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Fundamental Attribution Error: Perspectives of Principal, Teacher, and Parent Influence on Student Growth

Sonja Rayner

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FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR: PERSPECTIVES OF PRINCIPAL, TEACHER, AND PARENT INFLUENCE ON STUDENT GROWTH

by

Sonja Rayner

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School, the College of Education and Human Sciences and the School of Education at The University of Southern Mississippi in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to determine principals’, teachers’, and parents’ attributions of their own and the other groups’ relative influence on student academic outcomes measured by standardized tests. The secondary purpose was to determine whether and how fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias predicts or explains the responses of each group. Descriptive analyses were conducted to compare responses from these three constituent groups. Additionally, repeated measures MANOVA was conducted in order to explain the effect the moderator variable, school performance level, had on the strength of the relationship between the independent (school rating and group) and dependent (influence on student academic outcomes) variables. Participants included principals and teachers who worked at and parents of children who attended public K-8 schools in the state of Mississippi. Results indicated that these groups place most of the influence for student academic outcomes on teachers, regardless of the outcome being negative or positive. In addition, only partial support was provided for fundamental attribution error’s ability to explain or aid in understanding principals’ teachers’, and parents’ attributions of influence on student academic outcomes. The results for self-serving bias results were parallel.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express the deepest appreciation to my committee members. Committee chair, Dr. Thomas Lipscomb, for his indispensable support and assistance throughout all the dissertation stages. His skillfulness, encouragement and constant motivation were the result in achieving this goal. Committee member, Dr. Kyna Shelley, whose guidance, support and empathy at every point during my research helped me through this process. Committee member, Dr. Richard Mohn, whose expertise and guidance throughout the data analysis stages had a tremendous impact on the paper. Committee member, Dr. David Lee, whose knowledge of K-12 education supported in the outcome of the finished product.
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CFA</td>
<td>Confirmatory Factor Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Exploratory Factor Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESSA</td>
<td>Every Student Succeeds Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAR</td>
<td>Intellectual Achievement Responsibility</td>
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<td>ISG</td>
<td>Influence on Student Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANOVA</td>
<td>Multivariate Analysis of Variance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAEP</td>
<td>National Assessment of Educational Progress</td>
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<td>NCLB</td>
<td>No Child Left Behind</td>
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<tr>
<td>RSA</td>
<td>Responsibility for Student Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTTT</td>
<td>Race To The Top</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>Socio-economic Status</td>
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<td>TRS</td>
<td>Teacher Responsibility Scale</td>
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<td>USM</td>
<td>The University of Southern Mississippi</td>
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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

There is evidence that as far back as the 1800s, student academic growth has been monitored by education leaders and the community to determine if teachers were successfully promoting student learning (Reese, 2013). Since the 1970s, state and federal governments have implemented various changes to standards and accountability for academic proficiency. In the 1970s, states began implementing proficiency standards that students were required to meet to show academic progress (Kress, Zechmann, & Schmitten, 2011). By the mid-1990s, nearly every state in the nation had standards, tests to monitor student mastery of standards, and regulations for teacher accountability (Kress, et al., 2011). With the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [NCLB] (2001), which was an updated version of the Elementary and Secondary Educations Act of 1965 and Race to the Top [RTTT] (U.S. Department of Education, 2010) initiative of 2009, emphasis was placed on using student achievement as the defining measure of a successful school. This in turn has caused states, districts, and schools to focus on finding ways to improve the results of standardized tests (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, 2009, 2010).

The aforementioned federal regulations are placing the responsibility for enduring positive student outcomes on teachers and administrators by requiring test data and other evidence of student achievement to comprise a large part of yearly evaluations. Further, NCLB and RTTT holds administrators and teachers solely responsible for student growth excluding all other factors and stakeholders that influence student learning. While it is often assumed that parents, communities, students and student peers also influence
student academic progress, federal regulations consider only administrators and teachers responsible as determiners of standardized test results.

Background

Three groups are often considered influential in student academic achievement, which includes principals, teachers, and parents (Bruggencate, Lyten, Scheerens, & Sleegers, 2012; Donaldson & Papay, 2014; Fan & Chen, 1999; Jeynes, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006). The first group considered influential in student achievement is school principals (Bruggencate et al., 2012; Leithwood, 1994). There is debate concerning the extent to which principals influence student outcome, but there is relative consensus they do have some degree of influence, whether direct or indirect (Bruggencate et al., 2012; Ross & Gray, 2006). Although direct effects are limited to personal interactions with students, indirect influences are broader and can include collaboration with teachers and principal leadership style (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, 1994; Miller, Goddard, Goddard, Larsen, & Jacob, 2010; Urick & Bowers, 2011). While student achievement is thought to be influenced by principals, little is known about how this group views who is responsible for or has the most influence over the outcomes of student academic performance.

Currently, teachers are considered to have the strongest at school influence on student achievement and recent reforms at the federal and state levels have mandated every state to revise teacher evaluations to reflect this belief by rewarding or sanctioning teachers based on student achievement data (Donaldson & Papay, 2014; Petty, Wang, & Harbaugh, 2013). Thus, federal and state regulations have given teachers the largest share of responsibility for student outcomes while simultaneously ignoring the possible
contributions of other factors such as socio-economic status or student peer influence (Whelan & Teddlie, 1989).

Teachers believe that responsibility for student academic growth is mostly a shared responsibility between teachers, students, and parents (Kurt, 2013; Lauermann & Karabenick, 2013). Some research suggests teachers have a tendency to take credit for student academic success, but attribute student academic failure to factors external of the teacher (Guskey, 1981; Martin, Crossland, & Johnson, 2001). The teacher attribution of student academic failure may result in teachers distancing themselves from student failure for which they are held responsible through federal and state regulations as well as by their supervisors (Mathers & King, 2001; Whelan & Teddlie, 1989).

The third group affecting student achievement is parents (Fan & Chen, 1999; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Parents who are active in their child’s academics tend to have a larger impact on student achievement outcomes compared to inactive parents (Fan & Chen, 1999; Jeynes, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Active parent involvement, according to research, may increase student academic performance in the classroom and on standardized test scores (Fan & Chen, 1999; Gordon & Louis, 2009; Jacob & Lefgren, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Although evidence from research suggests a relationship between academic active parents and a child’s academic growth, parents tend to share responsibility for academic gains with students, teachers, and principals (Ballard & Bates, 2008), and tend to blame teachers and principals when their child fails to do well in the classroom (Ballard & Bates, 2008; Cantor, 2012; Peterson et al., 2011).

In sum, while these groups (principals, teachers, and parents) influence student achievement, each tend to blame others for student failure, but take credit for student
success. This study will examine how principals, teachers, and parents attribute relative influence on student academic growth measured by standardized tests. Attribution theory, and more specifically the construct of fundamental attribution error, will be considered relative to each group’s belief about influence on student growth.

Problem Statement

Principals, teachers, and parents all potentially influence student learning outcomes as measured by standardized achievement tests, and further, research has provided evidence that these influences can be positive or negative (Bruggencate et al., 2012; Ross & Gray, 2006). Although teacher and parent attributions related to responsibility for academic outcomes have been studied in past research, no attention has been given to how principals, teachers, and parents attribute their and the other groups’ relative responsibility for or influence on student performance as measured by standardized test. Without the knowledge of principals’, teachers’, and parents’ attributions concerning their influence on student academic outcomes, overestimation or underestimation may occur, which may hinder the involvement necessary by each group to meet the needs of student academic growth. This study will contribute to existing research by focusing on how principals, teachers, and parents attribute their relative influence on student learning outcomes as measured by standardized tests.

Theoretical Framework

This study will examine attribution theory, more specifically fundamental attribution error as one possible explanation of principals’, teachers’, and parents’ attributions of relative influence on student growth measured by standardized tests. In an attempt to try to understand other’s behavior, attribution theory proposes that people
attribute their behavior to either external or internal causes (Kelley, 1973; Kelley & Michela, 1980). An important component of attribution theory, fundamental attribution error, is the tendency to overattribute causes of the behavior of others to internal rather than external factors (Ross, 1977).

According to Heider (1958), in the process of understanding behavior, people attribute causes of others’ behavior to internal (personal) or external (environmental) factors. Decades later, Kelley (1971) introduced the attribution theory covariation model by arguing that people will make causal attributions about a situation or behavior depending on the information available to them. During the same time period of Kelley’s (1971) attribution model, Weiner proposed an achievement-related model of attribution theory. He theorized that the four components of ability, effort, luck, and task difficulty should be present when someone interprets an achievement-related event (Weiner, 1972, 1979). Later, Weiner (1985) extended his theory by proposing that separate emotions and self-evaluations are associated with individual attributions of success and failure.

Fundamental Attribution Error

First referred to by Heider in a study conducted with Simmel (Heider & Simmel 1944), fundamental attribution error is the process by which an attributor will likely undervalue external factors and overvalue internal factors in another’s behavior (Ross, 1977). According to Ross, this incorrect judgment leads the observer to believe that when someone acts differently than expected, that person has more control over the situation than the observer would, were he or she in the same situation. Heider (1958), Kelley (1967, 1972), and Weiner (1972, 1985) all emphasized in their models of attribution theory that people are quick to enhance their self-esteem or create positive impressions of
their own abilities and dispositions. This leads people to generally credit their successes to their abilities and efforts, but attribute failure to external factors, such as luck and task difficulty (Miller, 1978; Miller & Ross, 1975; Weiner, 1972, 1985), an attributional trait Miller and Ross (1975) termed “self-serving bias.” This “self-serving bias” may give people the tendency to assume responsibility for their own successful outcomes, but when others are observed to fail, they are assumed to be responsible for their failure (Bradley, 1978; Miller, 1978; Shepperd, Malone, & Sweeney, 2008).

Although some studies (Cantor, 2012; Guskey, 1981; Martin et al., 2001) focus on teacher and parent attributions of student academic outcomes, research is lacking in linking research findings of these attributions to fundamental attribution error. Principals, teachers, and parents may attribute student academic outcome behaviors as a function of their attempts to enhance or protect their self-esteem (Bradley, 1978; Miller & Ross, 1975; Sheperd et al., 2008; Zuckerman, 1979). In contrast to their attribution of student academic outcomes, principals, teachers, and parents may share responsibility for influence because of the need of not wanting to deny credit to students for their success and blame others for student failure (Zuckerman, 1979).

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to determine principals’, teachers’, and parents’ attributions of their own and the other groups’ relative influence on student academic outcomes measured by standardized tests. The study focused on the attributions of principals and teachers who worked at and parents whose children attended public K-8 schools in the United States. The secondary purpose was to determine whether and how the fundamental attribution error predicts or explains the responses of each group.
Research Hypothesis

The study was guided by the following research question and hypothesis.

RQ1: How do principals, teachers, and parents attribute the relative influence of each group on measured student growth?

H1: Performance level of the respondent’s school will moderate the reported relative influence of each group.

Delimitations

Because of relatively unique state-to-state testing systems and requirements, the results of this study may be delimited to the state of Mississippi. Since it will, however, provide a broader test of the applications of attribution theory within the K-12 education system it may have broader theoretical application as well.

Justification

Relatively few studies have focused on teachers’ and parents’ responsibility for student academic achievement and those that do for teachers (e.g., Cullen & Altschuld, 1994; Guskey, 1981; Whelan & Teddlie, 1989) are relatively old, dating mostly in the 1980s and early 1990s. Even fewer studies have been conducted in the last 10 to 15 years since implementation of NCLB and RTTT. Further, a majority of the research of teachers was conducted using data gathered from fictitious student scenarios of success and failure instead of actual student achievement data. Finally, although these studies focused on the attributions of teachers and parents, no study has focused on principal, teacher, and parent perspectives on the relative influence by these groups on student academic performance or standardized tests that serve as the basis for determining academic achievement.
Suggestions for further research concerning the responsibility for student academic achievement have been offered by various researchers including Lauermann and Karabenick (2013), Matteucci and Gosling (2004), and Peterson et al. (2011). These researchers suggest the extension of evidence is needed that focuses on teachers’ attribution of relative responsibility and self-acknowledgement of who is responsible for academic success and failure of students. Further, Lauermann and Karabenick (2013) suggests that the use of attribution theory in describing the teacher acknowledgement in responsibility to students has been the focus of research and not in describing teacher’s self-ascription. By focusing on the attributions and self-assessment of principals, teachers, and parents concerning who is most responsible for student academic growth, this study may provide additional insight into how these stakeholders attribute responsibility. Using fundamental attribution error as the theoretical framework for the study may also enhance in the understanding of each group’s apparent willingness to accept responsibility for student growth but not student academic decline. Further, the results of this study could contribute to reducing the tendency to blame student academic failure on others, thereby enhancing productive collaboration among all education stakeholders.

Overview of Methodology

A quantitative research approach was used to conduct the proposed study. Participants included principals and teachers who worked at and parents of children who attended public K-8 schools in the state of Mississippi. The study participants were drawn from Mississippi schools because of the relatively unique system by which the Mississippi Department of Education evaluation system holds all principals and teachers.
accountable for student outcomes as measured by standardized tests. Data were obtained from questionnaires completed by voluntary participants from schools rated by the Mississippi Department of Education as either A, B, D, or F. Participants from schools rated a C were not included due to the study calling for participation from high and low performing schools and a grade of C was considered an average rating. The researcher divided the state of Mississippi into six different regions (Northeast, Northwest, East Central, West Central, Southeast, and Southwest) to capture a more diverse participation from school culture, race, economic status, and community culture. After schools had been divided into each region and randomly selected, a cross reference was conducted to ensure each group of rated schools were located in different school districts within each region. This strategy prevented all schools in a given region from being drawn from the same district, which in turn diversified the cultures of the school districts represented.

After permission was granted to the researcher to conduct the study in schools, each voluntary participant completed a questionnaire designed specifically for his or her group in the study. Principals and teachers completed questionnaires using Qualtrics and parents completed a printed version of the questionnaire. Each questionnaire included a cover letter attached that described the purpose of the study, time to complete study, participation was strictly voluntary, and data collected would be anonymous. The letter also included information regarding contacting the researcher for any questions or concerns. The results from questionnaires were analyzed in order to determine how principals, teachers, and parents attribute each group’s influence on student academic outcomes measured by standardized tests.
Organization of the Dissertation

To examine how principals, teachers, and parents attribute relative influence on student academic growth measured by standardized tests, the content of the remaining chapters is as follows. Chapter two will discuss the relevant literature and theoretical framework. Chapter three will discuss methodology used in the study. Findings from questionnaire analysis will be presented in chapter four. Discussions, implications, and suggestions for future research will be included in chapter five.
CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examined principals’, teachers’, and parents’ attribution of their own and the other groups’ relative influence on student academic outcomes measured by standardized tests. Further, the study examined whether and how the fundamental attribution error predicted or explained the responses of each group. This chapter is a review of the pertinent research literature, theoretical framework, and is organized into five sections. Section one describes the background and recent government policies of accountability in the United States. The second section reviews literature regarding principals’ accountability for and influence on student achievement. Section three reviews literature concerning teachers’ perspectives regarding to whom and for what they are accountable, as well as teacher beliefs of who is responsible for student academic outcomes. The fourth section reviews literature relating to parents’ influence on their child’s academic outcomes and their beliefs of who is responsible for student outcomes. Section five describes attribution theory, fundamental attribution theory, self-serving bias, and the related literature concerning attributions of success and failure.

Background

As the Coleman Report (1966) was revealing evidence that inequalities (e.g., school facilities, school characteristics, and academic achievement) in education were occurring across America, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was being formed to create a national test that would enable gathering valid and reliable data on student achievement. A series of national assessments were administered using a sample of students (ages 9, 13, and 17) from different national regions of the United States, and due to the equivalence of the administration using the same test booklet sets,
the results were considered valid and reliable. The NAEP was thus judged an effective means of obtaining independent results and uniformity in reporting the effectiveness of schools across the country (Hanushek & Raymond, 2004; National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

In the early 1980s, A Nation at Risk (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) was published. This report accused American society of losing sight of educational goals and described how an identified decline in the quality of education was going to affect future students’ prospects for becoming college and work ready. The report further declared that current students were not being sufficiently academically challenged and that government and educational leaders should immediately and forcefully act upon these problems (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). With students emerging from high school neither college nor work ready, the report proclaimed that support was needed for English, math, and science due to the low availability of qualified teachers and the national concern regarding standardized test scores. In light of this report, several states voluntarily adopted accountability standards in the mid-1980s (Hanushek & Raymond, 2004).

