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Mississippi Teachers' Perception of Performance Evaluation Feedback and Its Influence on Teaching Practices and Student Outcomes

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MISSISSIPPI TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF PERFORMANCE EVALUATION
FEEDBACK AND ITS INFLUENCE ON TEACHING PRACTICES
AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

by

Joanna Walker Barnes

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 focus of this study was to understand how teachers make sense of instructional feedback from performance evaluation and its effect on their teaching practices and student outcomes. It is essential to understand how teachers make sense of feedback and incorporate it to improve their instructional practices. A qualitative phenomenological design was used to obtain an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions and experiences of evaluation feedback and how it influences their practices and student outcomes. The researcher identified five schools with a performance rating ranging from A to D. An interview protocol was developed and used to guide the individual, semi-structured interviews with K-6 elementary teachers in the Mississippi Pine Belt area with three or more years of classroom experience. The researcher identified five schools with a performance rating ranging from A to D.

The results of this study confirmed six themes from the experiences and perceptions of teachers in the Pine Belt area of Mississippi: (a) quality feedback; (b) self-reflection; (c) instructional coaching; (d) improved practices; (e) collegial support; and (f) professional growth.

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DEDICATION

With God all things are possible, therefore I thank Him for giving me grace and mercy throughout my journey of life. It is because of Him I have an abundant life full of love, joy, and peace.

To my love, best friend, and husband, Willie Barnes, I am grateful for you. Thank you for supporting, encouraging, and lifting me up throughout this journey. You gave yourself in many ways while I accomplished this feat. I am sincerely grateful for your willingness to walk along side with me.

I am grateful for all the teachers who participated in this study. You are dedicated to serving students in the Pine Belt community. Your experiences, educational journey, and professionalism mark you as influential leaders inside the classroom.

To all my colleagues, mentors, family and friends I thank you. As always, Teamwork Makes the Dream Work. To my beloved friend, the late Mrs. Michelle Johnson, I will always keep you in my heart. You reminded me all so often to “Trust in the Lord with all my heart, lean not into my own understanding, but in all my ways acknowledge Him and He will direct my paths.”

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my beloved parents, Robert Walker, Sr. and Maurice Haynes Walker.

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

For decades, teacher evaluations were considered a meaningless and bureaucratic exercise that had a small impact on the growth of teaching (Hull, 2013; Marzano & Toth, 2013). There have been many inconsistencies with the implementation, methods, and design of teacher evaluations dating back as far as the early 1700s. Toch and Rothman (2008) explained traditional evaluation practices “didn’t address the quality of instruction, much less measure students’ learning” (p. 1). However, the substance of teacher evaluations has changed over the years.

School Reform

The push for teacher quality is at the center of school reform because of the quality of teachers matters (Darling-Hammond, 2013). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2009), President Barack Obama stated, "It's time to stop just talking about education reform and start actually doing it. It's time to make education America's national mission" (p. 2). There has been a rise in teacher accountability in school districts across the United States. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 was enacted to reform education by increasing student academic performance and developing and retaining effective teachers in the United States. The ARRA stimulus package provided 4.36 billion dollars in the Race to the Top Fund to support the reform of education by redesigning the conditions of schools to promote student achievement.

The following criteria were outlined in the reform plan:

1. Establish explicit approaches to measuring student growth and measure it for each individual student;

2. Design and implement rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation systems for teachers that differentiate effectiveness using multiple rating categories that consider data on student growth;
3. Conduct annual evaluations of teachers that include timely and constructive feedback and provide teachers with data on student achievement growth for their students, classes, and schools; and
4. Use evaluations to inform decisions; and to develop teachers by including relevant coaching and professional development (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

School Reform Goals

Although all states were not awarded funds from the grant, states benefited by changing laws and policies to ensure success for all students by redesigning teacher evaluation systems. One of the primary goals in the reform plan was to rewrite teacher evaluation policies to measure teacher performances (National Center for Education and Regional Assistance, 2014). As a result, the state of Mississippi has been consistent in its effort to improve teaching practices and instructional growth. The state is currently piloting the Professional Growth System to evaluate teachers' performance. The system was implemented in August 2016 to improve the performance of educators, track educational progress, and identify areas of strengths and weaknesses of teachers. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) gave states autonomy regarding how to implement teacher evaluations (MDE, 2016). As a result, revisions were made to the Mississippi Teacher Evaluation System (MTES) and the Mississippi Statewide Appraisal Rubric (M-STAR). The M-STAR rubric was revised in 2016 to reduce the number of standards and domains

to raise the bar, reduce the lift and support the growth of teachers (MDE, 2016). The three goals of the revision are explained as follows:

- *Raising the Bar:* Designed to make the instrument more effective in helping teachers and administrators identify high-quality instructional practices. The updated rubric includes advanced instructional practices at Level 4, designed to give students ownership of learning.
- *Reducing the Lift:* Designed to include proven teaching practices while reducing overlap. Fewer standards ensure that teachers focus on the practices which matter most to increase student achievement.
- *Supporting the Growth of Teachers:* The rubric and classroom observation cycle are designed to support teacher growth through clear, specific, actionable, and timely feedback. The rubric provides teachers and administrators with a common language to discuss instructional practice (MDE, 2016).

The revised M-STAR rubric is currently the Teacher Growth Rubric which contains four domains and nine standards. The previous M-STAR rubric consisted of five domains with 20 standards. The four domains are lesson design, student understanding, culture and learning environment and professional responsibilities. Currently, the teacher observation cycle consists of three classroom observations per year: two unannounced informal walk-throughs and one announced formal observation (MDE, 2018). The previous teacher observation cycle consisted of five informal observations and two formal observations per school year for each teacher (MDE, 2014).

Background

Teacher evaluations have been a part of the United States school culture since the early 1700s. The evaluations are an essential institutional feature of schools because they are used to provide feedback, improve teaching practice, and to inform systems that support teaching and learning (Maslow & Kelley, 2012). Likewise, Marzano (2011) provided an overview of how evaluation methods have been used in the educational realm over the last century:

Throughout this era, the scientific approach gained strength and acceptance. The next era, lasting from 1960s to early 1970s saw the phenomenon of clinical supervision. The Hunter model was combined with clinical supervision to produce a prescriptive approach to supervision. This era was followed by the RAND study, which provided a realistic look at the actual practice of supervision and evaluation in districts and schools. Then, the mid-1990's saw the introduction of the Danielson model to teacher supervision and evaluation. (p. 10)

The 21st century presented significant modifications to the teacher evaluation system. Evaluations now heavily focus on ways to improve and strengthen teaching practices through self-reflection which Marzano (2011) stated positively affects teaching practices: “The true pedagogical development comes from teacher self-reflection that results in clear goals for improvement” (p. 9). Marzano suggested that student success depends on employing explicit criterion including teacher effectiveness and behavior together with measures of student achievement.

The Purpose of Teacher Evaluation

Several common themes are identified in the literature about teacher evaluation that relate to improving teaching practices: professional growth, student achievement, useful feedback, instructional and organizational leadership, and teachers' perception of teacher evaluation. Per Danielson (2012), there are two purposes for teacher evaluations: ensuring teacher quality and promoting professional development that are determining factors of student achievement (Danielson, 2012; Marzano, 2011).

Professional Growth and Development

Maslow and Kelley (2012) conducted case studies of four evaluation practices used in high schools. In their study, teachers reported that their learning is individualized and teachers seek feedback for development. Some teachers in one high school reported feedback was not provided in order to improve teaching and learning. Instead, teacher evaluation involved teachers reflecting on their teaching practices. Teachers in another high school stated that were teachers in the school capable of conducting professional development for other teachers. Resultantly, it is concluded that teachers in this study used results from performance evaluation to identify areas of improvement sought professional development in these areas. (Maslow & Kelley, 2012).