With the goals that every student should be subject competent at specified grade levels and the nation be first in the world in math and science, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act was signed into law in 1994. Following the initiation of Goals 2000, a decade of intensive performance testing to measure student achievement ensued in all states (Conley, 2015; Dorn & Ydesen, 2014). During the 1990s, as the era of accountability using standardized tests measures dawned, understanding was gained in standardized test practices, and the political leaders of the day began to examine the time
and resources needed for administrating standardized tests and deciding best strategies for teaching the tested standards to students (Conley, 2015).

Economists have suggested that federal accountability standards for schools were created to improve student achievement by monitoring educators in the hopes that they would conduct themselves and produce results in line with all stakeholders’ vision of what education should be (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011). Recent laws (e.g. No Child Left Behind [NCLB]) passed by the federal government have placed responsibility for student growth on school districts, and specifically on principals and teachers (Bathgate, Colvin, Silva & Education, 2011). Before NCLB, 45 states published reports disclosing high- and low-ranking schools as determined by each state’s standards, and after NCLB, all states receiving federal funding were required to publish these reports (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011; No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). The NCLB Act of 2001 and the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative (U.S. Department of Education, 2009) have not only mandated standardized tests as the way to measure the success of a school but also have created sanctions for schools, administrators, and teachers who fail to meet specified targets and goals defined by states.

In 2001, NCLB was passed by Congress to create policies with the aim of improving public education in the United States. NCLB mandated that schools in each state attain adequate yearly progress, with all students performing at the level denoted as proficient in reading and math on state standardized tests by the year 2014. It was expected these mandates would essentially force improved academic achievement for all students in every ethnic, demographic, and socioeconomic group across America (Bathgate et al., 2011). The act also called for highly qualified teachers in every
classroom and evaluations to assess teacher effectiveness (Hazi & Ruciniski, 2009).

However, the teacher evaluations, which were created individually by each state, were not uniform and yielded inconsistent (Hazi & Ruciniski, 2009).

The RTTT initiative (U.S. Department of Education, 2009) provided funds for states that adopted the federal government’s educational policies and implemented common core standards in all public schools within the state, thereby providing a waiver to opt out of NCLB’s provisions of every student being proficient by the year 2014 (Bathgate et al., 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The common core standards were created with the intention of essentially “leveling the playing field” for all students, so all could become college and career ready (Bathgate et al., 2011). The policy encouraged states to revise teacher evaluations to include classroom observations and student achievement data. The overall score on the revised evaluations began to be used to determine teachers’ effectiveness and success; it also placed the majority of responsibility for student outcomes on teachers (Maslow & Kelley, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Although federal policies thus stipulate who is responsible for student outcomes on standardized tests, researchers (e.g., Ballard & Bates, 2008; Cantor, 2012) have found evidence that stakeholders are willing to share this responsibility. The evidence is less clear, however, regarding the percentage of student outcomes stakeholders are willing to allocate to themselves and others. It is worth examining the individual roles of some of the stakeholder groups and considering how much influence each may assume in promoting student academic achievement.
Role of Principals in Student Academic Achievement

Principals are responsible for increasing student achievement through various job duties such as managing curriculum, building a positive school environment, and arranging school and community relationships (Urick & Bowers, 2011). Through their leadership style, relationships with teachers and students, and outreach to the community, principals may have some influence on student academic outcomes (Chappelar & Price, 2012; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, 1994). Evidence indicates principals may influence student achievement positively or negatively, as well as directly or indirectly (Bruggencate et al., 2012; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Silva, White & Yoshida, 2011).

Principals’ Direct Influence

According to Gentiluci and Muto (2007), principals’ direct influence may be accomplished through personal interactions with students. After controlling for ethnicity, socio-economic status, English proficiency, and academic ability, an ethnographic study of 39 eighth grade students revealed that students self-reported a higher level of motivation to perform well in academics when principals formally and informally engaged learners individually around the school campus or through class interactions. Although it was found that students were motivated to perform well in school-work, the possibility of analyzing how much principal influence has on student standardized test results or academic achievement was nonexistent due to not having access to language arts and mathematic proficiency records.

A similar study, conducted by Silva et al. (2011) also consisted of eighth grade students, but student achievement was measured using the Pennsylvania State System Assessment (PSSA), which was considered by the researchers to be a more reliable
measurement of academic performance than a student’s self-reported perspectives and effort. Students who had discussions with principals about the PSSA had higher actual than predicted scores as opposed to students who had discussions with principals after the PSSA. The results also revealed that students self-reported an increase in academic motivation when principals had a direct interaction with the students, which is in line with the findings of Gentiluci and Muto (2007). Although this study provides empirical evidence that principals may have a direct effect on student reading achievement, other studies (Fancera & Bliss, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Ross & Gray, 2006) have suggested that principal influence on student achievement is indirect.

Principals’ Indirect Influence

Principals may indirectly influence student performance through the interactions they have with school personnel, parents, and the community (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, 1994). Studying New Jersey high schools to determine the influence principals have on student achievement as measured by state standardized test and SAT scores, Fancera and Bliss (2011) speculated that principal leadership style may indirectly influence student academic achievement. Further, after surveying teachers about their beliefs regarding principals’ leadership styles, Miller et al. (2010) reported that structural equation model analysis revealed that the latent variable of instructional leadership correlated indirectly with achievement outcomes in third grade reading and math. These results indicated that principals’ active instructional leadership led to teacher collaboration which was linked to student achievement at a statistically significant level therefore suggesting that principals may have an indirect influence on academic outcomes.
Other studies have provided further evidence for an indirect relationship between principal influence and student achievement. After using path analysis (AMOS 4.0) to analyze the results of questionnaires distributed to elementary teachers in two Ontario school districts, Ross and Gray (2006) determined that a statistically significant link between teacher viewpoint of principal leadership and student achievement existed. Further analysis revealed a significant indirect relationship between principal transformative leadership style and student achievement through teacher commitment and collective efficacy. In contrast to this result, Fancera and Bliss’s (2011) study of New Jersey high schools found that principal leadership style did not contribute to a teacher’s collective self-efficacy, a factor which in turn affects student achievement.

Hallinger and Heck’s (1998) review of literature determined that one characteristic of a high-performing school was the involvement of multiple stakeholders in management decisions affecting the school’s academic performance. When principals encourage the participation of multiple stakeholders, including involvement from the community and parents, their schools tend to have a higher level of student success (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). However, Gordon and Louis (2009) found that although principals may encourage community and parental involvement, they may not believe that either group’s contributions lead to improved student outcomes. Further, principals generally consider parental influence to be weak and believe that parents have the most impact on achievement during the elementary years of a student’s academic career (Gordon & Louis, 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

In sum, research has suggested that principals may have a direct or indirect influence on student achievement, but evidence illuminating how principals
conceptualize their influence and that of other stakeholders is limited (Bruggencate et al., 2012; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Silva et al., 2011). Some principals have stated that to create a student-focused environment within their schools they must get to know the children on a personal level, hire effective teachers who can meet learners’ needs, and communicate with all stakeholders (Rodriguez, Murakami-Ramalho, & Ruff, 2009). It has been proposed that if these tasks can be accomplished, the influence principals have on student academic growth will be positive (Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

Role of Teachers in Student Academic Achievement

Federal regulations currently position standardized tests to play a significant role in identifying teacher influence as the key contributor to student growth (Donaldson & Papay, 2014; Fan & Chen, 1999; Petty et al., 2013). Federal regulations require using teacher evaluation scores as evidence that the teacher is effective; as a result, almost every state in the nation uses standardized test results to calculate a teacher’s final evaluation score for a school year (Donaldson & Papay, 2014). According to Moloney (2006), compared to other input on federal, state, and local mandates, the influence of teachers is minimal. Some research has focused on describing teachers’ belief concerning the level of influence various groups have on student academic outcomes (Kurt, 2013; Lauermann, 2014).

Teachers’ Perspective of Various Group Accountability

There is evidence that some teachers believe there is tremendous pressure from parents, principals, superintendents, schools boards, and the media to improve standardized tests results (Snow-Gerono & Franklin, 2006; Vernaza, 2012). With this perceived pressure for academic improvement, many teachers feel frustrated and believe
the level of responsibility they are assigned negatively impacts their work (Greene et al., 2008; Kurt, 2013; Moloney, 2006). For example, almost two-thirds of Oregon teachers who participated believed that being held accountable had a negative influence on their work, with the majority of those responding employed in low-performing schools (Greene et al., 2008). Moloney (2006) reported that teachers in his study believed their teaching was less effective when they were pressured to “teach to the test” due to accountability mandates than when they were able to differentiate instruction to the diverse students and felt frustrated and silenced regarding student achievement measures regulated by government bodies. Although Greene et al. and Moloney found evidence that teacher attitude and feelings were negative toward teaching accountability, Kurt’s (2013) study revealed no statistically significant relationship between teacher attitude towards the teaching profession and a student’s academic success or failure.

According to some studies, teachers consider themselves to be accountable to students, parents, and administration, as well as other teachers (Cullen & Altschuld, 1994; Mathers & King, 2001). Whelan and Teddlie (1989) conducted a study to investigate teacher attributions of responsibility for learning and how these relate to student achievement. The researchers found that teacher expectation was not a significant predictor of teacher attribution of responsibility, and teacher attribution of responsibility did not significantly predict student achievement. Thus, if a teacher believes factors that are not within his or her power to influence (e.g., socioeconomic status) can make a difference in a student’s academic growth, then he or she will not attribute responsibility for that student’s outcomes to him- or herself. In 2001, Mathers and King, studying teachers in Colorado, extended Whelan and Teddlie’s findings. Their results suggested
that teachers believe they are more accountable for factors over which they have some control (e.g., classroom climate) than for factors they indirectly influence (e.g., parent involvement), and the further removed a given factor is from the classroom, the less accountable teachers believe they are.

Research (e.g., Cullen & Altschuld, 1994; Mathers and King, 2001) has indicated that some teachers consider themselves to have more accountability to individuals that directly affect the classroom than to those who indirectly affect it. Cullen and Altschuld (1994) conducted a study of 18 in-service teachers from 13 elementary and secondary schools in seven central Ohio school districts. Although participation was low, overall, teachers believed they were accountable for student outcomes and to stakeholders that were directly related to student achievement. Furthermore, the results indicated that teachers believed to be the most accountable to principals and secondarily to students. In line with these results, Mathers and King (2001) revealed that teachers regard their accountability to be higher to individuals inside the classroom (i.e., themselves and students) than to groups outside the classroom (e.g., school boards and legislature).

However, teachers also recognize that they are accountable to multiple constituencies (e.g., student performance, policies, and individuals) and have specific obligations to each group of stakeholders (e.g., administrators, students, and parents). The contrast between these two studies is that Cullen and Altschuld (1994) found that teachers believed they were accountable for multiple aspects of learning (e.g., policies, community efforts, administrators, and themselves) whereas Mathers and King (2001) concluded that teachers believed they were more accountable for learning climate,
curriculum, and standards rather than for student behavior, parental involvement, and student attendance.

Teachers’ Perspective on Accountability

Recognizing the absence of a reliable instrument to measure teacher attributions of responsibility for student academic achievement, Guskey (1981) created the Responsibility for Student Achievement questionnaire (RSA). Using 184 teachers from two metropolitan districts in the United States, Guskey differentiated teachers’ perspectives on positive and negative causes of student achievement. Overall, his results indicated that female teachers assumed more responsibility for student achievement than did male teachers. There was no statistically significant relationship between teachers’ beliefs regarding responsibility for student achievement and years of experience or grade taught.

In contrast to Guskey’s (1981) research, recent studies focusing on gender, teachers’ belief regarding responsibility, and years of experience have yielded different findings. Kurt’s (2013) study of biology teachers in Turkey indicated that participating teachers with 1 year of experience believed they were responsible for student success, and the greater the number of years of professional experience, the less teachers believed they were responsible for student failure. Kurt (2013) also found teacher gender was not statistically related to teacher beliefs about responsibility for student academic success and years of experience was not significantly related to teacher beliefs about responsibility. The differences in results between Guskey’s and Kurt’s studies may be the result of different prevailing cultural norms.
Teachers’ perspectives are varied regarding the accountability level to which they are held and where the majority of accountability should be focused. Berryhill, Linney, and Fromewick (2009) conducted a study of third through fifth grade teachers and discovered that eight out of every 10 teachers referred to family factors such as socioeconomic status, home stress, and opportunities to learn outside of school as most strongly influencing student achievement. However, Peterson et al., (2011) conducted a focus group study of New Zealand students, parents, teachers, and determined the teachers believed the student had to be self-motivated to succeed in school. In addition, studies by Kurt (2013) and Roellke and Rice (2008) found that teachers tend to assign responsibility for poor student outcomes to a lack of resources needed to teach and to other external factors such as peer influence and parental involvement. The results of the studies by Berryhill et al., Peterson et al., Kurt, and Roellke and Rice thus reveal no consensus among teachers concerning who or what most strongly affects student academic performance.

To determine whether cultural factors are related to teacher sense of responsibility, Matteucci and Gosling (2004) conducted a study across culturally different European countries. First, Italian teachers’ perspectives on responsibility were studied; then a cross-cultural comparison was made with French teachers’ perspectives. In the first study, 115 Italian junior high and high school teachers participated. As hypothesized, the majority of these teachers placed responsibility on the student when a student failed due to lack of effort. However, the teachers assigned themselves the majority of responsibility when the student failed due to lack of ability. The researchers indicated that the participating teachers were angry about students who failed due to lack of effort, but
more sympathetic toward students who failed due to a lack of ability, which may be the reason Italian teachers were more likely to pass students who lacked ability than were French teachers.

In contrast, in the second study, French teachers were found to hold themselves more responsible than did the Italian teachers when it came to taking responsibility for student achievement (Matteucci & Gosling, 2004). The researchers concluded that in general, teachers ascribe a lower degree of responsibility for student failure to themselves and assigning the cause of failure to lack of student ability may enable the teacher to feel less responsible and therefore attribute the failure to the student. Consistent with these findings, in studying teachers through a focus group in New Zealand, Peterson et al. (2011) also found that teachers would try to distance themselves from low-achieving students and place responsibility for their low achievement on those who were failing.

Other research has focused on other nations to determine the cross-cultural diversity of teacher perspectives regarding responsibility for learning. As noted earlier, Kurt (2013) conducted a study of biology teachers in Turkey to determine their attributions of student academic success and failure. After conducting interviews, Kurt found overall that teachers believe that they were responsible for student academic success, but not responsible for student failure. However, a few teacher respondents expressed that teachers are not directly responsible for student success or student failure. The study further determined that when participating teachers had a class size of 31 or fewer students, they believed they were responsible for students’ success, but when the size was larger, the teachers assigned themselves less responsibility for student failures. Although additional studies have been conducted on cross-cultural diversity and teacher
perspectives on responsibility for learning, like Kurt’s investigation, these studies did not identify who, among multiple stakeholders, teachers believed was responsible for student success or failure.

According to Lauermann and Karabenick (2013), evidence concerning teachers’ views of responsibility for student achievement, and the conditions under which they are willing to accept responsibility, is lacking. To create a new instrument to measure teacher sense of responsibility and demonstrate that this sense is distinct from teacher’s self-efficacy, Lauermann and Karabenick (2013) studied teachers in two different countries. Testing the factorial structure of the measure, the researchers first gathered data from preservice teachers in Germany. The results indicated that teachers’ belief in their self-efficacy is independent from their belief about responsibility for student outcomes.

Since this evidence showed that self-efficacy was independent from teacher sense of responsibility, a distinction the researchers did not believe was evident in Guskey’s RSA questionnaire, Lauermann and Karabenick (2013) then conducted a study of K-12 teachers in the United States to determine whether the Teacher Responsibility Scale (TRS) would be valid with in-service teachers. Their findings revealed that the four-factor (responsibility for student motivation, student achievement, relationship with students, and teaching) structure was a good fit for in-service teachers. Thus, providing additional evidence that teacher self-efficacy beliefs are independent from teacher belief of responsibility for student outcomes.

Further, in contrast to Guskey’s (1981) and Kurt’s (2013) findings, Lauermann and Karabenick’s (2013) results showed no significant differences for teacher gender or “school poverty” on responsibility factors. However, the researchers did find that
elementary-level teachers reported a higher sense of responsibility for student achievement than did high school teachers. Consistent with Lauermann and Karabenick’s finding of independence for the constructs of self-efficacy and student outcome responsibility, Kurt (2013) found that attribution for student success or failure was not significantly related to self-efficacy in teachers with intermediate or high levels of self-efficacy. This replication furthers the evidence that teacher self-efficacy and sense of responsibility are independent.

Moswela (2014) concluded that influence over academic achievement varies with the potential sources of influence involved and argued that students cannot be considered to be as responsible for their achievement as are teachers and administrators, because the learners are the recipients of the teachers’ knowledge, expertise and the school’s ability to supply the content and subject matter needed for academic growth. Since teachers and administrators are trained in instructional strategies to provide needed subject content for student success, teachers and administrators may have the most influence over student growth (Moswela, 2014). Moswela also posited that teachers are the major influence in student learning because teachers facilitate the classroom, teach needed material, and have the most active time with students who are engaging with subject material.

Studies have been conducted to identify the agent(s) teachers believe most responsible for student academic growth. Lauermann (2014) studied teachers from one elementary school and one high school in the United States and found they identified teachers, students, parents, administrators, school counselors, social workers, and political policy makers as responsible for student academic progress. These findings echoed those of Ballard and Bates (2008), who studied teachers from an elementary
school in the United States and learned the teachers believed the principals, teacher aids, community, and parents were responsible for academic achievement. Although teachers in these studies distributed responsibility across school, churches, community, friends of students, youth organizations, and the home environment, the extent to which each factor was considered to contribute to responsibility for student academic growth was lacking in both investigations.

Martin et al. (2001) conducted a study of southwest Missouri elementary schools using Guskey’s (1981) RSA scale to investigate teachers’ viewpoint of their level of empowerment and level of responsibility for student outcomes. The results indicated that nearly two-thirds of the respondents took credit for student success, and almost half of them assigned themselves responsibility for student failure. In contrast to these findings, Ballard and Bates (2008), when studying elementary schools, found that teachers believed they shared responsibility for achievement with their students, but also believed the students should play the major role in their achievement. Ballard and Bates also found that blame was pointed toward teachers when learner outcome was negative, but teachers also were given credit when outcomes were positive.

In conclusion, the results of numerous studies (e.g., Kurt 2013; Martin et al., 2001; Matteucci & Gosling, 2004; Peterson et al., 2011) have suggested that teachers are more willing to accept responsibility for student success but less willing to accept responsibility for student failure in academics. Teachers believe that responsibility lies with factors within (e.g. classroom environment) their control rather than factors outside (e.g. home stress) of their control (Berryhill et al., 2009; Kurt, 2013; Peterson et al., 2011; Roellke & Rice, 2008; Whelan & Teddlie, 1989). Some authors speculate that this may
have caused teachers to distance themselves from low-achieving students, whom teachers may blame for individual student academic failure (Cullen & Altschuld, 1994; Matteucci & Gosling, 2004). The absence of teachers’ recognition of their responsibility for their students’ success or failure may cause teachers to lack motivation in providing students with an adequate education (Lauermann, 2014).

Role of Parents in Student Academic Achievement

Researchers tend to consider parents influential in student academic outcomes (Fan & Chen, 1999; Gordon & Louis, 2009; Jacob & Lefgren, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Shute, Hansen, Underwood, & Razzouk, 2011). Parents, through their involvement in their child’s schoolwork and activities, may have an effect on student academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 1999; Gordon & Louis, 2009; Jacob & Lefgren, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Shute et al., 2011). Parents who are directly involved in their child’s school-work and school-related activities may contribute to grade improvement in specific subjects, such as English and math, and may promote overall academic progress (Gordon & Louis, 2009; Jeynes, 2007).

The degree to which parents are involved with their child’s academic achievement has the potential to lessen the documented achievement gap among students of various ethnic and SES backgrounds (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Some studies have indicated that parent involvement in academics has a significant effect on student outcomes, and as the level of parental involvement increases, achievement increases concomitantly (Jeynes, 2003, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006). For example, after conducting a meta-analysis, Fan and Chen (1999) determined that overall parent involvement has a positive influence on student achievement. However, they suggested that parent involvement and student
achievement relationship results should not be generalized overall; instead, generalizations should be applied specifically and exclusively to the parental involvement variable(s) and student achievement variable(s) that are included in the study.

Two types of parent involvement, at-home and at-school may have a positive effect on student outcomes (Cooper, 1989; Fan & Chen, 1999; Jeynes, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Shute et al., 2011), and each should be considered separately from a research perspective. At-home involvement includes behavior such as a parent helping and checking a child’s homework, communicating academic expectations, and discussing school-day activities (Cooper, 1989; Fan & Chen, 1999; Jeynes, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Shute et al., 2011). School parental involvement includes the parent involvement at school (e.g., parent-teacher conferences) and in school-related activities parents attend (Fan & Chen, 1999; Jeynes, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006).

At-Home Parental Involvement

One type of at-home parental involvement showing a relationship with student achievement is parents checking their child’s homework. Jeynes (2003) analyzed 20 different studies and found that parent involvement specifically in the form of parents checking homework had a larger relationship with student achievement than any other type of parental involvement. Further, parent’s checking homework was more strongly related to students’ standardized test achievement scores than to their scores in specific classroom subjects, results that align with findings from Fan and Chen (1999). However, when Jeynes (2007) conducted a second meta-analysis just four years later, he found a small effect size of .38 when no controls were used. In other words, parents checking homework may possibly have a small effect on overall student achievement. When
grades and standardized tests were used for academic achievement measures, the relationships were statistically significant. When controls (SES, race, gender, or previous achievement) were used, overall achievement and standardized tests were not statistically significant.

However, other studies suggest that parental involvement defined as parents checking homework are not influential on academic achievement. Lee and Bowen (2006) obtained results similar to those of Jeynes’s (2007) meta-analysis. Studying third through fifth grade students from the southeastern United States, Lee and Bowen determined that parents helping their child with homework was only weakly associated with the student achievement as indexed by standardized test scores, teacher reporting of student grades, and students being on grade level in reading and math. Other researchers have reached similar conclusions. For example, using the ECLS_K database, Xu, Kushner-Benson, Mudrey-Camino and Steiner (2010) studied fifth grade students’ achievement and determined parental help with homework was negatively associated with reading achievement, a result that was also evident in Bembenutty’s (2005) study with 10th grade learners. Similarly, Xu and Corno (2003) found no difference in academic achievement between middle school students whose parents helped with homework and those whose parents who did not provide such support.

Shute et al., (2011) provided a cautionary word when interpreting findings associated with parental involvement, defined as parents checking homework, and student achievement. The researchers warned that any association should be interpreted with care, because other hidden, mediating variables may be present in the relationship. For example, while checking homework may be negatively associated with student
achievement, underlying extraneous variables may be at play, such as parents not checking homework until there is an academic problem with specific subjects or until overall academic progress is an issue. Xu et al., (2010) pointed out another potential underlying extraneous variable: Some parents may be completing homework for students instead of helping with or checking homework, behaviors that would affect the validity of statistical outcomes.

A second at-home parent involvement variable that has been found to be associated with student academic outcomes is parents’ academic expectations of their child. Researchers have investigated a variety of factors representing parent expectations, such as those regarding their child’s communication about school assignments and events that occurred during the school day and during school-related activities, along with expectations related to the goals of education and goals for their child (Fan & Chen, 1999; Jeynes, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Shute et al., 2011). Lee and Bowen stated that past research has suggested that approximately two-thirds of parents who participated in the study with children in the 6th through 12th grades expect their child to finish a 4-year college degree or higher. This in turn may explain the relationship between student achievement and parental expectations for their child’s education.

Lee and Bowen (2006) studied third through fifth grade students in a community bordering a major urban center in the southeastern United States. The researchers found that parent involvement as represented by parent’s educational expectations was more strongly correlated with academic achievement than were correlations between academic achievement and the parental involvement variables of time management and help with homework. The researchers further found that when a parent or guardian had earned a 2-
year degree or higher, he or she was significantly more likely to have frequent parent-child discussions at home pertaining to academics and had higher expectations for degree attainment than parents who did not complete high school, just completed high school, or received only some college or vocational training.

Lee and Bowen’s (2006) conclusions about the role of parental expectations in promoting student achievement were supported by the results of the 52-study meta-analysis completed by Jeynes (2007). Jeynes revealed that parental expectations had a large effect size of .88 on overall student achievement, and the results were consistent whether standardized tests scores or other measures served as the proxy for student achievement. Jeynes also found these results consistent across various studies. Other research (Jeynes, 2007; Shute et al., 2011) has suggested that beyond affecting student achievement, the variable of parental expectations may possibly be a strong predictor of a student’s determination regarding his or her own academic achievement.

A third at-home parent involvement variable researchers have discovered associated with student academic outcomes is managing a child’s home activities, which may include guiding television watching, monitoring the reading of non-school related materials, and overseeing hanging out with friends (Dumont, Trautwein, Nagy, & Nagengast, 2014; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Dumont et al. (2014) conducted a longitudinal study beginning when students were in fifth grade and continuing to seventh grade. Questionnaires were administered when the learners were in fifth grade and when they were in seventh grade. The researchers found that a student’s reading achievement in fifth grade predicted a parent’s responsiveness (defined as parental activities related to a student’s school life) in seventh grade. Students with high reading achievement reported
more parental responsiveness during the homework process than did students with low reading achievement. The researchers also found through student questionnaires that when students self-reported more reading effort in fifth grade, they also reported more parental responsiveness and structure (parent guidance) in seventh grade. However, students who procrastinated in completing homework in fifth grade reported less parental responsiveness in seventh grade. Dumont et al. concluded that students tended to have better reading scores when their parents were more responsive in the homework process.

Additional studies have indicated that parents monitoring their child’s at-home activities have less of an influence on student achievement when compared to other aspects of at-home parental involvement such as parents helping with homework and parental academic expectations. For example, Fan and Chen (1999) found that at-home parental supervision had a weaker relationship to student academic achievement when compared to parental expectations. Other studies, however, found that there is not a significant relationship between parents’ management of their child’s at-home activities and student achievement (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Overall, however, the majority of studies concerning parental supervision at home indicated a relationship with student academic achievement, but some studies further report that other factors such as parents’ high expectations for academic achievement are more strongly related to student achievement than at-home parental supervision of their child’s activities (Dumont et al., 2014; Fan & Chen, 1999; Xu et al., 2010).

At-School Parental Involvement

While a body of studies have provided evidence that at-home parental involvement may have a positive effect on student outcomes, other studies have focused
on at-school parental involvement as possible influences of academic achievement. At-school parental involvement is generally defined as parents and guardians taking part in school-related activities and events. Gordon and Louis (2009) suggest that in schools where teachers perceive a greater increase in parent involvement than schools where teachers perceive a lesser increase in parent involvement, student achievement tends to be higher. This correlation indicates that direct and active parental involvement perceived by teachers may have an influence on student learning. After their analysis, Gordon and Louis concluded that a school atmosphere of shared leadership and responsibility by all stakeholders possibly could lead to an increase in student learning.

Although most studies (Cooper, 1989; Fan & Chen, 1999; Jeynes, 2007) have indicated that parental involvement is associated with higher levels of student achievement, Coleman and McNeese (2009) found dissimilar results. Using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Coleman and McNeese discovered a negative correlation between parent involvement and fifth-grade student academic achievement. Furthermore, as parent involvement increases, student motivation, which was shown to have a moderately strong association with academic achievement, tended to decrease, and when parental involvement decreased, academic achievement tended to increase. Interpreting these findings, the researcher inferred that at this age and maturity level, students either begin resisting the support their parents provide in volunteering at their schools, or their parents stop volunteering as consistently when their children start to distance themselves.

Few studies focus on the perspectives of parents concerning who influences student achievement the most. Ballard and Bates (2008) suggest that most parents believe they and their child’s teacher are equally responsible for their child’s education, which a
small number felt that the teacher should take the most responsibility for student growth, and principals, school peers, and the child should accept some responsibility as well. In contrast to Ballard and Bates (2008) results, a qualitative study conducted by Peterson et al. (2011), using parent focus groups indicated a consensus that these parents believe that their child’s effort and motivation was responsible for academic outcomes. These parents also believed, however, that the teacher/student relationship played a very important role in academic progress; the teacher could encourage their child’s effort and motivation. However, Peterson et al. provided evidence consistent with the results from Ballard and Bates findings that parents take some degree of responsibility when it comes to their child’ academic success and that parents tend to point the finger away from themselves when their student is not achieving in school.

In sum, if parents directly involve themselves with their child’s academics through parental involvement either at-home (e.g. parents checking homework) or at-school (parent/teacher conferences), successful overall academic progress may be promoted by the parent (Fan & Chen, 1999; Gordon & Louis, 2009; Jacob & Lefgren, 2007; Jeynes, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Shute et al., 2011). Even though evidence has suggested that parents do influence student achievement, parents place a small amount of responsibility on themselves, whereas placing the majority of responsibility for student achievement with the child and teacher (Ballard & Bates, 2008; Peterson et al., 2011). However, evidence is limited on parent perspectives of who is the most influential in student achievement outcomes.

In summary, there is supporting evidence that principals, teachers, and parents have an influence on student academic outcomes. Whereas principals can contribute to
student achievement through direct (focusing on individual students) or indirect (leadership styles and communication with teachers) means (Bruggencate, et al., 2012; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Silva et al., 2011), teachers may influence student outcomes through instructional methods or motivation (Donaldson & Papay, 2014; Fan & Chen, 1999; Moswela, 2014). In addition to these two stakeholders, parents who are involved in their child’s academics can influence achievement by at-home or at-school means (Gordon & Louis, 2009; Jeynes, 2007).

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The current study will examine attribution theory and more specifically, the fundamental attribution error as one possible explanation underlying principals’, teachers’, and parents’ attributions of the relative influence various stakeholders have on student growth as measured by standardized tests. Attribution theory is concerned with how people try to understand and explain causes of behavior (Kelley, 1973; Kelley & Michela, 1980). An important component is the fundamental attribution error which results in the tendency to over-attribute the causes of others’ behavior to internal rather than external factors (Ross, 1977).

Heider (1958) introduced attribution theory when in attempting to explain how someone may try to understand another’s behavior by striving to infer the other’s intentions. According to Heider (1958), in the process of doing so people attribute causes of behavior to internal (personal) and/or external (environmental) factors. Internal attributions are “within” a person and include variables such as ability, motivation, or goals, while external attributions assign responsibility “outside” of the person and involve factors such as difficulty of the task and luck (Heider, 1958). Understanding which
attributions to use when trying to comprehend the behavior of another person gives the attributor a sense of control and belief in the predictability of his or her world (Heider, 1958; Hewstone, 1983).

Kelley (1971) introduced the covariation model of attribution theory by arguing that people will make causal attributions about a situation or behavior depending on the information available to them. An observer can recognize covariation between an observed behavior and the possible causes of that behavior if he or she possesses knowledge relevant to the situation (Kelley, 1971). In other words, if a person possesses knowledge from multiple observations made at different times and in different situations, then the person can attribute covariation between an observed effect and its causes.

Kelley (1971) identified three types of evidence necessary to attribute a cause to another’s behavior – consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency. Consensus is the extent to which others’ behavior towards the target is similar to those of the person being observed. For example, if two friends, who arrive in different cars, show up late for a dinner party the observer may attribute the behavior to external factors such as slow traffic. The second type of evidence, distinctiveness, is the extent to which that person’s behavior towards the target is dissimilar to his or her previous behaviors toward it. One example could be that a friend who shows up late to a dinner party, which the observer knows is an unusual behavior for that friend. This type of behavior would cause the observer to attribute the tardiness to external factors. The last type of evidence is consistency, which is the extent to which that person behaves similarly towards the same target on separate occasions. For example, a friend who always show up late to a dinner party, which in turn would cause the observer to attribute the tardiness to the dinner party.
as internal to the friend. Subsequently, Kelley (1973) recognized that the model had limitations, because an attributor may not have the opportunity to observe all three types of evidence and gather the knowledge needed to truly understand the causal relationships involved. Therefore, Kelley (1973) referred to the way individuals try to understand a cause or causes of observed behavior as putting together pieces of information relevant to the situation.

While Kelley (1971, 1972) focused on the process of forming causal attributions, Weiner (1972, 1985) focused on how attributions affect future behavior. Weiner and Kukla (1970) proposed using attribution theory to understand achievement motivation in academic settings. They reported that teachers frequently attribute student academic success to student ability and effort, and failure is often attributed to a lack of motivation or ability (Weiner & Kukla, 1970). Weiner (1972, 1979) later proposed that at least four components are involved in interpreting an achievement-related event. These components include ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. Each component differs from the others on the causal dimensions of internality-externality and stability-instability. For example, one may have the ability (an internal and stable factor) to complete an achievement-related task, but the outcome of task achievement may be attributed to luck, which is external and unstable. In 1985, Weiner extended his theory by proposing that separate emotions and self-evaluations are associated with individual attributions for success and failure. For example, a student may have a feeling of pride or high self-esteem after receiving an anticipated grade on a test but have less self-esteem when the grade is lower than anticipated.
Characteristics of Fundamental Attribution Error

Heider was the first to refer to attribution error when he reported that an observer does not actually know the events that trigger someone’s behavioral intentions and this lack of information may cause the observer to make an error in the causal attribution of the behavior (Heider & Simmel, 1944). Attributors are not sufficiently conscious of the other’s past experience, control, or behavioral intent in the current situation to consistently make accurate causal attributions. Ross (1977) termed this the fundamental attribution error, defined as the process by which an attributor will likely underestimate the role of external factors and overestimate the power of internal factors in another’s behavior. An observer’s judgment also may be affected by his or her belief regarding what constitutes common or unusual behavior (Ross, 1977). According to Ross, observers may believe that when a person acts differently than expected, that person has more control over the situation than the observer would, were he or she in the same situation.