Similar to Maslow and Kelley (2012), Donaldson (2012) presented findings based on teachers' interpretations of evaluation reform and the extent to which they report using observational feedback to change their teaching: "Very few of the teachers interviewed reported that the evaluation program had affected their instruction concerning changing pedagogical strategies. Many on the other hand, identified the primary impact of the

evaluations was increasing teacher self-assessment and productivity" (Donaldson, 2012, p. 27).

Student Achievement

Sharp (2010) conducted a qualitative study on pre-service teachers on pedagogical thought processes and self-perceptions after conducting several evaluations and classroom observations. The findings in this study indicated that teachers were responsible for their student achievement data regardless of prior knowledge, cognitive development, and other factors that may infringe on student outcomes. Each teacher used observation feedback to change the way they planned instruction for their students. As a result, they noticed significant progress in their student achievement data generated from formative and summative assessments. In another study, Donaldson (2012) found that teachers' perception of evaluations to improve student outcomes are as follows:

The teacher-evaluation program had changed how they approached instruction. Generally, the program seems to make student achievement as embedded in teacher goals more central to their thinking. Resultantly, they report aligning their planning more closely to their evaluation program goals, altering the pacing of instruction to ensure students can hit the achievement targets. (p. 27)

A common idea in the findings of these studies suggested that student achievement and learning improve as a result of teachers increasing their focus on "what" and "how" they are teaching through self-reflective practices and feedback from evaluators. Although most teachers' perceptions concerning the teacher evaluation system and instructional feedback are somewhat favorable, there are concerns with evaluation systems. A few concerns from the Maslow and Kelley study (2012) are that teachers

reported feedback was not provided from administrators to improve their teaching practices. Besides, teachers rarely collaborated to improve teaching and learning. However, teachers were reflective about their processes of teaching. This study found that teachers were not satisfied with the frequency of observations and formative evaluations.

Statement of the Problem

Teacher evaluation systems measure teacher efficacy based on teaching performance and student academic performance. Evaluation results are used to provide feedback to teachers, individualized professional development, and to inform individual schools and districts of instructional areas of improvement. Although many evaluation systems provide focused and meaningful instructional and professional feedback, some teachers argue that the feedback and scores do not play a part in their professional growth and student academic performance (Smylie, 2005). Furthermore, some argue that it is unfair and unbalanced to evaluate entry-level teachers and experienced teachers using the same evaluation tool (Danielson, 2001).

Theoretical Framework

This study will draw from the systems thinking theory (Fairchild, 2015). The education system is a multi-faceted system comprised of several factors, including administrators, students, teacher, stakeholders, course, curriculum, and funding (Despres, 2004). In light of high-stake testing and changes in school accountability measures, there has been a call for a systemic change to develop coherence and sustainability to better support student learning (Betts, 1992; Despres, 2004; Pardeya & Dhunpath, 2018). Although schools are structured as systems, the underlying issue is that most leaders fail

to integrate solution ideas and employ critical and creative thinking for problem-solving and making decisions (Betts, 1992). The systems thinking framework provides a systematizing means to developing a deeper understanding of how structures are organized, the interdependence of structures, the ensuing dynamics of the structures, and how they are held together (Fairchild, 2015).

Systems thinking was developed on the premise of five disciplines of learning organizations to determine patterns of change rather than seeing snapshots.:

1. Systems thinking: organization is viewed as a corporeal entity that enables or inhibits organizational success;
2. Personal mastery: individuals are motivated to create conditions which generate successful outcomes;
3. Mental models: require leaders to disrupt routines of practice to envision new possibilities for success;
4. Shared vision: individuals embrace the vision of collaboration, rather than aspire to pursue individual interests; and
5. Team learning: which requires consistent interrogation of practices, critical dialogues aimed at enhancing successful practices (Pardeya & Dhunpath, 2018; Senge, 1990).

It is vital for leaders as change agents to move away from traditional modes of thinking, have a clear grasp of the organization's function, and engage in open dialogue with a team to develop and implement a plan that pursues the vision (Senge, 1990).

Lannon (2018) stated that the system thinking approach could revitalize schools by changing the structure to one of an organization. He suggested that the education system

can transform from a dictatorial system to one that has a more participative organization style placing more emphasis on learning than instruction.

While Senge (1990) and Lannon (2018) supported that the systems thinking model promote quality and coherence in education, Depres (2004) asserted it would be complicated to apply systematic thinking in education systems because it is composed of sets of elements that continually change. However, Bethany (1991) argued that many education systems have little success with the systems thinking model because administrators rarely think outside of the box. They instead stay within the boundaries of the current systems and address the issues within the system using a “piecemeal” approach. The systems thinking theory will be used as frameworks to explain how systems in education and professional development influence teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. The researcher will use this theory to create the interview protocol and to identify common themes during data analysis.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore teachers’ perceptions of professional evaluation systems and how they influence their professional growth and teaching practices. Purposely, the researcher sought to understand how teachers' receptiveness to evaluation feedback improves not only their teaching practices but also their student academic outcomes.

This study presented an analysis of interviews with K-6 elementary teachers in the Mississippi Pine Belt area with three or more years of classroom experience. This study described how teachers perceive instructional feedback and its effect on their teaching practices and student achievement. It is essential to understand how teachers make sense

of feedback and incorporate it to improve their instructional practices.

Research Questions

This research study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers concerning teacher evaluation feedback and its effect on their professional growth?
2. What role do self-reflecting play in influencing teaching practices and student achievement?
3. How does professional development influence teaching practices and student achievement?

Assumptions

The assumptions of this study were:

1. The participants will reply freely and honestly.
2. The participants will reflect and elaborate on their perceptions.
3. Each interview will be conducted under the best conditions.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used within the study and the context of the literature.

Feedback: is accurate insight from the observer that focuses on the practice that teachers should carry out in their classroom. Feedback also include suggestions that can be implemented in future lessons (Mississippi Department of Education, 2017).

Formal Classroom Observation: an observation conducted by a trained observer who observes teaching practices, components of instruction, and student-teacher interaction using a rubric (Mississippi Department of Education, 2017).

Informal Walk-Through Observation: provide a quick evaluation of teacher performance to best inform teaching practices and formal observations (Mississippi Department of Education, 2017).

Instructional Leaders: school principals who set clear goals, allocate instructional resources, manages the curriculum, monitor classroom instruction, and evaluate teachers (Jenkins, 2009).

Multiple Measures: the use of multiple evaluation instruments to assess teachers' performance (Mississippi Department of Education, 2017).

Post-Observation Conference: a formal conference between the observer and teacher after either a formal or informal observation to provide and discuss instructional feedback (Mississippi Department of Education, 2017).

Pre-Observation Conference: an informal conference between a teacher and an observer before formal classroom observation to provide the observer with information relating to the lesson (Mississippi Department of Education, 2017).

Professional Growth: involves an acquisition of new learning to transform the knowledge into the development and growth of individuals (Duke, 1993).

Professional Growth System: an evaluation system designed to provide teachers and administrators with feedback to inform classroom instruction employing teacher reflection, student performance, and instructional practices (Mississippi Department of Education, 2017).

Standards: are domain-specific skills relating to teaching activities and responsibilities (Mississippi Department of Education, 2017).

Summary

This chapter proposed a qualitative research study that sought to understand teachers' perceptions of instructional feedback and its influence on their teaching practices and student achievement. In this chapter, the researcher also presented a historical overview of evaluation methods, described the purpose of the study, and provided the research questions that will be used to address the problem being investigated. Lastly, the researcher also imparted information about theoretical frameworks that was used to examine the problem under study. Chapter two will review current and relevant literature regarding the issues of teacher evaluation as related to professional growth and student outcomes.