In their attribution models, Heider (1958), Kelley (1967, 1972) and Weiner (1972, 1985) all emphasized that people are quick to enhance their self-esteem or create positive impressions in others of their own abilities and dispositions. In addition, people have the tendency to assume responsibility for their own successful outcomes. When others are observed to fail, however, they are assumed to be responsible for their failure (Bradley, 1978; Miller, 1978; Shepperd et al., 2008).

Therefore, there is a difference in how people parse out the internality-externality and stability-instability dimensions when making inferences about causes of their own and other people’s behavior. Generally, people credit their own personal successes to the
internal factors of abilities and effort. The causes of personal failure are attributed to external factors such as luck and task difficulty (Miller, 1978; Miller & Ross, 1975; Weiner, 1972; 1985). In contrast, when others fail, the cause is still attributed to internal factors (ability, motivation, effort, etc.). The attributional tendency to ascribe one’s own successful outcomes to internal factors, Miller and Ross (1975) referred to as “self-serving bias”; other researchers (Marsh, 1986; Weary, 1979) have referred it as the self-serving effect (SSE) or self-serving attributional biases.

The tendency to assume personal responsibility for positive outcomes may be due to an effort to enhance or protect self-esteem (Bradley, 1978; Zuckerman, 1979). Further, the desire to manage others’ impressions and judgments also may cause people to make self-serving attributions (Shepperd et al., 2008), or what Bradley (1978) and Zuckerman (1979) described as the motivation to take credit for success and deny failure in an attempt to protect or enhance self-esteem. However, Miller and Ross (1975) concluded that the tendency to assume personal responsibility for a positive or successful outcome may be due to intention, expectation, or recognition of the relationship between a behavior and its outcomes, or to all three, rather than to self-serving motives.

Although there is disagreement regarding why individuals make self-serving attributions, evidence exists that self-serving attributions are indeed present in determinations of causality for successful and failed academic tasks. For example, Marsh (1986), studying fifth and ninth grade students in public, Catholic, and private schools in Australia found that when the self-serving effect was measured across all participants, the attributions for success were more internal and attributions for failure were more external. In line with these results, using the Causal Dimension Scale, McAllister (1996)
studied Psychology majors playing the role of teacher and students from a college in the southern United States in a laboratory setting and field settings of faculty members from a college and found that in both settings teachers credited student success to internal factors and student failure to external factors. Similarly, in a study conducted by Yehudah (2002), teachers were provided with monetary rewards for their students’ performance in a national oral essay competition in Nigeria. Approximately 80% of students performed below average on the essay, and their teachers attributed those students’ poor performance to the students (external) rather than to themselves (internal). In comparison, of the three groups of teachers who received the consolation prize given to those who did not win but performed above average attributed student performance to teacher internal factors. Although these studies surfaced evidence of teacher self-serving bias in attributions of students’ academic performance, little research has been done examining the attributional tendencies of stakeholders outside the classroom such as parents and administrators.

Some studies have focused on teacher and parent attributions of student outcomes but did not link those findings to fundamental attribution error. For example, Guskey (1981) and Martin et al. (2001) proposed that teachers accept greater responsibility for students’ academic success than they do for learner difficulties and failures. Similarly, Ballard and Bates (2008) reported evidence that teachers will share responsibility for success with students but tend to place most of the responsibility for academic failures on students. Parents also will share some degree of responsibility for their child’s academic success, but they tend to place the majority of the responsibility for a child’s failure on teachers (Cantor, 2012), an external factor. These results are consistent with the
theoretical formulations of fundamental attribution error, as they yielded evidence that successful student achievement was attributed to teacher and parent internal/dispositional factors in their respective roles, and academic failure was attributed to external/environmental factors; none of the studies, however, overtly discussed the role of fundamental attribution error in their findings.

It may be that principals’, teachers’, and parents’ attributions for student academic outcomes are a function of their attempts to enhance or protect their self-esteem and/or they may be prompted by each group’s belief about the other group’s expectations and intentions (Bradley, 1978; Miller & Ross, 1975). By trying to enhance others’ view of them, these stakeholders may be trying to avoid blame for failure and assume responsibility for success (Bradley, 1978; Miller & Ross, 1975; Sheperd et al., 2008; Zuckerman, 1979). Alternately, in not wanting to deny credit to students for their success or blame others for student failure, principals, teachers, and parents may share the responsibility for influence of student academic outcomes (Zuckerman, 1979).

Summary

This body of research suggests that principals, teachers, and parents have an influence on student academic outcomes. The “at-school” stakeholders: principals and teachers can influence student achievement in multiple ways. Principals through leadership style, interaction with students, and community outreach may influence student academic outcomes either positively or negatively (Bruggencate et al., 2012; Chappelar & Price, 2012; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Silva et al., 2011). While some research provides evidence that teachers may influence students through classroom interaction and stimulating student motivation (Donaldson & Pay, 2014; Fan & Chen,
1999), other studies examine teacher attributions of relative influence on other stakeholder’s influence on student achievement (Kurt, 2013; Lauermann & Karabenick, 2013). The “at-home” stakeholder (parents or guardians) may also provide influence for student success. Parents may influence their child’s academic outcomes by either at-home or at-school activities (Gordon & Louis, 2009; Jeynes, 2007), but when it comes to blame, parents believe that they are responsible for some academic outcomes, but parents mostly point the finger toward students and teachers (Ballard & Bates, 2008; Peterson et al., 2011).

While this evidence suggests that these three stakeholders can influence student outcomes, (parents/guardians, principals, and teachers), evidence is limited as to each group’s perspectives concerning the relative influence each group has on student academic outcomes. Although there is some evidence that teachers and parents will attribute student academic success to themselves but will externalize responsibility factors and others with student academic failure, research including attributions made by principals is completely lacking. Even though the theoretical frameworks of fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias are in line with these perspectives, studies have not focused specifically on this as a possible explanation for the attributions of principals, teachers, and parents provide for student outcomes. By linking fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias to principals’, teachers’, and parents’ perspectives of student academic outcomes, this study will expand existing research that focuses on attribution of influence on student learning outcomes as measured by standardized achievement tests.
CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine principals’, teachers’, and parents’ attributions of their own and the other groups’ relative influence on student academic achievement. The purpose of this chapter is to (1) describe the research design, (2) explain the sample of participants, (3) describe the instrument, and (4) provide a description of the procedures used to collect data.

Research Design

The survey methodology was employed for this study to describe principals’, teachers’, and parents’ beliefs of their own and the other groups’ relative influence on student achievement. Descriptive analyses were conducted to compare responses from these three constituent groups. Additionally, repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (RM_MANOVA) was conducted in order to explain the effect the moderator variable, school performance level, had on the strength of the relationship between the independent (school rating and group) and dependent (influence on student academic outcomes) variables.

Participants

Participants included principals, teachers, and parents whose children attend K-8 public education in the State of Mississippi. Principals were sampled from public K-8 Mississippi schools that were rated by the Mississippi Department of Education as an A, B, D, or F. The researcher determined that inviting all principals from chosen rated schools would likely provide an adequate sample size to maximize the chances of adequately representing the population mean and to determine if a significant relationship existed. Teachers who currently worked at and parents whose children attended a
stratified random sampling of selected public K-8 Mississippi schools were invited to participate. To form a stratified random sample, all public schools in the state of Mississippi were divided by their rating of A, B, D, or F, provided by the Mississippi Department of Education. Each A, B, D, and F school was then stratified by one of six regions: Northeast, Northwest, East Central, West Central, Southeast, and Southwest. Although the Mississippi Department of Education recognizes only four regions, the researcher chose to divide the state into six regions to capture diverse participation from school and community culture, race, and economic status. From each region, four schools from each performance level (A, B, D, and F) were randomly chosen, which provided a total of 72 schools from which permission was requested to conduct the study. After the initial random selections were made, a cross reference was conducted to ensure each group of rated schools were from various school districts. This strategy aided in the prevention of participants from each school performance level from being selected from the same school district, which in turn provided school districts represented by diverse cultures.

Requests for participation were sent to school principals at the selected schools. After a two-week period, a reminder email was sent to the principals who had not yet responded. When the first round was completed, it was determined that obtaining permission from 72 schools as initially planned would be difficult. Therefore, the procedure was revised somewhat in an attempt to obtain permission from 24 schools across Mississippi. This included one randomly selected school from each performance level from each region. After randomly selecting schools and four months of requesting permission to conduct studies, permission was granted for participation from 13 schools.
across Mississippi. In addition, permission was granted from a local school to conduct a pilot study. Approval to conduct the study was sought and obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of The University of Southern Mississippi (USM).

Invitations for the pilot study were distributed to multiple principals, as well as teachers and parents of children who attended a public K-8 grade school in the state of Mississippi. Of the 151 principals invited to participate, 21 principals completed the questionnaire (13.9 %). Teachers and parents were invited to participate from a local school in the researcher’s area. Of the 45 teachers and 503 parents invited to participate, 34 teachers (75.5 %) and 63 parents (12.5 %) returned completed questionnaires.

For the main phase of the study, 438 principals were invited to participate. Permission from 13 schools was granted to include teachers and parents, however, six principals declined the participation of teachers and parents. The seven remaining schools allowed the questionnaire to be distributed to 330 teachers and 4,060 parents. The return rate for questionnaires was as follows: 53 principals (12.10%), 62 teachers (18.79%), and 1,069 parents (26.33%) returned questionnaires. Due to incomplete, incorrectly filled out, or blank questionnaires being returned, the number of participants used in the analyses was 46 principals, 58 teachers, and 993 parents.

Measures

Student academic achievement questionnaires have been developed by various researchers to measure beliefs concerning the responsibility for student success and failure. The current study used a questionnaire adapted from two previous instruments to examine influence on student academic achievement. These instruments included the
Responsibility for Student Achievement Questionnaire (RSA) by Guskey (1981) and the Teacher Responsibility Scale (TRS) by Lauermann and Karabenick (2013).

Instrumentation Background

The RSA by Guskey (1981) was created to measure teachers’ attributions of student academic achievement and circumstances related to school. The scale consisted of 30 items concerning positive and negative academic situations in the classroom. Guskey developed his scale based on the Intellectual Achievement Responsibility (IAR) questionnaire previously created by Crandall, Katkovksy, and Crandall (1965). The major difference between the two scales is that IAR measures student beliefs while the RSA measures teacher beliefs regarding school related academic achievement and situations.

The IAR’s reliability has been assessed by means of test-retest correlations and split-half reliability analysis. The questionnaire was administered to 923 elementary and high school students, then administered again after a two-month interval to a portion of the original participants. The test-retest correlations were statistically significant indicating the temporal stability of the scale. Further, to determine the internal consistency of each subscale a split-half reliability analysis was conducted, which indicated that the items within each subscale were somewhat homogenous. Thus, the researchers determined that the IAR was a reliable measure for student beliefs of internal and external responsibility for student positive and negative academic situations.

Based on the IAR, Guskey created the RSA to assess teachers’ attributions regarding their own responsibility for student academic success and failure. Teachers were asked to divide 100 points between two choices depending on their beliefs of the statement. After administering the questionnaire to 215 elementary and high school
teachers, Guskey performed an exploratory factor analysis and found evidence for the validity of the RSA in measuring responsibility for student success and failure. The RSA was re-administered to a portion of the original teacher participants at a 4-month interval and test-retest correlations and split-half analysis were significant, indicating both test-retest and internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire.

Recently, Lauermann and Karabenick (2013) created the Teacher Responsibility Scale (TRS) after determining that previous teacher responsibility measures did not distinguish between teacher’s self-efficacy and teacher’s belief of his/her responsibility for student outcomes. The TRS demonstrated that a teacher’s belief in responsibility for student achievement and a teacher’s sense of self-efficacy were independent of each other. Further, the TRS assesses the willingness of teachers to accept responsibility for negative as well as positive student academic outcomes.

The TRS was first administered to pre-service secondary teachers in Germany, and after performing a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), it was determined that a four-factor model, including teacher responsibility for student motivation, student achievement, relationships with students, and teaching, best fit the data. After measuring the teacher responsibility items against parallel teacher self-efficacy items created by the researcher, a CFA determined that the scales had empirically identifiable differences. Further, after conducting a repeated-measures MANOVA and paired t-tests, these analyses suggested that responsibility and self-efficacy functioned differently in specific educational outcomes. The TRS was administered a second time to kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) teachers in the United States to determine if the assessment would be reliable to in-service teachers. A confirmatory factor analysis determined that the four-
structure model was a good fit to the data, indicating that the TRS to be a valid and reliable assessment for teacher responsibility for student outcomes.

Instrument Demographics

The instrument used in this study, Influence on Student Growth (ISG), was developed by the researcher based on the RSA (Guskey, 1981) and TRS (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2013). The ISG was adapted to allow administration of one questionnaire to all constituent groups (principals, teachers, and parents), with demographics appropriate to each group. The ISG questionnaire is divided into two sections: demographics (see Appendices A, B, and C) and influence on student growth (see Appendix D). Each group of participants was administered the ISG with demographics appropriate to their constituent group. For the demographic sections, items 1, 2, and 3 identify the participants’ genders, ethnicities, and highest educational levels completed, respectively. In addition, the principal demographic section (see Appendix A) includes items 4 (length in years employed as principal, not including years employed as an assistant principal) and 5 (length in years employed as a principal at the current school). The teacher demographic section (see Appendix B) includes seven additional items: items (4) length of years employed as a K-6 grade teacher, (5) length of years employed as a 7-8 grade teacher, (6) grade currently teaching, (7) length in years teaching at current grade level, (8) state tested subject currently teaching, (9) length in years teaching this subject, and (10) nationally board certified. Further, the parent demographic section (see Appendix C) includes item (4) grade your child is currently in and item (5) if you have other children in K-8, select grade(s) each is currently in.
Influence on Student Growth Scale

The responsibility for student academic outcomes section of the questionnaire was the same for all participants. This section provided directions and examples on how to attribute the percent of influence that each group is believed to have concerning student achievement. For each statement, the respondents were asked to partition 100 percent among principals, teachers, and parents. The 100 percent metric was adopted from Guskey’s (1981) RSA questionnaire. In the current study, 100 percent represents the total influence respondents believe the three constituent groups in the study have on student academic outcomes.

The ISG (see Appendix D) is comprised of 21 items concerning influence on student academic outcomes. Items 1, 2, 4, 7, and 9 measure participants’ beliefs regarding each group’s influence on positive student academic outcomes. Items 3, 5, 6, 9 and 10 measure participants’ beliefs regarding each group’s influence on negative student academic outcomes. Items 11-19 measure participants’ beliefs regarding each group’s influence on student motivations/dispositions. Item 20 measures participants’ beliefs regarding each group’s influence on overall student achievement, and item 21 measures participants’ beliefs regarding each group’s influence on state standardized tests.

Procedures

After permission for the research was granted by USM’s Institutional Review Board, a pilot study was conducted to determine the adequacy of the questionnaire and instructions. Principals and teachers were invited to participate in the pilot study via e-mail. Parents were invited to participate in the pilot study by printed informed consent letters and questionnaires brought home by students. Pilot study participants were asked
to complete the questionnaires in accordance with the procedures used in the main study. The pilot study was conducted to determine if the ISG questionnaire could be used appropriately in the selected setting.

For both the pilot study and main phase of the study, principals received an introductory email containing a brief description of the study, a link to the host site, Qualtrics, and a request to participate. Principals were asked to forward the email containing the information to all teachers in their schools. For principals and teachers, informed consent letters (see Appendix E) were viewed prior to accessing the online questionnaire. Parent consent letters (see Appendix F) were attached to the front of the printed questionnaire, which were brought home to them by the students.

Both phases of this study employed the survey methodology and used both online and hard-copy formats to gather information regarding participants’ beliefs of their own and the other groups’ relative influence on students’ academic outcomes, as measured by standardized tests. As indicated above, appropriate permissions to conduct the study were granted for the participating schools, which were chosen by means of stratified random sampling stratified by means of performance level ratings by the Mississippi Department of Education as either A, B, D, or F.

After being fully informed of the nature and purpose of the study, those invited to participate had the opportunity to complete a version of the ISG questionnaire appropriate to his or her constituent group. Each questionnaire in the pilot and main studies consisted of questions concerning the participants’ demographics, items related to positive and negative student outcomes, and items that affect students’ academic achievement. All participants were given a period of two-weeks to complete the questionnaires.
Principals and teachers completed the questionnaires online using Qualtrics. After the allowed two-week period had ended, the data collected were downloaded to the researcher’s computer, which is password protected, and the Qualtrics survey site was made inaccessible to additional participants. Parents completed printed copies of the questionnaires. Each teacher received a large envelope containing an instructional letter (see Appendix G) that described the procedures for distribution and retrieval of parent questionnaires. Parent questionnaire packets, which contained an informed consent letter, questionnaire, and envelope, were delivered to parents by students. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, parents returned the questionnaires in a sealed envelope, which was placed in a sealed box located in the teacher’s lounge or placed in a location preferred by the principal. If a questionnaire was returned by a student unsealed, the teacher was asked to fold the questionnaire in half, tape or staple it, and place it in the sealed box. After a two-week period, the researcher sent another email announcing to principals the day on which parent questionnaires would be retrieved. The researcher picked up the parent questionnaires from each school and placed all printed questionnaires in a locked file cabinet.

Data Analysis

Data analyses were conducted using IBM’s SPSS version 24. Demographics were coded and entered in the computer using Microsoft Office Excel software. Questions were coded using corresponding numbers and initials for attribution of group influence percentage (ie, question one is coded, Q1P for attribution of principal percentage, Q1T for attribution of parent percentage, and Q1PA for attribution of parent percentage), but responses were left as percentages. Percentage answers coincided with the respondent’s
response, whether that response was a whole number or decimal. The Excel file was uploaded to SPSS. The procedures used for the analysis are described below.

Research Question 1: How do principals, teachers, and parents attribute the relative influence of each group on measured student growth?

To determine attributions of relative influence of each group on measured student growth, descriptive statistics were used. Using listwise deletion, any subject who had a missing value for any variable was deleted from the analysis. Mean statistics were used to describe how each group attributed principals’, teachers’, and parents’ attributions on positive student academic achievement, negative student academic outcomes, and student motivations/dispositions.

Hypothesis: Performance level of the respondent’s school will moderate the reported relative influence on each group.

This hypothesis was based on the theoretical formulations of fundamental attribution error. As with the research questions, the hypothesis used listwise deletion for any subject that has a missing value for any variable. To determine if performance level of the respondent’s school would moderate the reported relative influence on each group, repeated measures MANOVA was used. MANOVA is designed to look at multiple dependent variables at once. Repeated measures analysis is used when participants are included in all conditions of an experiment. Therefore, since participants were in only one level of the independent variables of school performance level and group rated, and there were nine dependent variables a repeated measures MANOVA was used. Using Wilks’ lambda, if significant main effect or interaction were present, an examination was conducted on the univariate F test for each variable. In addition, simple effects were used
to determine the specific interaction variables that contributed to the significance. To aid in determining if fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias could be used to explain or understand participants’ attribution of influence, means reported was used.
CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

This study’s primary purpose was to determine how principals, teachers, and parents make attributions regarding their own and the other groups’ relative influence on student academic outcomes. Based on the principle of fundamental attribution error, it was hypothesized 1) that respondents would attribute a higher level of causation for students’ academic outcomes to groups other than their own and 2) that based on the concept of self-serving bias the performance level of a respondent’s school would moderate the attributed relative influence of each group. This chapter begins by discussing a pilot study and explaining how the results of that pilot study informed subsequent revisions to the data collection instrument. This discussion is followed by a summary of the characteristics of the respondents in the main phase of the instigation and a detailed analysis of the data collected.

Pilot Phase

In the state of Mississippi, the state department of education assigned letter grades (A, B, C, D, or F) to each school based on the standardized test scores of students attending the school. “A” is the highest rating, “F” the lowest. For the pilot study, a sample consisting of principals from C rated schools in Mississippi and teachers from a K-8 school as well as parents of children attending the school was utilized. The school in the pilot phase was randomly selected from schools rated “C” by the Mississippi Department of Education. An invitation to participate was sent to principals from 151 schools, and 45 teachers along with 503 parents were invited from one school in central Mississippi. A total of 21 principals, 34 teachers, and 63 parents returned completed
questionnaires for a return rate of 13.9% for principals, 75.5% for teachers and 12.5% for parents. Seven parent questionnaires included percentages that did not add to 100% thereby violating instructions and were therefore recalculated to create a valid 100%. The responses to these questions were recalculated by using a new percentage based on the sum divided by answer for that group. This procedure provided a valid 100 percent for each question. One other completed parent questionnaire was eliminated due to no items being answered and one because the respondent failed to follow instructions. No difficulties were apparent with respect to either the directions for completing the questionnaire or with the items themselves. In the pilot study the researcher discovered evidence that some parents were completing and submitting more than one questionnaire. The researcher concluded that this may have been due to some parents having more than one child at the school in the grades in which the pilot study was conducted. To lessen the possibility of this affecting the results of the main study, directions in the demographics section were revised by adding, “If you receive more than one questionnaire, please complete only one for the child who you choose to return it to school.”

Data Analysis

Data analyses were conducted using IBM’s SPSS version 24. Demographics were coded and entered using Microsoft Office Excel software. Questions were coded, but answers were left as percentages. Percentages coincided with respondent’s answers regardless if the answer was a whole number or decimal number. The Excel file was uploaded to SPSS. The procedures used for the analysis are described below.

Research Question 1: How do principals, teachers, and parents attribute the relative influence of each group on measured student growth?
To determine attributions of relative influence of each group on measured student growth, descriptive statistics were used. Using listwise deletion, any subject that had a missing value for any variable was deleted from the analysis. Mean statistics were used to describe how each group attributed principals’, teachers’, and parents’ attributions on positive student academic achievement, negative student academic outcomes, and student motivations/dispositions.

Hypothesis: 1) Based on fundamental attribution error, it was hypothesized that raters would attribute a higher level of causation for students’ academic outcomes to groups other than their own 2) Based on self-serving bias, performance level of the respondent’s school will moderate the reported relative influence on each group.

As with the research questions, listwise deletion was used for any subject that had a missing value for any variable. To determine if raters would attribute a higher level of causation for students’ academic outcomes to groups other than their own and if the performance level of the respondent’s school would moderate the reported relative influence on each group, repeated measures MANOVA was used. Since participants’ data was categorized within the independent variables of school performance level and group rated, and three independent variables – percentage of influence on positive student academic outcomes, percentage of influence on negative student academic outcomes, and percentage of influence on student motivations/dispositions a repeated measures MANOVA was used. Using Wilks’ lambda, if significant main effect or interaction were present, an examination was conducted on the univariate F test for each variable. To aid in determining if fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias could be used to explain or understand participants’ attribution of influence, means were compared.
Main Phase

Attribution of Influence on Student Growth

This study addressed the following primary research question: How do principals, teachers, and parents make attributions regarding their own and the other groups’ relative influence on student growth? Two specific hypotheses were offered: 1) Respondents would attribute a higher level of causation for students’ academic outcomes to groups other than their own and 2) the performance level of respondent’s school would moderate the attributed relative influence of each group.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the data obtained from the parent sample to determine the underlying constructs and factor structure within the data. This analysis utilized principal component analysis extraction with oblimin rotation using Kaiser normalization. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) was computed to be .917, indicating that the sample size was adequate for the exploratory factor analysis. Small sample size precluded using EFA for the teacher and principal data, however, pattern matrices were produced in the exploratory factor analysis for these data gave indication of similar factor structure among the three data sets indicative of three underlying constructs in the instrument, positive student academic outcome, negative student academic outcomes, and student motivations/dispositions (see Appendix H, Appendix I, and Appendix J). The variance explained for parents’ attributions of each group were as follows: 56.58% for parents’ attributions of principals, 52.08% for parents’ attributions of teachers, and 50.32 % for parents’ attributions of parents.
This factor structure is consistent with the theoretical foundations for this study of fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias. In both theoretical formulations, participants are hypothesized to take credit for positive student academic outcomes and place the blame elsewhere for negative student academic outcomes. In designing the ISG scale, the instrument was divided into positive student academic outcomes, negative student academic outcomes, and student motivations/dispositions. Thus, the results of the EFA support the construct validity of the instrument for its intended purpose.

Based on the theoretical basis of fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias the dependent variables were used to examine how principals, teachers, and parents attributed the relative influence of each group measured by student growth. The following nine dependent variables were utilized in this study: 1) principal influence on positive student academic outcomes, 2) teacher influence on positive student academic outcomes, 3) parent influence on positive student academic outcomes, 4) principal influence on negative student academic outcomes, 5) teacher influence on negative student academic outcomes, 6) parent influence on negative student academic outcomes, 7) principal influence on student motivations/dispositions, 8) teacher influence on student motivation/dispositions, and 9) parent influence on student motivations/dispositions.

To determine the internal consistency reliability for each of the nine dependent variables measured in the instrument, Cronbach’s alpha was used. Kline (1999) indicated that a good reliability coefficient is in the region of .7 to .8. Cronbach’s alpha (see Table 1) values are displayed. Cronbach’s alpha values for all nine dependent variables were above this standard for reliability except for teacher respondents attributing principal influence on positive student academic outcomes (see Table 1) which was quite close to
this standard (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .694$) and was, therefore, deemed acceptable for the purposes of this study.
Table 1

Cronbach’s Alpha for Positive and Negative Student Academic Outcomes and Student Motivations/Dispositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Student Academic Outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principal Influence on Positive Student Academic Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>.866</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>.694</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>.829</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Influence on Positive Student Academic Outcomes</strong></td>
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<td>.909</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>.839</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>.841</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Influence on Positive Student Academic Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>.876</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Teachers</td>
<td>.848</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>.812</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Student Academic Outcomes</td>
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</tr>
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<td><strong>Principals Influence on Negative Student Academic Outcomes</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Parents</td>
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<td><strong>Parent Influence on Negative Student Academic Outcomes</strong></td>
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<td>Teachers</td>
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<td>Parents</td>
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<td>Student Motivations/Dispositions</td>
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</table>
Group Attributions of Relative Influence on Student Academic Outcomes

The principle of fundamental attribution error holds that when people attribute causal influence on another’s behavior, that person has the tendency to overestimate the internal control that the person has and to underestimate influence of external factors on the behavior. Therefore, based on the formulations of fundamental attribution error, it was hypothesized that a respondent would attribute more relative influence on student outcomes to the other groups than they would to their own group’s influence. That is, a respondent would be expected to attribute more causal influence on both positive and negative student academic outcomes because the respondent would believe that the other groups would have more control over the outcomes than would their own group.

Principals’ Attributions

Wilks’ lambda revealed a significant effect for the principals’ attributions of influence for each group on positive student academic outcomes, negative student academic outcomes, and student motivations/dispositions: $\Lambda = .15, F(6,39) = 36.3, p < .001$. Although there is a significant effect for principals overall when attributing student academic outcomes, further analysis was conducted to determine where and if any significant relationships existed for positive and negative student academic outcomes. Therefore, univariate tests were used to determine significance for the main effect for positive student academic outcomes and for negative student academic outcomes.

Mauchly’s test indicated, that the assumption of sphericity had been violated for the main effect of principals’ attributions of each group’s relative influence on positive student academic outcomes $\chi^2(2) = 19.21, p < .001$ and negative student academic outcomes, $\chi^2(2) = 17.02, p < .001$. Therefore, degrees of freedom were corrected using the
Greenhouse-Geisser estimates of sphericity (ε = .73 for the main effect of positive student academic outcomes and .75 for the main effect of negative student academic outcomes).

Univariate tests revealed a significant main effect for principals’ attributions of each group’s relative influence on positive student academic outcomes, $F(1.47, 64.65) = 104.44, p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons of means revealed a significant difference between how principals attributed the relative influence for principals and teachers ($p < .001$), principals and parents ($p < .001$), and teachers and parents ($p < .001$) on positive student academic outcomes, consistent with the predictions of the principle of fundamental attribution error. The pattern of means (see Table 2) indicated that principals attributed teachers (59.62%) as having the most influence on positive student academic outcomes and parents (28.12%) having the second most influence. As predicted principals attributed their group (12.26%) with the least amount of influence.

Univariate tests revealed a significant main effect for the extent to which principals attributed each group’s relative influence on negative student academic outcomes: $F(1.50, 66.33) = 62.96, p<.001$. A pairwise comparison of means revealed a significant difference between how principals attributed relative influence for principals and teachers ($p < .001$), principals and parents ($p < .001$), and teachers and parents ($p < .001$) on negative student academic outcomes. Again, consistent with the study’s hypotheses based on the principle of fundamental attribution error the pattern of means (see Table 2) revealed that principals attributed the least amount of influence on negative student academic outcomes to their own group (13.05%) with relatively more influence attributed to teachers (56.46%) and to parents (30.57%).
### Table 2

*Means for Principals’ Attributions of Positive and Negative Student Academic Outcomes and Student Motivations/Dispositions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Student Academic Outcomes</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>12.263%</td>
<td>1.416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>59.617%</td>
<td>2.409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>28.121%</td>
<td>1.822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Student Academic Outcomes</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>13.048%</td>
<td>1.504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>56.478%</td>
<td>2.655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>30.571%</td>
<td>2.420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Motivations/Dispositions</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>15.982%</td>
<td>1.457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>52.536%</td>
<td>1.918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>32.758%</td>
<td>1.744</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teachers’ Attributions**

Wilks’ lambda indicated a significant effect for teachers attributions of each group’s relative influence on positive student academic outcomes, negative student academic outcomes, and student motivations/dispositions: \( \Lambda = .08, F(6,51) = 104.59, p < .001 \). Further analysis was conducted to determine if significant effects existed for teachers’ attributions of each groups’ relative influence on positive and negative student academic outcomes.

Mauchly’s test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated for the main effect of teachers’ attributions of each group’s relative influence on positive student academic outcomes: \( \chi^2(2) = 20.32, p < .001 \), and negative student academic outcomes: \( \chi^2(2) = 29.90, p < .001 \). Consequently, the degrees of freedom were corrected using the Greenhouse-Geisser estimates of sphericity (\( \varepsilon = .76 \) for positive student academic outcomes and \( .71 \) for negative student academic outcomes).
Univariate tests revealed a significant main effect for teachers’ attributions of each group’s relative influence on positive student academic outcomes: $F(1.53, 85.66) = 156.68, p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons of means revealed a significant difference between how teachers attributed the relative influence for teachers and principals ($p < .001$), teachers and parents ($p < .001$), and principals and parents ($p < .001$) on positive student academic outcomes. In this case, the pattern was inconsistent with the hypothesis based on the principle of fundamental attribution error (see Table 3). Specifically, teachers attributed the most relative influence to their own group claiming 56.54% of the influence on positive student academic achievement. Teachers attributed parents with 33.17% of the influence and principals with 10.31%.

Univariate tests indicated a significant main effect for teachers attributions of each group’s relative influence on negative student academic outcomes: $F(1.41, 78.92) = 109.20, p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons of means revealed a significant difference between the extent to which teachers attributed the relative influence of teachers and parents ($p < .001$), teachers and principals ($p < .001$), and principals and parents ($p < .001$) for negative student academic outcomes. The pattern of the means indicated that as was the case with positive academic outcomes, teachers attributed their group (53.81%) with having the most influence on negative student academic outcomes, with parents (38.43%) and principals (7.96%) having significantly less influence (see Table 3).
Table 3

*Means for Teachers’ Attributions of Positive and Negative Student Academic Outcomes and Student Motivations/Dispositions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Student Academic Outcomes</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>10.314 %</td>
<td>1.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>56.535 %</td>
<td>1.793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>33.168 %</td>
<td>1.591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Student Academic Outcomes</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>7.964 %</td>
<td>1.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>53.805 %</td>
<td>2.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>38.432 %</td>
<td>2.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Motivations/Dispositions</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>11.510 %</td>
<td>1.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>52.002 %</td>
<td>1.769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>36.979 %</td>
<td>1.591</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents’ Attributions

Wilks’ lambda indicated a significant effect for parents’ attributions of each group’s relative influence on positive student academic outcomes, negative student academic outcomes, and student motivations/dispositions: $\Lambda = .090, F(6,986) = 1660.69, p < .001$. Further analyses were conducted to determine if significant effects existed for parent attributions of positive student academic outcomes or for negative student academic outcomes.

Mauchly’s test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated for the main effect of how parents attributed each group’s relative influence on positive student academic outcomes: $X^2(2) = 412.30, p < .001$ and negative student academic outcomes, $X^2(2) = 377.85, p < .001$. Therefore, the degrees of freedom were corrected using the Greenhouse-Geisser estimates of sphericity ($\varepsilon = .75$ for the main effect of
positive student academic outcomes and .76 for the main effect of negative student academic outcomes).