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

This qualitative, phenomenological design study explored teachers' perceptions of professional evaluation systems and how the feedback influences teaching practices and student outcomes. In this chapter, the researcher provides a review of literature that addresses the research questions: (1) What are the perceptions of teachers concerning teacher evaluation feedback and its effect on their professional growth? (2) What role does self-reflecting play in influencing teaching practices and student achievement? (3) How does professional development influence teaching practices and student achievement? This study seeks to understand how teachers' receptiveness to evaluation feedback improves not only their teaching practices but also their student academic outcomes. The researcher will explore the following elements to better understand the phenomenon: teacher evaluation systems, teachers' perceptions of evaluation and feedback, and the relationship between teacher performance and student learning.

Historical Perspective

Teacher evaluation systems have historically been a part of school culture throughout the United States (Marzano, 2001). The first teacher evaluation system was developed in the early 1700s during the rise of the schooling movement to provide instructional feedback and strengthen teachers' development (Marzano, 2001). During this time, there was a dire need for a teacher evaluation system being that there was no formal training for teachers or a set criterion for hiring and firing teachers. Government officials had unlimited power to establish criteria with their discretion, which proved to be not only biased but also ineffective (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011). Moreover, the quality of the teacher evaluations and feedback provided by government

officials and appointed clergymen varied greatly. As, an evaluation system was developed to provide quality and consistent feedback on pedagogical skills related to teacher development: "awareness characterized this period that pedagogical skills are a necessary component of effective teaching, which was the first step in the journey to a comprehensive approach to developing teacher expertise" (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011, p. 2).

Educational Eras

Several educational models and evaluation methods emerged following the schooling movement. One was John Dewey's point of view of human progress based on democracy. Dewey maintained that schools should be student-centered and organized so that students become citizens and develop ideas of a democratic system (Dewey, 1981). Alternatively, during the late 1800s and early 1900s, Fredrick Taylor believed various methods of training should be used as means to educate students and improve production (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011). Taylor's theory was based on the premises that factory workers were successful in performing tasks using certain behaviors and various methods for performance. He advocated that school should be learning factories where students build their capacity and skill sets (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011). Both Dewey's and Taylor's scientific views influenced the management of schools with a focus on measurement of teacher behaviors using student academic performance.

Cubberly (1929) expounded upon the views of Dewey and Taylor. He incorporated Dewey's and Taylor's theories in his textbook, *Public School Administration*, developed for school administrators to evaluate teachers and the school using the scientific method. Later, William Wetzel, an educator and school administrator,

recommended that student learning should also be measured to determine teacher effectiveness, as well as the school. Wetzel added three data components for scientific supervision: aptitude tests to acknowledge student's cognitive level, measurable course objectives, and measures of student outcomes to determine teacher effectiveness (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011).

The Era of Clinical Supervision

After World War I, education became a more complicated enterprise with its primary focus changing to clinical supervision (Anderson & Synder, 1993). Clinical supervision is the "analysis of data and relationship between teacher and supervisor based on program, procedures, and strategies designed to improve the students' learning by improving the teacher's classroom behavior" (Cogan, 1973, p. 9). A primary focus was placed on supervision because it was expected to change teacher classroom behavior to improve student learning by merging objectives and scientific classroom observation with college instruction that focused on student learning (Reavis, 1978; State University, 2015).

Clinical supervision improved evaluation systems in that teachers were challenged to reflect on their practices by using the evaluator's feedback together with student learning outcome data (Anderson & Synder, 1993). While clinical supervision provided the information, teachers needed to grow their pedagogical practices, it was a challenging process to carry out because many supervisors of instruction possessed little knowledge regarding how to help teachers improve their teaching techniques (Anderson & Synder, 1993).

Since then researchers have worked to refine clinical supervision so that it is more practical and meets the needs of educators (Goldhammer,1969; Hunter & Reavis, 1978). Goldhammer (1969) developed a model for clinical supervision to be used in a college setting. Goldhammer's model involved frequent observations and discussion between the supervising instructor and teacher to help both achieve higher levels of growth and effectiveness.

Madeline Hunter

Madeline Hunter's research also focused on clinical supervision. She developed a seven-step model for teaching to articulate a universal language of instruction: anticipatory set, objective and purpose, input, modeling, checking for understanding, guided practice, and independent practice (Marzano, 2011). Hunter's model also integrated the use of script taping during the supervision process, which entailed the evaluator recording teaching strategies and later categorized them according to those that "promoted learning" or "interfered with learning" (as cited in Marzano, 2011, p. 6). Hunter's seven steps of teaching were also used as the content of the pre- and post-conferences, which was different from Goldhammer's model being that the evaluator and teacher worked together during the pre-conference to create a plan to use during observation. During the pre- and post- conferences, teachers describe their lessons using Hunter's steps, while supervisors determined the teacher's effectiveness based on the alignment of the lesson to Hunter's steps. Hunter's model provided building administrators criteria checklist to mark to indicate that the seven- steps were implemented in the classroom (Kersten & Israel, 2010).

Reflective Era

The 1980s is known as the reflective era in education because it was the start of teachers' career goals being incorporated in the evaluation process. In his book, *Differentiated Supervision*, William Glatthorn (1984) explained that teacher development should be the responsibility of the teacher, not the administrator. This differentiated approach allowed teachers to grow in the teaching profession based on their goals along with the prescriptive professional development goals provided by supervisors.

Similarly, Glickman, Gordon, and Gordon (1998) also contributed to this differentiated approach to professional growth. Glickman et al. (1998) explained a methodical approach to supervising teachers was necessary to plan for organizational goals and teachers' individual needs for growth. They suggested that supervisors employ the following steps to promote development: direct assistance, group development, curriculum development, and action research. Glickman et al. (1998) also stated teachers grow when they are supported in an environment where they are challenged. As a result, supervisors can set goals for the organization and address teacher needs to improve instruction and student outcomes.

The era of reflection was the foundation of teacher evaluation. The reflection component was incorporated into the works of Glatthorn (1984) and later became a part of the Danielson Model, a teacher evaluation model created in 1996 (Marzano, 2011). There was a shift from using a checklist for evaluating teachers based in a model that captured a more conceptual, performance-based teacher evaluation with the start of the 21st Century. Furthermore, learning became more complex by employing philosophies from research such as backward design, teaching for understanding, authentic pedagogy,

and inquiry learning (Kersten & Israel, 2005). This shift in teaching and learning required a greater understanding of academic and teaching performance using multiple measurements (Kersten & Israel, 2005).

Today, nearly 300 years later after the first teacher evaluation system was developed, teacher evaluation remains an essential institutional function of schools. They are used to evaluate schools' accountability and the effectiveness of teacher performance based on teaching practices and student learning. Maslow and Kelley (2012) stated evaluations provide meaningful instructional feedback and data to improve teaching practices and inform organization systems supporting teaching and student learning.

Purpose of Teacher Evaluation

Teachers matter. Many factors contribute to student learning including background, individual qualities, and family; however, among-school related factors, teachers matter most. Teachers have a direct influence on student learning and achievement, which is why it is crucial to evaluate their performance, instructional and professional. Stronge and Tucker (2003) argued that it is necessary to view teacher evaluation in high regards considering that no reform can succeed without competent, highly qualified teachers. There were similar findings in the work of Danielson and McGreal (2000) which suggested that the primary purposes of teacher evaluations are accountability and professional development.

Respectively, Marzano (2012) added that teachers' development and accountability should be measured separately because they have two different purposes and implications. While teacher evaluation systems can serve different purposes, the sole purpose of evaluations is providing feedback and guidance for improving professional

practice. The performance feedback that school administrators and teachers receive from observations may improve educators' personal growth by helping teachers to learn about, reflect on, and improve teaching practices.