Univariate tests revealed a significant main effect for parents’ attributions of each group’s relative influence on positive student academic outcomes: $F(1.49, 1478.41) = 2121.53, p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons of means revealed a significant difference between how parents attributed the relative influence of parents and principals ($p < .001$), parents and teachers ($p < .001$) and principals and teachers ($p < .001$). This pattern was not wholly supportive of the predictions of the study based on the principle of fundamental attribution error. Specifically, the pattern of means (see Table 4) revealed that parents attributed principals with 7.83% of the relative influence on positive student academic outcomes, and attributed teachers (55.22%) with the most influence and parents (36.86%) with the second most influence.

Univariate tests also revealed a significant main effect for parents’ attributions of each group’s relative influence on negative student academic outcomes: $F(1.59, 1575.18) = 1881.15, p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons of means revealed a significant difference between how parents attributed the relative influence of parents and principals ($p < .001$), parents and teachers ($p < .001$), and principals and teachers ($p < .001$). In this case the pattern of means (see Table 4) exhibited that parents attributed 7.43% of the relative influence on negative student academic outcomes to principals and 54.26% and 38.32% to teachers and parents respectively.
Table 4

Means for Parents’ Attributions of Positive and Negative Student Academic Outcomes and Student Motivations/Dispositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Student Academic Outcomes</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>7.8345 %</td>
<td>.274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>55.223 %</td>
<td>.492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>36.860 %</td>
<td>.470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Student Academic Outcomes</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>7.428 %</td>
<td>.297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>54.258 %</td>
<td>.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>38.324 %</td>
<td>.512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Motivations/Dispositions</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>9.101 %</td>
<td>.279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>47.220 %</td>
<td>.437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>43.736 %</td>
<td>.451</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Performance Level of a Respondents’ School

Based on the principle of self-serving bias, it was hypothesized that the performance level of a respondent’s school would moderate the attributions of relative influence on student academic outcomes. Specifically, respondents sampled from high-performing schools were hypothesized to attribute relatively more responsibility to their own group (principal, teacher, or parent) for positive and negative academic outcomes when compared to the same group from low-performing schools, which in turn would mean the respondents of high-performing schools would take more credit for the overall success of the school. However, respondents from a low-performing school would take less credit for positive and negative student academic outcomes than respondents of high-performing schools because the respondent would take less credit for the overall unsuccessfulness of the school.
This hypothesis was not confirmed in the case of principals’ attributions as Wilks’ lambda indicated that the school’s performance level did not have a significant effect on how principals’ attribute relative influence on positive student academic outcomes, negative student academic outcomes, or student motivations/dispositions: $\Lambda = .92, F(2,43) = 1.84, p = .171$. Similarly, using Wilks’ lambda, school performance level was not found to significantly moderate teachers’ attributions of relative influence on positive student academic outcomes, negative student academic outcomes, or student motivations/dispositions: $\Lambda = .93, F(3,54) = 1.35, p = .268$. As was the case with the other two respondent groups using Wilks’ lambda, there was no statistically significant moderating effect of school performance level on parent attributions of relative influence on positive student academic outcomes, negative academic outcomes or student motivations/dispositions: $\Lambda = .99, F(3,989) = 1.93, p = .123$.

Ancillary Findings

A small number of parent respondents, 38, included written comments on returned questionnaires. A content analysis was conducted on these qualitative responses from which three main themes emerged. The first was that the student, him/herself, had the most influence and responsibility for his/her own student academic outcomes. Some parents expressed the opinion that students are themselves responsible for between 70% to 100% for their own academic outcomes. Some parents commented that students are responsible for their own “choices and work done” and “carry the biggest load towards their success”. Some parents expressed the view that students who were unmotivated to be successful in school would not be successful, irrespective of the effort or influence from principals, teachers, and parents. The second theme that emerged concerned
parents’ beliefs with respect to state testing. Several parents expressed an unfavorable opinion of state testing. For example, several parents described state testing as being too stressful for students, a waste of resources and time, and that schools are placing too much emphasis on state tested areas instead of all subjects. One parent stated, “the industry/group creating the standardized tests should be held responsible and should have the responsibility of the “influence.” The third theme that was revealed from parent comments was that it took a group effort for students to be successful. Several parents’ written responses expressed the view that all constituent groups (principals, teachers, and parents) were responsible for student academic outcomes, and that communication between groups should take place and that they should work together. One parent commented:

”I truly believe that teachers, parents, and principals have equal amounts of influence in regards to student’s education. It is a group effort that must be equally put forth in order for a student to truly succeed.”
CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Race to the Top initiative of 2009, and Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 are federal laws that place the greatest responsibility for student achievement on teachers and administrators excluding all other factors influencing student learning. However, studies have suggested that others may influence students in various ways and further, that the potential influence of principals, teachers, and parents on student academic outcomes maybe positive or negative (Bruggencate et al., 2012; Ross & Gray, 2006). Principals may have a direct or indirect influence on student achievement, while parents may influence their children’s academic performance at home or at school (Bruggencate et al., 2012; Fan & Chen 1999; Gordon & Lewis, 2009; Jacob & Lefgren, 2007; Jeynes, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Ross & Gray, 2006). However, out of all the potential influence that are external to students, some research suggests that teachers and parents consider teachers to have the greatest responsibility for students’ academic outcomes (Donaldson & Papay, 2014; Petty, Wang, & Harbaugh, 2013).

Few studies have been conducted that focus on the beliefs concerning the relative influence of various groups or constituencies on student achievement, particularly in the last decade since the implementation of NCLB, RTTT, and ESSA. Most of the extant research dates to the 1980s and early 1990s (e.g., Cullen & Altschuld, 1994; Guskey, 1981; Whelan & Teddlie, 1989). In addition, the largest portion of the research that does exist focuses on teacher and parent attributions of responsibility for student academic outcomes. The primary purpose of this study was to determine principals’, teachers’, and parents’ attributions of their and the other groups’ relative influences on student academic
outcomes as measured by standardized tests. In this manner, it is the goal of this study to contribute to the existing literature focusing on the attributions of the relative influence on student academic outcomes. The secondary purpose of this study was to test the applicability of the principles of fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias to predict and/or potentially explain each group’s attribution of influence on student academic outcomes. The hypothesis was that the fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias could explain the process by which these groups attribute their own and the others groups’ influence on student academic outcomes.

The study participants included principals and teachers who were working at and parents whose children attended a public K-8 grade school in Mississippi at the time of the study. The survey methodology was employed. Data were obtained by administering the Influence of Student Growth (ISG) questionnaire to all participants. The principals and teachers completed questionnaires via Qualtrics, while parents completed questionnaires via printed versions.

The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase, the pilot study, was carried out to assess the necessity of revisions to the instrument or to data collection procedures. After the pilot phase, which informed minor revisions to the directions, the main study took place over a four-week period, during which the questionnaires were administered to principals from all selected A, B, D, and F performance level schools in Mississippi and teachers and parents of A, B, D, and F performance level stratified sampled schools in Mississippi.
Attribution of Influence

The research question addressed principals’, teachers’, and parents’ attributions of the relative influence of each of the same groups on measured student growth. Specifically, the study explored how principals, teachers, and parents attributed their own and the other groups’ relative influence on student academic outcomes and student motivations/dispositions. Therefore, the pattern of the means was used to describe the percentage of how each group attributed the other groups’ relative influence.

Positive Student Academic Outcomes

Teachers were attributed with having the majority of relative influence on positive student academic outcomes by all respondent groups (see Figure 1). Specifically, teachers were attributed with 56.54% by their own group, 59.62% by principals and 55.22% by parents. With respect to parents, principals attributed parents with the least amount of influence (28.12%) compared to teachers’ (33.17%) and parents’ (36.86%) attributions. Considerably lower percentages were attributed to principals’ influence on positive student academic outcomes. Principals attributed their own group with 12.26% of influence, whereas teachers attributed 10.31% and parents attributed 7.83% to principals.

Negative Student Academic Outcomes

As with positive student academic outcomes, teachers were attributed with having the most relative influence on negative student academic outcomes (see Figure 1). Principals attributed teachers with 56.46% of influence, parents with 30.57%, and their own group following with 13.05%. Consistent with principals, teachers attributed the most influence on negative student academic outcomes to their own group (53.81%).
Also in the same manner as principals, teachers attributed parents with the second most influence (38.43%), and principals with the least (7.96%). Parents’ attributions were close to a reflection of teachers’ attributions of negative student academic outcomes. Parents attributed the teacher with 54.26%, the parents with 38.32%, and the principals with 7.43%.

Student Motivations/Dispositions

In alignment with positive and negative student academic outcomes, the relative influence on student motivations/dispositions were attributed mostly to teachers with lesser degrees of influence attributed to parents and principals (see Figure 1). The least amount of influence was attributed to principals with attributions made of 15.98% by principals, 11.51% by teachers, and 9.10% by parents. An intermediate amount of influence on student motivations/dispositions was attributed to parents. Parents attributed their own group with 43.74% of influence on student motivations and dispositions, whereas teachers attributed parents with 36.98% of influence and principals attributed 32.76% to parents. The largest percentage attributed from all three groups concerning influence on student motivations/dispositions was to teachers. Principals and teachers attributed teachers as having 52.54% and 52% relative influence, while parents attributed a slight lower amount (47.22%) of relative influence on student motivations/dispositions.

The primary finding of the study was that all constituent groups, principals, teachers, and parents, attributed the highest amount of influence on student academic outcomes to teachers regardless of whether the outcome is positive or negative. The respondents attributed the second greatest influence to parents, while principals were seen as having the least amount of relative influence. These findings are in line with the results
of previous studies. For example, Martin et al. (2001) reported that two-thirds of Missouri elementary teacher respondents took responsibility for positive student outcomes. Ballard and Bates (2008) found that most parents believe that they and their children’s teacher are equally responsible for their children’s education. Although the findings in this study did not report equal attribution of influence between teachers and parents, these two groups were viewed as having the most influence on both positive and negative student academic outcomes. These earlier findings in combination with those of the present study, suggest that while policies and federal mandates may change in education, the view among parents, teachers, and principals is relatively consistent in attributing to teachers and parents the most influence on student academic outcomes whether those outcomes are positive or negative.
Figure 1: Graph of each groups’ mean attributions of their own and the other groups’ relative influence on positive student academic outcomes, negative student academic outcomes and student motivations and dispositions.

Fundamental Attribution Error

Fundamental attribution error occurs when an individual overestimates internal factors and underestimates the power of external factors when attributing causes for another’s behavior. Based on fundamental attribution error, it was hypothesized that raters would attribute a higher level of influence on student academic outcomes to the groups other than their own. Thus, the pattern was hypothesized that the respondent group would attribute more relative influence for positive and negative academic
outcomes to external factors, which in this study is the other two groups, than to internal factors, which in the present study is represented by the raters’ own group.

Indeed, the present results included a statistically significant main effect for the extent to which respondents attributed each group’s relative influence for positive and negative student academic outcomes and for student motivations/dispositions. Pairwise comparisons revealed a statistically significant difference ($p < .001$) between how principals attributed the relative influence on positive student academic outcomes between principals and teachers, principals and parents, and teachers and parents. Teachers’ attributions of the relative influence on positive student academic outcomes were also statistically significant different ($p < .001$) between teachers and principals, teachers and parents, and principals and parents. The same was true for parents, in that the pairwise comparison of the means revealed a significant difference ($p < .001$) between how parents attributed the relative influence of positive student academic outcomes between parents and principals, parents and teachers, and principals and teachers. Pairwise comparisons revealed a mirror statistically significant difference for principals, teacher, and parent attributions of negative student academic outcomes. These findings indicate that respondents’ attribution of relative influence is consistent with the operation of the fundamental attribution error. In order to determine if there was an alignment with each group’s percentage of influence attributed with predictions based on the fundamental attribution error, the pattern of the means was analyzed. This hypothesis was supported as the principals attributed the most influence for both positive and negative student academic outcomes to teachers (positive: 59.62%; negative: 28.12%) and parents (positive: 56.46%; negative: 30.57%) and less to their own group (positive:
12.26%; negative: 13.05%). In addition, and consistent with the operation of the fundamental attribution error, the attributions of principals indicated that they attribute influence for student academic outcomes, both positive and negative, to factors outside of their own control more specifically to teachers and parents.

In contrast to principals, teacher attributions of principals and parents relative influence did not support the hypothesis based on the operation of the fundamental attribution error. That is, for both positive and negative student outcomes, teachers attributed their own group with the highest level of influence. (positive: 53.81%; negative 53.81%). One possible explanation for this is that teachers tend to believe that they themselves are primarily responsible for student outcomes due to mandated demands placed on them by federal and state laws, or because they are knowledgeable as to the subject matters being taught and that is their obligation to transmit that knowledge to their students.

Partial support for the predictions based on the fundamental attribution error were found concerning parent attributions of principal and teacher influence on student academic outcomes. Parent respondents attributed to teachers 55.22% of the influence on positive student academic outcomes and 54.26% of the influence on negative student academic outcomes. Therefore, and as was the case for principals, parent attributions concerning relative influence on student academic outcomes were found to be consistent with the operation of the fundamental attribution error as they attributed the most influence to groups other than their own. However, parent attributions of principals’ relative influence were inconsistent with predictions based on the fundamental attribution error, as parents attributed principals as having less relative influence on both positive
and negative student academic outcomes (positive: 7.83%; negative: 7.43%) as compared to their own group (positive: 36.86%; negative: 38.32%). Thus, when parents attribute teachers’ relative influence on student academic outcomes, parent attributions are in line with fundamental attribution error. However, this is not the case with parent attributions concerning the extent of principals’ influence on student academic outcomes. It may be that parents do not possess the knowledge of the principals’ range of responsibilities, perhaps viewing principals as those in charge of the facility or behavioral issues rather than being able to influence students academically.

Teacher attributions of the other groups’ influence and parent attribution of the teacher influence were consistent with the predictions based on the fundamental attribution error. This finding is in line with Jones and Nisbett’s (1972) conclusions that observers will attribute more responsibility to the person being observed in certain situations than to internal dispositions. However, since fundamental attribution error did not apply in principal attributions or parent attributions of principals’ influence on positive or negative student academic outcomes, other possible explanations could be proposed. Jones and Nisbett (1972) suggested that for an observer to correctly identify causes for how a person behaves, the observer must first have sufficient information about the person. In this study, the possibility of each respondent being acquainted with the other group through either present of past interactions at school or in the community may have altered their attribution in a way that favors one group over another. Alternatively, each group could have different perspectives as to the other groups’ roles as they may affect student academic outcomes, which may in turn have been reflected in a group’s attribution. It could prove useful for future research to expand on the concept of
fundamental attribution error in education by comparing attributions before and after each group is acquainted and well-informed of the other groups’ influence on student academic outcomes.

Self-Serving Bias

Based on the well-documented phenomenon of self-serving bias, it was hypothesized that a respondent’s school performance level would moderate a respondent’s reported influence attributed for student academic success and failure. Specifically, it was hypothesized that respondents from a high-performing school would attribute their group with a higher level of influence on positive and negative student academic outcomes than respondents would of the same group from a low-performing school because the respondent would credit themselves with the overall high performance of the school. Correspondingly, respondents from low achieving schools would attribute a lower level of responsibility to their own group compared to the same group of respondents from high-performing schools for both successful and poor student outcomes because they would attribute themselves with less credit with the overall performance of the school. Support for this hypothesis was mixed in terms of a significant difference between respondents from high-performing and low-performing schools (see Figure 2). Regardless of school performance rating, principals, teachers, and parents attributed the overall influence on student academic outcomes in a similar way. Specifically, principals and parents from low-performing schools attributed their own group with a higher percentage of influence on positive student academic outcomes (principals: 9.48%; parents: 38.20%) than the principals and parents from high-performing schools (principals: 6.19%; parents: 35.53%). The hypothesis, however, was supported for
teachers’ attributions. Teachers from high-performing schools attributed to their group 58.25% of the influence compared to teachers from low-performing schools who attributed their own group with 52.20%. The same pattern was present in attributions of negative student academic outcomes. Parallel to findings of positive student academic outcomes, principals from low-performing schools attributed 9.22% of the influence for negative student academic outcomes to their group as compared to principals from high performing schools (5.64%). Parents from high-and low-performing schools attributed their own group at nearly identical percentages, 38.45% for parents from high performing schools as compared to parents from low-performing schools at 38.19%. Teachers, on the other hand, attributed their own group as having the most influence on negative student academic outcomes. Teachers from high-performing schools attributed their group with 55.95% for influence and teachers from low-performing attributed their group with 52.57% of the influence on negative student academic outcomes.