Promote Professional Growth

The primary goal for improving teaching is to improve learning, the premise for teacher evaluation systems. Six defined components are included in evaluations for professional development:

- High-quality standards for instruction
- Multiple standards-based measures of teacher effectiveness
- High-quality training on standards, tools, and measures
- Trained individuals to interpret results and make professional development recommendations
- High-quality professional growth opportunities for individuals and groups of teachers
- High-quality standards for professional learning. (Goe, Biggers, & Croft, 2012, p. 2)

The evaluation components represent a comprehensive aligned system to promote professional growth. It is essential for instructional standards to be built upon effective teaching practices and exemplary practices to further teacher development (Goe, Biggers & Croft, 2012). To explain, Marzano (2012) posed three characteristics of teacher evaluation systems that promote professional growth. The first characteristic is a comprehensive and specific system. A comprehensive, specific system includes research-based elements and strategies associated with student achievement. The second

characteristic relates to development and involves using a rubric that teachers can use to monitor their skill development and developmental levels. Lastly, the third characteristic involves acknowledging and rewarding teacher growth (Marzano, 2012). Evaluation systems should be comprehensive, have specific and measurable goals, and include an approach for recognizing teacher growth.

Accountability

Duke and Stiggins (1986) defined accountability as "the extent to which teachers have achieved a minimum acceptable level of competence and prescribed areas or performance standards" (p. 43). Maintaining accountability is a challenge that many schools throughout the United States face, especially considering that for decades teachers' evaluation scores have ranked high while students' performances remained low (Mississippi Department of Education, 2013). As a result, teacher quality and development has been a focus in school districts across America.

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* released by National Commission on Excellence in Education concentrated on issues concerning academic courses and lengthening the school year (Danielson, 2001, p. 1). In the 1990s, the focus shifted to students' academic challenges and assessments. Then beginning in 1996, the focus quickly accelerated to the concept of teacher quality (Danielson, 2001), which shifted educational policymakers' attention to developing an evaluation system that would merge professional development with quality assurance (Danielson, 2001). Since then, many systems have emerged with differentiated approaches, but with the same purpose, to "cultivate and develop good teaching" (Danielson, 2001, p. 14).

Understanding the Evaluation Process

There are two categories of teacher evaluations, formative and summative.

Formative and summative evaluations have two different functions in the evaluation process. Formative evaluations are used for the development of teachers while summative evaluations are used to make decisions such as determining if teachers should be placed on an improvement plan or dismissing the teacher altogether (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Danielson and McGreal (2012) provided a comparison of both, formative and summative evaluations:

Formative Evaluations:

- Provide constructive feedback
- Recognize and reinforce outstanding practice
- Provide direction for staff development
- Unify teachers and administrators around improved student learning

Summative Evaluations:

- Screen out unsuitable candidates
- Dismiss incompetent teachers
- Provide legally defensible evidence. (p. 8)

Although formative and summative assessments serve different purposes in the overall evaluation process, the data collected from both assessments are used to provide a comprehensive analysis of teachers' professional growth, which is supported by The National Education Association (2017). The National Education Association (2017) advocated that professional growth and measurement of teacher quality should be "complementary and integrally-related parts of the same process" (p. 7).

Teacher Evaluation Systems

Teacher evaluations are a part of every school district. Policymakers, parents, and the community expect quality teachers in every classroom. Thus, administrators need a clearly defined frame or guide for teaching to evaluate teacher effectiveness in classrooms. A national teacher evaluation system does not exist; however, Danielson's Framework for Teaching Evaluation Model is widely used for teacher evaluations. It is based upon research and designed to promote improved learning for students. It focuses on teacher responsibilities and effective teaching practices: "what teachers should know and be able to do in the exercise of their profession" (p.1) to improve student learning outcomes. Danielson used four domains to describe these responsibilities of teachers in the evaluation model: planning, learning environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities (Danielson, 2007). Likewise, the four domains have been and are current components of teacher evaluation systems used in Mississippi schools over the last decade.

Prior to 2010, many school districts throughout the State of Mississippi had leeway to select evaluation tools and carryout the teacher evaluation process at their own discretion (MDE, 2012). However, this was not true for all schools. Schools that were classified as "school of improvement" were mandated by the Mississippi State Board of Education to use Mississippi's teacher evaluation system to measure teacher effective and student achievement (MDE, 2012). "Therefore, revising and streamlining the existing instrument, identifying a student growth measure, and garnering support for a statewide system was a challenge" (MDE, 2012, p.525).

Mississippi Teacher Evaluation Systems

The Statewide Teacher Evaluation Council (STEC) which included educators, teacher union representatives, community members, curriculum program coordinators, the superintendents' organization, and the Governor's Office joined forces to developed guiding principles for a statewide teacher evaluation system to:

1. Drive growth in student achievement in the classroom, department, school, and district levels.
2. Focus on effective teaching and learning based on national and state standards that target high expectations and meet the diverse needs of every learner.
3. Use multiple rating tools to assess levels of productivity, including measures of teamwork and collaboration, student assessment data including student growth, school and classroom climate, and leadership.
4. Include comprehensive training on evaluation system components that provide fair, transparent scoring mechanisms and produce inter-rater reliability.
5. Promote and guide individual and collaborative professional learning and growth based on educator content knowledge and the use of research established best practices and technology.
6. Provide appropriate data to differentiate compensation in a fair and equitable manner.
7. Differentiate the evaluation process based on the educator's expertise and student assessment results.
8. Provide appropriate and timely feedback at multiple levels to detect individual and systemic strengths and weaknesses. (MDE, 2012, p.312)

The evaluation systems included multiple measurements to assess the effectiveness of teacher performance such as value-added, classroom observations, student work habits, achievement gap reduction, collaboration with peers, individual support for students, peer evaluations and artifacts as evidence to meet goals (MDE, 2012). The council added multiple measurements of teacher performance on the basis that student outcomes increase when they receive high-quality teaching from a competent teacher (MDE, 2012).

M-STAR Rubric

In the spring of 2011 with the collaboration of the American Institutes for Research (AIR), a draft of the Mississippi Statewide Teacher Appraisal Rubric (M-STAR) was developed to include twenty standards with five domains: Planning, Assessment, Instruction, Learning Environment and Professional Responsibilities. The Danielson Framework and National Board of Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards were used as resources to guide the development of descriptions for the performance level standards. There were four performance levels developed as a result: Distinguished, Effective, Emerging, and Unsatisfactory (MDE, 2012). The M-STAR process was designed to improve the performance of educators, track educational progress, and identify areas of need. According to the Mississippi Department of Education (2012), the purpose of the Mississippi teacher performance evaluation process will:

- Provide formative assessment information about the performance of individual teachers to highlight areas of strength and identify areas for growth.
- Serve as a guide for teachers as they reflect upon their practices.

- Provide shared understanding regarding priorities, goals, and expectations of quality practice.
- Serve as a tool to help structure instructional leadership and feedback (p. 1).

The Mississippi Department of Education (2012) outlined the evaluation cycle for M-STAR observation process which included multiple measures of evaluation to evaluate teachers on performance standards and to determine each teacher's areas of strength and growth. This process consisted of the following methods:

1. *Formal classroom observations:* There will be a minimum of two formal observations per school year. Formal observations will be announced and scheduled in advance with the teacher. The first formal observation should be completed during the first half of the school year; the second should be completed during the second half of the school year. At least one observation will be performed by an administrator. The second observation will be performed by either an administrator or another trained evaluator. All formal observations will include a pre-observation conference and a post- observation conference.
2. *Pre-Observation Conference:* The pre-observation conference should happen within one to two days prior to the observation. This conference provides the opportunity for the teacher to describe the context and plans for the class session and to provide initial artifacts.
3. *Post-Observation Conference:* The post-observation conference should happen as soon after the observation as possible and no later than one week after the observation. This conference provides the opportunity for the

evaluator to provide feedback, discuss areas for improvement, and create a professional development plan.

4. *Informal “Walkthrough” Observations:* There will be a minimum of five informal observations during the school year. Informal observations will be unannounced, and each observation will last 5 to 15 minutes. Informal observations will be used as a means to inform instructional leadership functions of the school administrator by providing quick checks of teacher performance and feedback on that performance.
5. *Review of artifacts:* Artifacts should include existing materials only; teachers should not create artifacts solely for the purpose of the artifact review. Lesson plans are required for the artifact review. Teachers must submit their lesson plan to their evaluator at least 24 hours prior to the pre-observation conference.
6. *Teacher self-assessment:* Teachers will use the M-STAR rubric for self-assessment. Teacher self-assessment will be discussed during the summative evaluation conference.
7. *Student survey:* The student survey will be given once during the school year.
(MDE, 2012, pp. 1-2)

Implementation Timeline of M-STAR

In September 2011, a panel of professional experts was organized to partake in the validation process for the performance standards, rubric and evaluation procedures to ensure that they accurately measured teacher behaviors. Prior to being field tested, feedback was elicited from more than 2000 teachers, school administrators, professional

association members, college professors, and other stakeholders to ensure that feedback was included as part of the development and implementation of M-STAR.

During the 2013-2014 school year, M-STAR and schoolwide growth were field tested. Teachers in the state-tested areas were rated based on the following criteria: 50% M-STAR rubric score, 30% individual growth, and 20% school-wide growth. The ratings were different for non-state tested teachers. They were rated using the following criteria: 50% M-STAR rubric score and 50% school-wide growth. In 2014-2015, MTES was fully implemented throughout school districts and schools in Mississippi. Updates were made before full implementation. Teachers in the state-tested areas performance criteria changed to the following: 30% M-STAR rubric score, 20% professional growth goals (PGGs), 30% individual growth goals and 20% school-wide goals. Non-state tested teacher's overall performance score was based on the following changes: 30% M-STAR, 20% professional growth goals (PGGs), 30% student learning objectives (SLOs) and 20% school-wide.

Later, process manuals were updated in June 2014 after MDE received feedback from educators. MDE modified forms to correlate with changes to the M-STAR rubric to move PGGs to Domain 5 of the rubric. PGGs measures how a teacher implements professional development and was approved to count as 20% of teacher's evaluation during the 2015-2016 school year. This requirement was removed because PGGs were already part of M-STAR as domain 5, standard 17. Other updates were also included during this year. The number of walk-through (informal) observations were reduced to a minimum of two instead of the required five per school year. It was recommended that two formal observations be conducted, but one was required by the state. A pre-

observation conference was recommended for formal observations but not required. In addition, the length of time required for formal observations were reduced from bell-to-bell or length of a lesson to no less than 30 minutes. The M-STAR rubric was revised in 2016 to reduce the number of standards and domains to raise the bar, reduce the lift and support the growth of teachers (MDE, 2016).

Professional Growth Rubric

As part of Mississippi Board of Education 5-Year Strategic Plan 2016-2020, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) outlined goals for the state of Mississippi which included student achievement and teacher effectiveness, which led to the development of the Professional Growth System (PGS) (MDE, 2016). The PGS was designed to support all teachers in strengthening practice through the classroom observation cycle, specific and actionable feedback to adjust teaching practice, and follow-up to encourage the growth of teachers. The evaluation cycle for the PGS observation process includes multiple evaluation measures to assess teacher performance and determine areas of strengths and improvements (MDE, 2018). The PGS process for evaluating teachers includes:

1. *Walk-through (informal) Observations:* These visits should be used by the evaluator to provide quick checks of teacher performance to provide feedback on a specific lesson. The walk-through observations occur throughout the school year unannounced. A minimum of two walk-through visits is still recommended. More frequent informal observations may be needed to strengthen a teacher's practice. Beyond the required two, the frequency and length of time of the walk-through

observations are at the discretion of the school district. Observers should use the rubric to identify potential areas of feedback.

2. *Formal Observations and Conferences:* Formal observations should be announced and scheduled in advance with the teacher. Each teacher should receive a minimum of one formal observation per school year. Beyond the required one, the frequency and length of the formal observations are at the discretion of the school district.
3. *Pre-observation conference:* The pre-observation conference provides the opportunity for the teacher to describe the context and plans for the lesson before a formal classroom observation and discuss goals related to teaching practice. A pre-observation conference is recommended, but not required.
4. *Feedback Conversations:* A feedback conversation should take place after each school site observation. High-quality feedback helps teachers improve by identifying strengths and areas of improvements (changes to their practice that should be prioritized). To be effective, feedback after a classroom observation should focus on foundational practices, be clear and observable, and bite-sized to be implemented immediately. High-quality feedback after each observation is recommended.
5. *Summative Observation Conference* – The end-of-year meeting between teacher and observer. The purpose of this collaborative conversation is to review feedback and summative ratings from observations of practice and to identify successes, areas of growth, and the next steps toward the teacher's continued professional growth. It is also an opportunity to reflect on available student data that may

inform ways to improve teaching practice and student outcomes. (MDE, 2018, pp. 8-9)

6. *Observation and Feedback Process*: This is a four-step process for collecting evidence to support feedback conversations. These steps should be followed when observing teaching to provide observers with a transparent process for high-quality feedback.
 - Collect: An observer looks for and records relevant evidence from a lesson.
 - Sort: The observer organizes the evidence by standards.
 - Interpret: The observer determines performance levels by aligning the evidence to the rubric's indicators.
 - Provide Feedback: The observer uses evidence in discussion with the teacher on how to improve practice. (MDE, 2018, p. 7)

The PGS is a comprehensive evaluation system that examines teacher quality and effectiveness using data collected from multiple observations and through a different lens. While this evaluation system does not include a component that differentiates between novice and tenured teachers, it does provide personalized and strategic feedback.

Aligning Teacher Evaluation to Student Outcomes

Student achievement is the premise of the educational system. Well-prepared teachers have more significant influence on student achievement than students' cultural background, poverty, and minority status (Darling-Hammond, 2000). However, current teacher evaluation systems fail at linking teacher effectiveness and student achievement. McConney, Shalock, and Schalock (1997) believed that the primary purpose of attending

school is for each child to gain the knowledge and skills needed to become an adult. This view is supported by Peterson (2000) who argues that student learning and academic growth is the key measure of teacher effectiveness. Although teacher effectiveness has a significant role in student success, there is literature that suggested that it is difficult to tie student growth to one teacher because other factors, namely student motivation, parental support, demographics, and school facilities also contribute to student learning outcomes (Doyle & Han, 2012; Peterson, 2000).

The number of schools that consider student achievement as a part of the teacher evaluation system has increased over the last decade. In 2007, 16 states had included student achievement as a factor in teacher evaluations, and by 2015, that number increased 43. States have begun to link student achievement to teacher evaluation as a response to low student scores because there is evidence that shows that while teachers' ratings are higher on teacher evaluations, their students are not performing at proficiency (Gilles, 2015). Furthermore, Stumbo and McWalters (2011) argued that the revision of teacher evaluation systems is a must on the basis that teacher effectiveness should not solely be measured on how good teachers know and communicate content but rather on the degree to which teachers increase student achievement.

As a result of the misalignment of teacher performance and student success, the US Department of Education (2009) asked states to design teacher evaluation systems that distinguished teacher effectiveness using multiple measures for student growth as a major factor. According to the U.S Department of Education (2009), the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 was signed by President Obama as a

way to jumpstart the economy. During this time, ARRA provided funds for the Race to the Top Fund, which awarded states that adhered to the following:

1. Creating conditions for innovation and reforms
2. Achieving significant improvement in student outcomes
3. Including making substantial gains in student achievement
4. Closing achievement gaps
5. Improving high school graduation rates
6. Ensuring student preparation success in college and careers
7. Implementing plans in four core education reform areas:
 - a. Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to compete in a global economy
 - b. Building data systems that measure student growth
 - c. Recruiting, developing, rewarding and retaining effective teachers and principals
 - d. Turning around our lowest-achieving schools (U.S. Department of Education 2009, p. 2)

As a result of the *Race to the Top Initiative*, the Race to the Top Grant (RTTT) was created to provide funding to help states make necessary changes to teacher evaluation systems relating to incorporating student outcomes as a part of teacher performance. States who applied for the RTTT grant had to establish clear methodologies to measure student achievement and growth (Gilles, 2015). Resultantly, the shift of teacher effectiveness focused on student outcomes rather than teachers' content knowledge. One problem with this approach is including student scores in teacher

evaluation have not yielded large returns in terms of increasing student achievement (Alexander, Jang, & Kankane, 2017).