Therefore, the present data provided partial support for the presence of self-serving bias in principals’, teachers’, and parents’ attributions for student academic outcomes. In fact, it would appear that principals and parents from high-performing schools take less credit for positive student academic outcomes than those do from low-performing schools. It would also seem that principals from low-performing schools take more credit for negative student academic outcomes than principals from high-performing schools. Parents appear to credit themselves with about the same percentage regardless if they are from high or low-performing schools. Therefore, suggesting that principals’ and parents’ attributions of positive and negative student academic outcomes are not reflective of the concept of self-serving bias because high-performing schools
take no more credit for positive and negative student academic outcomes than principals and parents of low-performing schools. However, teachers’ attributions of their own groups influence on positive and negative student academic outcomes are in line with the formulations of self-serving bias. Teachers from high-performing schools take more credit for both positive and negative student academic outcomes than those from low-performing schools. Although the present findings partially supported this hypothesis, it is important for future research to consider the possibility that self-serving bias may be present in other ways. This study focused on the attributions of three constituent groups, but self-serving bias may occur between other groups not considered in this study, such as students or student peers.

Figure 2. - Mean Attribution of Influence for High- and Low-Performing School Respondents

![Figure 2. Graph for the mean attributions of each group’s relative influence on positive and negative student academic outcomes from high- and low-performing schools.](image)
Based on the concept of self-serving bias (a component of fundamental attribution error), the researcher chose to look at the pattern of the means to determine if respondents would attribute more influence on positive student academic outcomes and the least amount of influence on negative student academic outcomes to their own group when compared to the other groups. These findings provided partial support based on the concept of self-serving bias. Specifically, it is consistent with the predictions based on self-serving bias with respect to the attributions of principals for negative student academic outcomes wherein they attributed the primary influence for negative outcomes to teachers (59.62%) and parents (28.12%). Therefore, principals may tend to place the primary responsibility for negative student academic outcomes on others and especially teachers. Also consistent with the predictions based on self-serving bias, teachers attributed the most influence on positive outcomes to their own group (56.41%), with parents (33.17%) next and principals (10.31%) having viewed as the least influential. Consequently, teachers place most of the influence on their own group for positive student academic outcomes. Parents, on the other hand, attributed the highest percentage of influence to teachers for both positive (55.22%) and negative (54.26%) student academic outcomes, which in the case of negative student academic outcomes is consistent with predictions based on self-serving bias. However, principals’ attributed teachers (56.48%) and parents (30.57%) with most of the influence for positive student academic outcomes, which does not support the concept of self-serving bias. In contradistinction to the principle of self-serving bias, the teacher respondents did not show self-serving bias when attributing influence for negative student academic outcomes. Rather, they attributed to their own group (53.81%) the highest percentage of
responsibility for student failure. Additionally, parents attributed principals (7.43%) with the least amount of influence on negative student academic outcomes which is also not consistent with the operation of the self-serving bias.

Partial support was provided for self-serving bias being consistent in the principals’, teachers’, and parents’ attributions of each group’s influence on student academic achievement. In contrast to these findings, Bradley (1978) and Zuckerman (1979) found that people assume responsibility for success, but they do not do so for failure. In addition, Heider (1958), Kelley (1967, 1972), and Weiner (1972, 1958) emphasized that people are quick to attempt to create positive impressions of their own abilities in others.

In the present study, although principals did not take relatively more credit for positive student academic outcomes, they did attribute the least amount of influence on negative student academic outcomes to their own group. In other studies, (i.e. Guskey 1981; Martin et al., 2001; and Ballard and Bates, 2008) it was discovered that teachers will take credit for success and place the responsibility on others for student failure. However, in the present study, the teachers took both credit for student success and responsibility for student failure. Parents’ attributions of influence on student academic outcomes were in line with those reported by Cantor (2012) in which he found that parents will share the degree of success with other groups but most student failure was attributed to teachers. Thus, in the current study, parents shared the major influence on positive student academic outcomes with teachers but attributed the greatest influence for negative student academic outcomes to teachers.
Although the present results can be interpreted as providing partial support for the operation of self-serving bias, some caution should be used in interpreting the results. In all the respondent groups, teachers were attributed the most influence for both positive and negative student academic outcomes. This is in line with Miller and Ross’s (1975) conclusions that the tendency to assume personal responsibility for a positive or successful outcome may be due to intention, expectation, or recognition of the relationship between the behavior and its outcomes, or to all three, rather than to self-serving motives. These findings suggest that principals, teachers, and parents expect teachers to have the most influence due to their knowledge of the subject and the time spent with students as concluded by Moswela (2014). In contrast, these groups may recognize that parents have the opportunity to influence students via motivation, academic expectations of the child, and being involved with schoolwork at home (Cooper, 1989; Fan & Chen, 1999; Jeynes, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Shute et al., 2011). In addition, these groups may expect principals to have little direct influence on students and their academic outcomes. Thus, the operation of a self-serving bias in the present results cannot be definitively verified.

If self-serving bias does not apply to attributions of relative influence on student academic outcomes, other possible explanations may be relevant. As Zuckerman (1979) suggested, administrators, teachers, and parents may share the responsibility for influence of student academic outcomes because they do not blame or credit any one group. It may be relevant for future research to include various open-ended questions or conduct focus groups in high- and low-performing schools to determine the factors influencing
respondents lack of desire to blame or credit a specific group for its influence on student academic outcomes.

Ancillary Findings

The questionnaire included three factors: positive student academic outcomes, negative student academic outcomes, and student motivation/dispositions. The principals, teachers and parents attributed the most relative influence on student motivations/dispositions to teachers. In addition, the parents attributed close to the same percentages of influence to their own group and to teachers. Principals (52.56%) and teachers (52.06%) attributed almost the same amount of influence on student motivations/dispositions to teachers. A similar amount of influence was reported by parents (47.3%) for teacher influence on student motivations/dispositions. It is interesting to note that in the case of attributions concerning principals’ relative influence on student motivations/dispositions, the principals assigned a higher level of influence to their own group (16.01%) than did parents (8.71%). Gentilucci and Muto (2007) and Silva et al. (2011) found that eighth graders self-reported a higher level of motivation when principals had a direct interaction with students than when such was not the case. Parents may not have the knowledge of how often principals directly interact with students concerning issues relating to student motivation which in turn may alter the attributed degree of principal influence on student motivations/dispositions provided by parents. It could be that parents think that principals only interact with students as authority figures or when discipline issues occur. In the future, it may be beneficial to examine how a student’s motivation to succeed academically affects how he or she attributes others’ influence on student academic outcomes.
Parent Comments

Although no comment section was included in the questionnaire, some parents chose to include comments, which ranged from opinions about the questionnaire itself to additional comments concerning influence. These additional qualitative data were subjected to content analysis revealing several common themes among the comments. The first major theme, with 19 parents providing comments, was that the students had the most responsibility when it came to their academic outcomes. Some parents inquired as to why the student was not included on the questionnaire because “the student has a big part in their success.” Others voiced reasons why they believed the student is responsible such as when a parent stated, “Regardless how much the principal, teachers or parents encourage the students to succeed academically, if the students do not have the grid, or do not work hard, they will not achieve their academic goals.” These parents seemed to think that no amount of influence that a principal, teacher, or parent had on a student, would alter his or her academic outcomes if that student did not have internal motivation. This theme should likely be interpreted with caution. Although this may be true for some students, this sentiment may not be generalizable to all students. It may be that some students benefit from persistent external motivation, whereas others need only a small amount. This view is quite consistent with Gentiluci and Muto’s (2007) finding in a study of eighth graders who reported a higher level of motivation when principals personally engaged them concerning academic success than when principals did not engage students personally.

The second theme to emerge from the unsolicited comments was the expression on the part of some parents of a strong dislike of mandated state testing. Nine parents
provided such comments varying from “it’s all about passing the test” to “I don’t agree with our current state testing system.” These parents considered that state testing is a “waste of time.” In addition, they commented that teaching was geared toward the test and/or that schools only focused on subjects that were state tested and not the entire curriculum. Some parents also commented on how stressful these tests can be for the student. For example, one parent wrote of how her lower elementary child cried before each state test. In a world of data-driven results and conclusions, it may be worth determining how stressful these tests are for children. Future research could examine how student stress level affects the results of state testing which in turn could possible lead to improved ways to decrease student anxiety of state testing.

The third theme to emerge from the parent comments was the view that a “group” effort is required to influence the success of students. The eight parents who wrote such comments expressed that all groups were responsible for student academic outcomes. Some parents thought that there should be greater communication among those who influence students and that these groups should work together to improve overall student academic outcomes. As one parent stated, “It is a group effort that must be equally put forth in order for a student to truly succeed.”

In the past, most studies on influences on student outcomes have focused on teachers and parents, and while others have targeted students. The present study focused on principals, teachers, and parents, who overall demonstrated little self-serving bias in terms of student academic outcomes. Future research should expand this focus to include various other groups such as students and student peers and how all attribute the relative influence for student academic achievements for each group. By using qualitative
methods, researchers could address whether self-serving bias is present in specific situations such as teacher/parent or teacher/student meetings. Using qualitative methods could provide the attributor with the opportunity to express beliefs that a questionnaire may not represent. This type of measure could provide the researcher the opportunity to question a response and find the underlying reason for the response. It may be that self-serving bias is more evident in education when the outcome directly affects the individual than in general beliefs about student academic outcomes, such as a parent being confronted in a parent/teacher meeting. Therefore, qualitative measures could provide the researcher the opportunity to further question a participant’s response which in turn may lead to finding the underlying reason for the response.

As noted earlier, limited research has been conducted on various groups other than teachers, parents, and students, that may influence student academic outcomes. This study did find mixed support for fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias explaining or aiding in understanding principals’, teachers’, or parents’ attributions of their or the other groups’ influence on student academic outcomes. The results were in part consistent with the possibility that principals, teachers, and parents may have displayed some degrees of fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias. However, due to the primary attribution made to teachers for influence on both positive and negative student academic outcomes and student dispositions/motivations, these models may appear to be unadaptable to the behaviors of those not directly responsible for student academic outcomes. Nevertheless, the inclusion of other groups may prove the model adaptable for all groups influencing student academic outcomes. These models may not be adaptable to the behaviors of those not directly responsible for the outcomes.
Future research could perhaps profitably focus on individual classroom students’ academic outcomes instead of those of the whole school. Educational fundamental attribution error and educational self-serving bias may emerge on an individual basis or in certain aspects of student outcomes rather than broad positive and negative student academic outcomes. In other words, principals, teachers, and parents may take responsibility for specific aspects of positive and negative student academic outcomes and a more fine-grained analysis could prove fruitful.

Limitations

There are several limitations specific to this study that should be acknowledged.

• The study was conducted in Mississippi with an administration that granted permission to conduct the study in their schools. Therefore, the study was restricted from recruiting teachers and parents from all schools in the state. In addition, due to the unique state-wide systems for rating a school only schools within the state of Mississippi were studied. Thus, caution must be taken in generalizing the present findings to other schools and other states.

• The study was conducted during state testing time. Consequently, this may have caused principals, teachers, and parents to decline to participate.

• This study relied entirely on self-reporting by principals, teachers, and parents. Reliance on self-reporting may be problematic and jeopardize the validity of findings. Participants may have been biased when replying. In addition, they may have felt uncomfortable in answering certain questions honestly.

• To control for biased answers, individuals were instructed to fill out only one questionnaire. However, it was beyond the control of the researcher if a teacher
chose to fill out a questionnaire for his or her child. Therefore, teacher participants may have received a questionnaire from their child to fill it in and may have answered twice.

- Due to timing of the results from state tests and permission from the principals, the standardized test measures to determine high- and low-performing schools were from 2016. This time lapse could have provided an opportunity for principals and teachers to have changed schools or subjects taught.

- This study relied on teachers delivering questionnaires to students, who in turn would deliver them to their parent/guardian. For this reason, some parents may have not been given the opportunity to participate.

Some studies have indicated that an attributor will take credit for academic success and place blame externally for academic failure. This study demonstrated that principals, teachers, and parents attribute the primary influence on student academic outcomes to teachers. It would appear from the data that although consistent in part with the operation of fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias because of this overwhelming tendency of all groups to attribute primary influence to teachers, the evidence of such is weak at best.

The following topics can be suggested for future research:

- Future research should attempt to identify attributions of influence on student academic outcomes from all groups instead of focusing on specific ones.

- Qualitative research efforts should focus on collecting data on attributions of administrators, teachers, parents, student, and student peers’ on why certain
groups are influential in student academic outcomes and transform these into themes that could be used in understanding attributions.

- Focus groups should be included to determine whether self-serving is present when influential groups are placed in certain situations concerning student academic outcomes.

Conclusions

This study was conducted to determine principals’, teachers’, and parents’ attributions of relative influence on student academic outcomes and motivation. The second purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which the principles of fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias could explain the attributions of each constituent group.

The overall pattern of results indicated that regardless which group (principals, teachers, and parents) made the attributions of influence on student academic outcomes and motivations/dispositions, teachers were considered to have the most influence overall, with parents being second and principals with the least amount of influence. The concept of fundamental attribution error and self-serving bias was partially supported in the results of this study. The predictions of fundamental attribution error were consistent with the attributions of principals as to the other groups’ and their own group’s influence on student academic outcomes. In addition, parents’ attributions of teachers’ influence on student academic outcomes were consistent with the predictions of fundamental attribution error but not consistent as to parent attributions of principal influence on student academic outcomes. Similarly, the predictions of self-serving bias were partially supported with respect to how a respondent’s school performance level would moderate
the respondent’s attributions for student academic outcomes. The findings suggest that irrespective of school performance level, principals, teachers, and parents attributed influence on student academic outcomes quite similarly. Teachers’ attributions of influence on positive student academic outcomes were in accord with self-serving bias predictions but not supported for attributions of parents’ and principals’ relative influence. For attributions for negative student academic outcomes, however teachers attributed their own group with the most influence as did principals and parents.

As noted above, this study was restricted to an examination of the attributions of principals, teachers, and parents. It is possible that other groups could attribute relative influence differently. Thus, in addition to including principals, teachers, and parents, it is important for future research to include other groups of individuals who influence student academic outcomes, such as students, student peers, and other administrators (e.g., superintendent, school board members). The inclusion of all these groups in one study, may increase understanding concerning how all stakeholder groups that influence student academic achievement view one another’s influence on student achievement and could lead to policy recommendation that, if implemented, would benefit student learning outcomes.
APPENDIX A

Principal Demographics

Directions: For the following, please select the one that best describes you.

1. Gender
   - Male
   - Female

2. Race/Ethnicity
   - American Indian or Alaskan Native
   - Asian American
   - African American
   - Caucasian
   - Hispanic American
   - Multiple Ethnicities
   - Other

3. Highest education level completed
   - Some High School
   - Bachelor Degree
   - High School
   - Master Degree
   - Vocational
   - Specialist Degree
   - Some College
   - Doctorate Degree
   - Community College Degree

4. Length in years employed as a principal, not including time as assistant principal
   - Less than one year
   - 1-2 years
   - 3-4 years
   - More than 6 years
   - 5-6 years

5. Length in years at current school
   - Less than one year
   - 1-2 years
   - 3-4 years
   - More than 6 years
   - 5-6 years
APPENDIX B

Teacher Demographics

Directions: For the following, please select the one that best describes you.

1. Gender
   _____ Male
   _____ Female

2. Race/Ethnicity
   _____ American Indian or Alaskan Native
   _____ Asian American
   _____ African American
   _____ Caucasian
   _____ Hispanic American
   _____ Multiple Ethnicities
   _____ Other

3. Highest education level completed
   _____ Some High School
   _____ Bachelor Degree
   _____ High School
   _____ Master Degree
   _____ Vocational
   _____ Specialist Degree
   _____ Some College
   _____ Doctorate Degree
   _____ Community College Degree

4. Length in years employed as a K-6 grade teacher
   _____ 0
   _____ 1-2 years
   _____ 3-4 years
   _____ 5-6 years
   _____ Less than one year

5. Length in years employed as a 7-8 grade teacher
   _____ 0
   _____ 1-2 years
   _____ 3-4 years
   _____ 5-6 years
   _____ Less than one year

6. Grade currently teaching
   _____ K
   _____ 2nd grade
   _____ 4th grade
   _____ 6th grade
   _____ 1st grade
   _____ 3rd grade
   _____ 5th grade
   _____ 7th grade
   _____ 8th grade

7. Length in years teaching at current grade level
   _____ Less than one year
   _____ 3-4 years
   _____ 5-6 years
   _____ 1-2 years
   _____ 3-4 years
   _____ More than 6 years

94
8. State tested subject currently teaching (Check all that apply)
   _____ English  _____ Math  _____ None
   _____ Reading  _____ Science

9. Length in years teaching this subject
   _____ Less than one year  _____ 3-4 years  _____ more than 6 years
   _____ 1-2 years  _____ 5-6 years

10. Nationally Board Certified
    _____ Yes  _____ NO
APPENDIX C

Parent Demographics

Directions: For the following, please select the one that best describes you. If you receive more than one questionnaire, please complete only one for the child who you choose to return it to school.