Multiple Measures of Teacher Performance

Research revealed that student assessment data does not provide enough substantial evidence to determine teacher effectiveness. According to Marshall (2012), using student data to evaluate teacher effectiveness is problematic being that the purpose of student assessments is to measure student learning, not teacher performance. Marshall's (2012) argument is supported by Doyle and Han (2012), who claimed that multiple measures must be considered to evaluate performance because no single measure is perfect. Policymakers have debated about which performance measures to include in teacher evaluations, including student assessment data to assess teacher performance. One model considered is the Value-Added Models (VAM). The VAM considers student growth percentiles (SGPs) and prior performance to determine growth (Steinburg & Kraft, 2017).

There are other methods for calculating growth without comparison data that focus on students' progress towards growth goals as set using a pre-test and post-test and mastery of standards. In addition to using student performance data to measure teacher effectiveness, rubric-based observations ratings of classroom practice and student surveys are used in capturing teacher performance (Steinberg & Donaldson, 2016).

Value-Added Model

Results-based accountability systems have emerged as a result of concerns with traditional evaluation systems (Murphy, 2012). Among the results-based accountability systems is the Value-Added Model (VAM). VAM is based on the number of skills a

student learns in one school year as determined by end of the year state assessments. VAM models determine cohort growth from year to year on assessments of student data (Darling-Hammond, Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothsten, 2012). According to Danielson and McGreal (2000), students' cultural background, academic and behavior challenges, and attendance are variables that should be taken into account because they influence student outcomes. Therefore, VAM used by itself would create a "disincentive" for teachers because of students' backgrounds (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 43). Furthermore, research conducted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2012) indicated that VAM scores are not steady due to variables that have an effect on student outcomes. Among these variables include student demographics, previous education, economic status, and other student factors that has an influence on how students perform.

Contrary to the findings of research conducted by Danielson and McGreal (2000), other literature suggested that there are problems with measuring teacher effectiveness using VAM because the ratings change from year to year and from class to class (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012). In addition, VAM scores differ when different test are used to measure student growth, which raises concerns about the possibility of measurement error when tying teacher performance to student assessment scores, as well as concerns about the possibility of teachers teaching to the test rather than providing students with differentiated, relevant learning experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012).

Using assessment scores to determine teacher effectiveness introduces bias because at-risk students are typically are not randomly assigned to teachers and may be assigned to teachers in disproportionate numbers: "Randomly assigning students to

teachers for measuring teacher effectiveness is rarely feasible or ethical” (Murphey, 2012, p. 7). These challenges have a significant effect on the validity of the VAM scores because factors such as poverty, attendance, parental involvement, and homelessness have detrimental effects on teacher scores much like student scores (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012).

Student Learning Objectives

Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) are also used as an alternative measure for teacher evaluations. SLOs can be used to evaluate student learning and growth and teachers’ instructional practices in any grade level or subject. Conversely, there is limited information on whether SLOs produce scores that connect with other measures of teacher performance. There have been some studies that have found significant relationships between student learning objects and teacher effectiveness; however, additional research is needed for valid and reliable results (Gill, Brunch & Booker, 2013).

Artifacts

Another measure of teacher performance is the examination of classroom artifacts including lesson and curriculum-unit plans, teacher-created assessments, and student work samples, all of which are used to determine the quality of classroom instruction. Artifacts provide the basis for assessing planning or alignment of instruction to state standards (Milanowski, 2011). Evaluators use artifacts to grasp a clear understanding of how teachers design teaching and learning for students (Goe, Bell, & Little 2009).

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations are used more often as a measure of teacher performance in an evaluation system. They measure teaching practices and methods using a

framework for teaching and learning. Valid and reliable instruments are crucial to determine the effectiveness of a teacher's performance (Goe, Bell, & Little 2009; Milanowski, 2011). Observation rubrics are scales for criterion-based assessments utilized during classroom observations. The rubrics encompass observation components across various domains of teacher practice to guide evaluators in making consistent decisions regarding teacher performance (Steinburg & Kraft, 2017).

Observation rubrics also help evaluators to provide quality feedback consisting of clear and specific descriptions of what quality performance looks like together with communicating performance expectations supported by self-reflection of practice (Milanowski, 2011; MDE, 2014). Evaluators consider the combined results of multiple observations to determine a final teacher performance rating (Steinburg & Kraft, 2017).

Student Survey

Student assessments of their teachers have been linked to the measures of student outcomes (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010). It can take years to collect data to generate results on the effectiveness of student surveys as it relates to teacher performance (Peterson, Wahlquist, & Bone, 2000). Additionally, there has been relatively little research published on including student surveys as part of teacher evaluation results. Students often base their perspectives of their teacher's performance on their opinions of the teacher rather than the learning environment and instructional practices (Symlie, 2014).

Improving Teacher Effectiveness

Teacher evaluation linked to improving teaching practices and ensuring accountability can be included in the same system (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Maslow &

Kelly 2012; Marzano, 2012). Education policymakers should design an aligned system that meets both goals of teacher evaluation. Research suggested that teacher evaluation should promote improvement in both professional development and teaching practices because the system is weak, and the established process has little impact on teacher practices in the classroom (Marzano, 2012; Maslow & Kelly 2012).

Teacher evaluations fall short of developing teachers' instructional capacity which contributes to student achievement (Segiovanni & Starrat, 2002). Respectively, additional research has provided sufficient support to show that the current teacher evaluation systems lack connection to professional development opportunities for teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Howard and Gullickson, 2013; Marzano, 2012; Maslow, 2005; Weisburg et al. 2009). Teacher evaluations alone are a “weak lever” for improving teacher effectiveness due to the lack of relationship between evaluation and professional development (Smylie, 2014). According to Darling-Hammond (2013), teacher evaluation is effective when it is linked to a strong “teaching and learning system” that supports professional growth in teachers. The system would bring evaluation and opportunities for professional development to a cohesive system to improve teacher effectiveness:

It is important to link both formal professional development and job-embedded learning opportunities to the evaluation system. Evaluation alone will not improve practice. Productive feedback must be accompanied by opportunities to learn. Evaluations should trigger continuous goal-setting for areas teachers want to work on, specific professional development supports and coaching, and opportunities to

share expertise, as part of recognizing teachers' strengths and needs (Darling-Hammond; 2013, p. 99).

Numerous studies have revealed that improving teacher effectiveness using teacher evaluation is vital to the professional development of teachers to impact student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Marzano, 2012; Smylie, 2014). The opportunities teachers have to grow professionally and improve their teaching practices as a result of their teacher evaluation feedback and to move forward beyond the process of evaluation produces a highly effective system for educational improvement (Smylie, 2014).

Aligning Evaluation to Professional Development

A comprehensive evaluation system should include an alignment of teacher evaluation outcomes to target professional growth opportunities that improves teaching practice and student learning (Goe, Bigger & Croft, 2012). The authors described six components in an aligned teacher evaluation system that meet both the goals of professional growth and accountability as follows:

1. High-quality standards for instruction
2. Multiple standards-based measures of teacher effectiveness
3. High-quality training on standards, tools, and measures
4. Trained individuals to interpret results and make professional development recommendations
5. High-quality professional growth opportunities for individuals and groups of teachers

6. High-quality standards for professional learning (Goe, Bigger & Croft, 2012, p. 2).

This view is supported by Smylie (2014) who argued that evidence gathered during a teacher evaluation should be used to develop a teacher's professional growth plan and goals. As a result, individual teacher professional development should be job-embedded within the school.

This approach is challenging because workshops hosted by states and districts do not have a concrete purpose or structure, which results in fragmented and ineffective workshops (Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, 2013). With this in mind, it is essential that professional development opportunities are planned and facilitated in a proper manner to enhance teachers' classroom practices and improve students' academic success (Fullan, 2008; Guskey, 2002). The key is to provide professional learning that increases teacher effectiveness and learning outcomes for students as outlined by Learning Forward (2011) posed the following professional learning standards to increase teacher and student success:

- Occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.
- Requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.
- Uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.
- Requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.

- Integrates theories, research and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.
- Aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.
- Applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long term change. (Learning Forward, 2011, p. xiii).

Role of Instructional Leader

When it comes to teacher evaluations, one crucial role that is a determinant to the development of teachers is the principal. A principal's goal in teacher evaluation is to improve teaching practices to increase student outcomes. Instructional leadership involves the principal taking a leading role in the primary task of teacher evaluation and observation (Feeny, 2007).

As part of being an instructional leader, principals are supportive of teachers' development in teaching and learning in order to foster successful student outcomes. Principals develop teachers, both novice and veteran. However, principals have other demands, that occupy their time. Liethwood (1992) explained principals' view of their role as instructional leader. "Even principals who acknowledge their responsibility to foster teacher development often claim that is not a function they feel capable of performing well" (p. 86). With this, Holland (2009) explained that the principal's role has a direct effect on student outcomes as related to the building and developing teachers' capacity as the principal's primary role as an instructional leader.

According to May and Supovitz (2011), the instructional practices of a principal include observing classrooms, collecting and analyzing data with teachers, fostering collaboration among teachers, and maintaining visibility. According to Fink and Marholt (2011), there are specifics that an evaluator should pay attention to during a classroom observation:

1. Purpose: The lesson purpose is made clear in the context of the lesson and the extent to which the purpose is meaningful and relevant.
2. Student Engagement: Experts observe for student engagement in terms of intellectual, academic work and critically analyze the substance of that work in support of student learning.
3. Curriculum and Pedagogy: Focus on the content of the lesson and how it links to lesson purpose, teaching approaches and strategies, and scaffolds learning for gradual release of responsibility.
4. Assessment for Student Learning: Observers pay attention to how teachers determine and help ensure student success through assessments and adjustments to student learning.
5. Classroom Management and Culture: Teachers structure the classroom environment and create cultures that are inviting and respectful of student learning. Observers pay attention to the physical environment, routines and rituals, and culture and climate of the classroom (p. 25-46).

Fink and Markholt (2011) explained that these measurements give observers an opportunity to recognize classroom and instructional practices so that when they provide

feedback or engage in dialogue with teachers there is a common language related to instruction and pedagogical skills. Likewise, Danielson (2012) stated it is best to have a common language to discuss practice because it adds value to feedback conversations. When conversations are specific to teacher's performances and practice, teachers can be reflective in analyzing their own teaching behaviors. Giving teachers the opportunity to self-reflect and hold professional conversations about their evaluation makes the evaluation process beneficial for teachers and supports their professional growth (Danielson, 2012; Rock & Wilson, 2005).

Besides the specifics of what to look for during an observation, Marshall suggested that when observations are conducted frequently by the same observer in 10 – 15 minutes for each visit would give the observer or evaluator ample opportunities to gather data on a teacher's performance during the beginning, middle, or end of class if the observations are unannounced and completed at different times of the day. (Marshall, 2012; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010).

Formative evaluations are the part of an evaluation system used to develop teachers because of the feedback provided as part of the process. As an instructional leader, a principal's feedback on teacher evaluation and observation can have a positive influence on teacher growth and student learning (Fenny, 2007). Fenny (2007) described quality feedback as a reflective conversation between the evaluator and teacher, where the teacher determines his or her need for professional development. Moreover, Hattie and Timperley (2007) defined feedback as "conceptual information provided by an agent regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (p. 81). The goal of feedback is to strengthen the capacity of teachers by promoting professional growth. Feedback

should include descriptive observable data, promote reflective inquiry, and promote self-directedness in teachers (Fenny, 2007).

Fenny (2007) presented several recommendations for instructional leaders who provide feedback to teachers during the evaluation and observation process. The first recommendation he suggested is that instructional leaders' feedback should be focused, descriptive, and supported by the evidence of student's work. The second recommendation is the use of structure to "promote reflective inquiry" for conversations to "facilitate the learning of teachers" (Fenny, 2007, p. 195). His third recommendation for instructional leaders included leading teachers to set goals in regards to student outcomes.

A leader that supervises instruction understands that quality feedback is the key to transforming teacher behaviors to ensure the success in student outcomes. Steven Covey (1991) explained that without feedback on performance, a person's achievements on goals are minimized. Productive feedback should include opportunities to learn to support teachers' professional growth (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

Observation Feedback

Feedback should enhance a teacher's ability to set goals and become reflective in their practices and behaviors in teaching. Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, and Keeling (2009) defined feedback as the gap between the actual performance level and the parameters of the reference level of the evaluation system. Instructional and professional feedback is vital to the success the education system and teachers because feedback identifies areas of strengths and improvement, as well as guides professional development (Cherasaro, Brodersen, Reale, & Yanoski, 2016). The United States Department of Education (2016)

required schools throughout the United States to implement teacher evaluation and support systems that provide "clear, timely, and useful feedback" (p. 6). Considering that, many schools throughout the country have committed to conducting observations and assessments multiple times throughout the school year to provide feedback to teachers (Myung & Martinez, 2013).

Teachers' Perception of Feedback

Feedback helps teachers to improve their teaching and learning practices, as well as improve student performance (Garet, Wayne, Brown, Rickles, Song, & Manzeske, 2017; Kane & Staiger, 2012). However, in order for teachers to consider feedback as relevant and valuable, it has to be first accepted as valid for teachers to be motivated to respond by improving their practices (Tuma, Hamilton, & Tsai, 2017). Tuma, Hamilton, and Tsai (2017) stated that it is essential to examine teachers' perceptions of the feedback that they receive to ensure that the district has successfully translated the feedback into enhanced teaching practices. It is essential to the success of the school and teachers that feedback is consistent, relates to instructional practices, and that it is authentic. In a study conducted by Myung and Martinez (2013), both teachers who were tasked with developing and proficient skills reported feeling threatened by feedback. The teachers stated that their principal gave them few opportunities to make a good impression, which made it difficult for them to feel confident and competent in their classrooms. One teacher reported that he was only observed once over the course of the school year, which made his observation comparable to "a dog and pony show" (Myung and Martinez, 2013, p. 5). The teachers also conveyed that infrequent observations and limited opportunities for feedback led them to perceive observations and feedback as a form of judgment rather

than tools to help them strengthen their instructional practices (Myung & Martinez, 2013). Teachers who receive more frequently scheduled feedback have more positive perceptions of the helpfulness of their school evaluation system (Tuma, Hamilton, & Tsai, 2017).

Summary

This literature review focused on relevant literature regarding teacher evaluation as a system to promote professional growth of teachers and increase student achievement. In this chapter, the researcher presented a historical overview of teacher evaluations, the purpose and process of teacher evaluation, aligning teacher evaluation to student achievement and methods for improving teacher effectiveness during the teacher evaluation process.

CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the researcher describes the purpose of the study, research questions, and methodology. This chapter also details the contextual setting, the participants, procedures for data collection and analysis, and the measures used to establish trustworthiness and maintain integrity.