1. Gender
   _____ Male
   _____ Female

2. Race/Ethnicity
   _____ American Indian or Alaskan Native
   _____ Asian American
   _____ African American
   _____ Caucasian
   _____ Hispanic American
   _____ Multiple Ethnicities
   _____ Other

3. Highest education level completed
   _____ Some High School
   _____ Bachelor Degree
   _____ High School
   _____ Master Degree
   _____ Vocational
   _____ Specialist Degree
   _____ Some College
   _____ Doctorate Degree
   _____ Community College Degree

4. For the child who was given this questionnaire, please select the grade the child is currently in
   _____ K
   _____ 2nd grade
   _____ 4th grade
   _____ 6th grade
   _____ 8th grade
   _____ 1st grade
   _____ 3rd grade
   _____ 5th grade
   _____ 7th grade

5. If you have other children in K-8 grade, select grade(s) each is currently in
   _____ K
   _____ 2nd grade
   _____ 4th grade
   _____ 6th grade
   _____ 8th grade
   _____ 1st grade
   _____ 3rd grade
   _____ 5th grade
   _____ 7th grade
APPENDIX D

Influence on Student Growth (ISG)

Directions: For each of the following statements, please give the percent to each of the three choices according to your belief of what percent out of 100 that group influences the statement.

SAMPLE STATEMENT:
A student completes a home assignment for a class
For example, you may believe that the principal has the most influence on the statement above (Example A), or you may believe the parent is most influential (Example B), or you may believe the teacher has the most influence with the principal having zero influence and the parent having very little influence (Example C).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>50% a. Principal</th>
<th>40% b. Teacher</th>
<th>10% c. Parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1% a. Principal</th>
<th>14% b. Teacher</th>
<th>85% c. Parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0% a. Principal</th>
<th>98% b. Teacher</th>
<th>2% c. Parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percent should vary depending upon your belief, but the three percentages for each statement must always add to 100%. Always place a percent, even if it is zero (0), in the blank next to each group.

How much influence does each group (principals, teachers, and parents) have on the following statements?

1. A student passes to the next grade
   
   ____% a. Principal
   
   ____% b. Teacher
   
   ____% c. Parent
   
   100%

2. A student does well on a test at school
   
   ____% a. Principal
   
   ____% b. Teacher
   
   ____% c. Parent
   
   100%
3. A student doesn’t perform well in a subject
   _____% a. Principal
   _____% b. Teacher
   _____% c. Parent
   100%

4. A student does better than usual in a subject at school
   _____% a. Principal
   _____% b. Teacher
   _____% c. Parent
   100%

5. A student fails a test
   _____% a. Principal
   _____% b. Teacher
   _____% c. Parent
   100%

6. A student doesn’t pass to the next grade
   _____% a. Principal
   _____% b. Teacher
   _____% c. Parent
   100%

7. A student is academically successful
   _____% a. Principal
   _____% b. Teacher
   _____% c. Parent
   100%
8. A student has made excellent progress throughout the school year
   _____% a. Principal
   _____% b. Teacher
   _____% c. Parent
   100%

9. A student has very low academic achievement
   _____% a. Principal
   _____% b. Teacher
   _____% c. Parent
   100%

10. A student does not learn the required material in a subject
    _____% a. Principal
    _____% b. Teacher
    _____% c. Parent
    100%

11. A student’s academic expectations
    _____% a. Principal
    _____% b. Teacher
    _____% c. Parent
    100%

12. A student learning material
    _____% a. Principal
    _____% b. Teacher
    _____% c. Parent
    100%
13. A student’s work ethic

___% a. Principal
___% b. Teacher
___% c. Parent
100%

14. A student overcoming learning difficulties

___% a. Principal
___% b. Teacher
___% c. Parent
100%

15. A student’s interest in learning

___% a. Principal
___% b. Teacher
___% c. Parent
100%

16. A student organizing concepts

___% a. Principal
___% b. Teacher
___% c. Parent
100%

17. A student being actively involved in learning

___% a. Principal
___% b. Teacher
___% c. Parent
100%
18. A student adequately preparing for class
   
   _____% a. Principal
   _____% b. Teacher
   _____% c. Parent
   100%

19. A student valuing learning a subject
   
   _____% a. Principal
   _____% b. Teacher
   _____% c. Parent
   100%

20. Overall student academic achievement
   
   _____% a. Principal
   _____% b. Teacher
   _____% c. Parent
   100%

21. State Standardized Test Scores
   
   _____% a. Principal
   _____% b. Teacher
   _____% c. Parent
   100%

   Thank you for your participation.

Adapted from:
Responsibility for Student Achievement scale (RSA), Guskey, T. (1981). Used by permission
Teacher Responsibility Scale (TRS), Lauermann, F., & Karabenick, S.A. (2013). Used by permission
APPENDIX E
Principal and Teacher Informed Consent Letter

Dear Fellow Educator:

The purpose of this research is to determine principals’, teachers’, and parents’ perspectives about their own and the other group’s relative influence on student academic outcomes.

The following questionnaire should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. If you choose to participate in this study, your responses will be anonymous, and you will not be identified in any way. If, however, any identifying information is inadvertently obtained during the course of this study, it will remain completely confidential. Participation is voluntary, and you are free to decline or discontinue your participation at any point without concern of penalty, prejudice, or any other negative consequence. By completing the questionnaire, respondents will have the opportunity to consider principals’, teachers’, and parents’ relative influence on student academic growth.

After data from submitted questionnaires are collected, they will be combined and entered into a computer program for analysis. Following data analysis, the survey website will be closed, and any data stored on the survey site will be permanently deleted. Should results from this study be published or presented, the identity of all participants and schools will be protected. There are minimal anticipated risks to the participant. Findings from this study may beneficial to educational administrators, educators, and the community.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact Sonja Rayner using the contact information provided below.

This project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board, which ensured that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the IRB at 601-266-5997. Participation in this project is complete voluntary, and participants may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits.

By completing the online questionnaire, the respondent gives permission for this anonymous and confidential data to be used for the purposes described above. You must be 18 years or older to participate in this study.

Thank you for your consideration and assistance with this project,
Sincerely,
Sonja Rayner
researchgrad17@gmail.com
601-764-8060 or 601-764-2463
P.O. Box 1451
Bay Springs, MS 39422
APPENDIX F

Parent Informed Consent Letter

Dear Parent:

I am currently a graduate student at The University of Southern Mississippi, conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. degree in Education (emphasis: Research, Evaluation, Statistics, and Assessment). I have seven years’ experience as a classroom teacher. The purpose of this research is to determine principals’, teachers’, and parents’ perspectives about their own and the other group’s relative influence on student academic outcomes.

Data for this project will be collected using the questionnaire entitled Influence on Student Growth attached to this cover letter. The questionnaire should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. If you choose to participate in this study, your responses will be anonymous, and you will not be identified in any way. Please do not write your name, your child’s name, or the school name on the questionnaire. After voluntarily completing the questionnaire, please return it in the envelope, sealed, to your child’s teacher. The teacher will place the sealed envelope in a sealed box located in the teacher’s lounge. After two weeks, the researcher will retrieve the sealed boxes. If, however, any identifying information is inadvertently obtained during the course of this study, it will remain completely confidential. Participation is voluntary, and you are free to decline or discontinue your participation at any point without concern of penalty, prejudice, or any other negative consequence. By completing the questionnaire, respondents will have the opportunity to consider principals’, teachers’, and parents’ relative influence on student academic growth.

After data from submitted questionnaires are collected, they will be combined and entered into a computer program for analysis. The questionnaires will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a secure location by the researcher, and only the researcher will have access to the key. Should results from this study be published or presented publically, the identity of all participants and schools will be protected. There are minimal anticipated risks to the participant. Findings from this study may beneficial to educational administrators, educators, and the community. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact Sonja Rayner using the contact information provided below.

This project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board, which ensured that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the IRB at 601-266-5997. Participation in this project is complete voluntary, and participants may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits.

By completing the online questionnaire, the respondent gives permission for this anonymous and confidential data to be used for the purposes described above. You must be 18 years or older to participate in this study. Thank you for your consideration and assistance with this project,

Sincerely,
Sonja Rayner
researchgrad17@gmail.com
601-764-8060 or 601-764-2463
P.O. Box 1451
Bay Springs, MS 39422
Dear Fellow Educator,

My name is Sonja Rayner and I am conducting a study to determine principals’, teachers’, and parents’ attribution of their own and the other groups influence on student achievement measured by standardized tests for my doctoral dissertation at the University of Southern Mississippi. I was a classroom teacher myself for 7 years and appreciate the demands on your time.

I am asking you to please assist me in distributing and retrieving parent questionnaires. Your assistance will include the following:

- Pass out the enclosed parent questionnaire packets to your first period class.
- Ask student to take the packets home for parent completion and for questionnaires to be returned in the provided envelope sealed.
- Place the return envelopes in the sealed box in the teacher’s lounge.

If a questionnaire is returned without the envelope, please fold in half, staple or tape, and place in sealed box provided in teacher’s lounge. In addition, if parents have questions about the questionnaire, please refer them to the number, email address, or address on the bottom of the parent cover letter.

For your assistance in distributing and retrieving parent questionnaires, I have enclosed a $5.00 gift certificate.

Thank you for your assistance.

Kind Regards,
Sonja Rayner
Phone: 601-764-2463
Email- researchgrad17@gmail.com
Address – P.O. Box 1451, Bay Springs, MS 39422
### APPENDIX H

Pattern Matrix for Parents’ Attributions of Principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A student doesn't perform well in a subject - Principal</td>
<td>.886</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student does better than usual in a subject at school - Principal</td>
<td>.791</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student fails a test - Principal</td>
<td>.741</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student does well on a test at school - Principal</td>
<td>.709</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student has very low academic achievement - Principal</td>
<td>.508</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student does not learn the required material in a subject - Principal</td>
<td>.460</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student has made excellent progress throughout the school year - Principal</td>
<td>.425</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student passes to the next grade - Principal</td>
<td>.414</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student is academically successful - Principal</td>
<td>.413</td>
<td>.394</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student doesn't pass to the next grade - Principal</td>
<td>.403</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student valuing learning a subject - Principal</td>
<td>.802</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student adequately preparing for class - Principal</td>
<td>.644</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student being actively involved in learning - Principal</td>
<td>.638</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student organizing concepts - Principal</td>
<td>.531</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student's interest in learning - Principal</td>
<td>.474</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A student's work ethic - Principal</td>
<td>.355</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student overcoming learning difficulties - Principal</td>
<td>.310</td>
<td>.300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student's academic expectations - Principal</td>
<td>.609</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student learning material - Principal</td>
<td>.465</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Loadings less the .3 were suppressed to aid in interpretation
### APPENDIX I

Pattern Matrix for Parents’ Attributions of Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A student has made excellent progress throughout the school year - Teacher</td>
<td>.812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student is academically successful - Teacher</td>
<td>.657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student does well on a test at school - Teacher</td>
<td>.573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student passes to the next grade - Teacher</td>
<td>.560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student does better than usual in a subject at school - Teacher</td>
<td>.533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student's work ethic - Teacher</td>
<td>.722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student valuing learning a subject - Teacher</td>
<td>.650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student adequately preparing for class - Teacher</td>
<td>.585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student overcoming learning difficulties - Teacher</td>
<td>.579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student's interest in learning - Teacher</td>
<td>.536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student being actively involved in learning - Teacher</td>
<td>.464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student organizing concepts - Teacher</td>
<td>.420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student's academic expectations - Teacher</td>
<td>.379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student learning material - Teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student doesn't pass to the next grade - Teacher</td>
<td>.772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student fails a test - Teacher</td>
<td>.722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student doesn't perform well in a subject - Teacher</td>
<td>.661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student has very low academic achievement - Teacher</td>
<td>.513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student does not learn the required material in a subject - Teacher</td>
<td>.471</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Loadings less than .3 were suppressed to aid in interpretation
**APPENDIX J**

Pattern Matrix for Parents’ Attributions of Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A student has made excellent progress throughout the school year</td>
<td>.766</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student is academically successful</td>
<td>.671</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student does better than usual in a subject at school</td>
<td>.628</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student passes to the next grade</td>
<td>.602</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student's academic expectations</td>
<td>.519</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student learning material</td>
<td></td>
<td>.678</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student valuing learning a subject</td>
<td>.674</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student's work ethic</td>
<td>.633</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student adequately preparing for class</td>
<td>.488</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student overcoming learning difficulties</td>
<td>.500</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student organizing concepts</td>
<td>.458</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student being actively involved in learning</td>
<td>.451</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student doesn't pass to the next grade</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.783</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A student fails a test</td>
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<td>-.699</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
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<tr>
<td>A student doesn't perform well in a subject</td>
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<td>-.616</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student has very low academic achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.532</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student does not learn the required material in a subject</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.491</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Loadings less than .3 were suppressed to aid in interpretation
APPENDIX K

– RSA Permission For Use

Gmail

questionnaire permission
2 messages

Sonja Windham <sonjahlw@gmail.com>
To: guskey@uky.edu

Fri, Mar 10, 2017 at 10:40 AM

Dr. Guskey,
I am a student at The University of Southern Mississippi writing my dissertation and would like permission to use your Responsibility for Student Achievement questionnaire. Please read the attached letter and respond if permission is granted or denied.

Kind Regards,
Sonja Windham

Seduct Unlimited
Phone: (502) 764-2463

[Embedded attachment]

Thomas Guskey <guskey@uky.edu>
To: Sonja Windham <sonjahlw@gmail.com>

Tue, Apr 18, 2017 at 2:45 PM

Hi Sonja,

You have my permission to use the scale as described in your letter. All I ask is that you include a complete citation to the original work and notify me of your results when completed.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best wishes,

Tom

Thomas R. Guskey, Professor
College of Education
University of Kentucky
Lexington, KY 40506
APPENDIX L
–TSA Permission For Use

Permission for use of questionnaire

2 messages

Sonja Windham <sonja@gmail.com>
To: farin@usmch.edu

Dr. Lauermann,

I, Sonja Rayman, sent an email requesting permission for use of your questionnaire titled "Teacher Responsibility Scale," and on May 3, 2017 Dr. Kornberick granted me permission via email. Although the email that was sent granting permission from Dr. Kornberick referenced you in the CC section, my school, the University of Southern Mississippi, will also need an email granting me permission to use the questionnaire from you. This questionnaire will include the appropriate citation.

Please respond advising me of your decision.

Kind Regards,
Sonja Windham

farin Uncoated
Phone: (601) 764-2463

Fani Lauermann (Matielskova) <fani.lauermann@gmail.com>
To: Sonja Windham <sonja@gmail.com>
Cc: fani@usmch.edu

Yes, absolutely! Please feel free to use the scale!
Fani Lauermann

Sent from my iPhone
[Date and Time]
Good Morning,

I, Sonja Raymer, sent an email on April 18, 2017 requesting permission to use your questionnaire titled “Teacher Responsibility Scale”. Please respond by email if permission has been granted, denied, or is still being debated.

Kind Regards,
Sonja Windham

Sawdust Unlimited
Phone: (801) 784-2453

Stuart Karabenick <skaraben@umich.edu>
To: Sonja Windham <sonjawe@gmail.com>
Co: fannim@umich.edu

Sonja —
Apologies for not responding earlier. Yes, you have permission to use the Teacher Responsibility Scale, with appropriate citation.

Stuart A. Karabenick
Research Professor
Combined Program in Education & Psychology
Adjunct Professor
Department of Psychology
4037 SEB
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI 48109
(734) 6470911
skaraben@umich.edu

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/%3Au%3D1%3B+6+22%3B+4&ixpr=1&inboxing=4deo%odh%3D1b06014a407088%3Dnm%3D15817603016478%3Dso%3D15817603016478%3Dso%3D1581760301610955%3Dso
APPENDIX N

– IRB Approval Letter

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
110 College Drive #447, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0447
Phone: 601-266-2977 | Fax: 601-266-2927 | www.usm.edu/research/institutional_review_board

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 50, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequately and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Event Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 1803003
PROJECT TITLE: Fundamental Attribution Error Perspectives of Principal, Teacher, and Parent Influence on Student Growth
PROJECT TYPE: Doctoral Dissertation
RESEARCHER(S): Sanja Raymer
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education and Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Administration and Research
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 09/09/2018 to 09/09/2019
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board

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REFERENCES