Purpose of Study

The objective of this research was to explore teachers' perceptions of professional evaluation systems and how they influence their professional growth and teaching practices. Purposely, the researcher sought to understand how teachers' receptiveness to evaluation feedback improves not only their teaching practices but also their student academic outcomes.

It is essential to understand how teachers perceive instructional feedback and its effect on their teaching practices and student achievement. This study described how teachers with three or more years of classroom experience perceive instructional feedback and its effect on their teaching practices and student achievement.

Research Questions

Three research questions were used to guide this research:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers concerning teacher evaluation feedback and its effect on their professional growth?
2. What role does self-reflecting play in influencing teaching practices and student achievement?
3. How does professional development influence teaching practices and student achievement?

Methodology

A qualitative approach was used to understand teachers' perceptions and professional experiences with teacher evaluation systems. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to obtain an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions and experiences of evaluation feedback and how it influences their practices and student outcomes. Qualitative methods fit well with this study because the researcher seeks to achieve a holistic understanding of the participants' perceptions and experiences with teacher evaluation systems and its influence on their professional development and student achievement (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Additionally, a qualitative inquiry is important in this research to hear teachers' perceptions of different evaluation systems that have been used to provide instructional feedback and to determine annual performance ratings.

For this study, the researcher served as the human instrument to conduct interviews and evaluate individual participants' responses and interactions during the interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to facilitate interactivity between the researcher and the participant, as well as allow for flexibility (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Speaking directly to participants helped the researcher to understand their perceptions and experiences in regards to the professional evaluation systems (Creswell, 2007). An interview protocol was used to guide the individual, semi-structured interviews. Questions on the protocol were created using the systems thinking framework together with common themes in teacher evaluation literature.

Description of Contextual Site

The contextual sites selected for this study were five elementary schools located in Mississippi's Pine Belt area. Pseudonyms have been assigned to each school and school district. The schools, Brady Elementary, Brees Academy, Newton Elementary, Manning Elementary, and Wilson Magnet School, were selected based on their overall academic performance ratings ranging from A to D according to the Mississippi Department of Education's 2018-2019 Accountability Report. The intent of the researcher was to select participants from schools with different ratings to better understand teachers' interpretations and perceptions of instructional feedback and their implementation of constructive feedback to improve their teaching practices and student achievement. It is essential to understand the perceptions and experiences of teachers from different school districts using the same professional evaluation systems to identify possible gaps associated with the evaluation systems, such as evaluation process, evaluation measures, and the level and quality of feedback. A description of each school and corresponding district will follow.

Brady Elementary School is a part of the Pat Patriot School District. Over 98% of the district faculty is highly qualified. Pat Patriot School District has roughly 2,773 students and has maintained an A rating. Brady Elementary School currently has an A rating for the 2018-2019 school year; however, before the 2017-2018 school year, it was rated as a F school. Brady Elementary has nearly 300 students in grades 3-4. The demographics of their student population is 75% White, 15% Black, 4% Hispanics, and 5% Two or More Races.

Brees Academy is an elementary school in Orleans School District. The Orleans School District has about 2,600 students grades K-12 and currently has a B rating on the accountability model. The district has 99.2 % highly qualified teachers. Brees Academy, grades K-5, has 279 students of which 80% are African American, 15% is Hispanic, and nearly 5% White. Brees Academy current has a B accountability rating, which increased one level from the previous two school years.

Newton Elementary is a part of the Carolina School District. Carolina School District is located in the heart of an urban city and currently has a D rating. Carolina School District has experienced a teacher-shortage over the last two years. Only 88.6% of the districts' teachers are highly qualified. There are approximately 4,500 students enrolled in Carolina School District of which 419 of the students attend Newton Elementary. Newton Elementary was rated a C school for the 2018-2019 school term and a D for the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. Newton was rated an F school in 2014-2015 school year. Newton Elementary services students in grades Pre-K-5th grade. The student population is 98% African American and 2% White.

Manning Elementary is a part of Justice School District, currently rated as a D school district. The percentage of highly qualified teachers employed with the district is 94%. The overall student performance district-wide and at Manning Elementary has regressed since previous years. Both, the district and Manning Elementary received a C rating for the 2015-2016 school year and a D rating for the 2014-2015 school year; however, currently, they have a B rating. There are roughly 3,000 students enrolled in Justice School District school of which 299 attend Manning Elementary, a predominately African American school.

Wilson Magnet School is an elementary school located in Price School District, a D rated district. Price School District has 89.3% K-12th grade highly qualified teachers. Nearly 3,200 students attend schools in the Price School District. Wilson Magnet School has a population of 279 students grades K-6th grade of which 92.47% are African American, 4% White, and 4% two or more races.

Participants

The participants for this study were 14 elementary teachers, with about 2-3 teachers from each selected. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who meet the predefined criteria: have been employed by the district for three or more consecutive years, have at least three years of teaching experience, and have a K-6 elementary education certification. The predefined criterion was established to identify participants who have experience with the MSTAR and TGR as it relates to feedback and evaluation (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014).

After approval from the University of Southern Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher recruited participants by contacting the superintendent of each district to request permission to conduct the study in their schools. With the superintendent's approval, the researcher requested permission with superintendent's letter from each principal. Upon approval, the researcher collaborated with each school site's lead principal or administrative assistant to identify teachers who meet the defined criteria and arrange a time to meet with the teachers to seek their voluntary participation and explain the purpose of the study, criteria, and the expected outcomes of the study.

Data Collection

Data was collected using individual, semi-structured interviews with elementary teachers. Semi-structured individual interviews were a good fit for this study because it allows for flexible, less-structured questions giving the participants the opportunity to openly share their perceptions and experience related to the teacher evaluation systems, their professional growth, and student achievement (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007). The researcher worked closely with each participant to schedule 45 minute to one-hour individual interviews around the participant's schedule. The researcher believed that a 45-60 minutes interview session provided the participants adequate time to share their perceptions and experiences; however, additional time was allocated. The interview questions were based on the theoretical framework employed in this study, evaluation models, and the participants' perceptions of the feedback component of the evaluation systems (Appendix A). The interviews were conducted at a location where the participant felt comfortable such as their home or at the library in a private study room.

With approval and permission from The University of Southern Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB) together with the participants, the researcher recorded interviews using a digital recorder and used a researcher journal to record field notes and manage data. Data from the interviews was transcribed including interview questions and the responses of each participant. Each interview transcript was immediately uploaded to a password protect cloud drive to protect the participant. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant, school, and school district to protect the participant's identity.

Data Analysis

Interview data and field notes were analyzed as data. Interviews were transcribed using NVIVO, a digital transcription system with a built-in encryption software to conceal data. The data analysis process begun once full transcription of the interview data was reviewed by the researcher. The researcher also used the NVIVO digital system to identify and code significant statements that respond to the research questions and address the problem under study (Creswell, 2007). The researcher connected the codes with themes derived from the literature and the systems thinking theoretical framework.

Trustworthiness

Creswell (2013) recommended three strategies for establishing accuracy and validity: structural corroboration, member checking, and peer examination. Structural corroboration was used to triangulate information data from field notes and interviews with accurate insights into teachers' perceptions of and experiences with professional evaluation systems and instructional feedback. Member checking was used throughout the interview process to ascertain the authenticity of the participants' views and personal accounts. Member checking consisted of the researcher asking the participant a question, providing the participant time to respond, summarizing the participant's response, and then allowing the participant to correct errors or add more information if needed (Creswell, 2013). The last step to establishing trustworthiness is peer examination, which was carried out during meetings with the committee chairperson. During the meetings, the researcher and the committee chair reviewed data and shared thoughts throughout coding and data analysis process to ensure that analyses are bias-free, accurate, and credible.

Ethical Considerations

Showing ethical considerations for each participant is necessary. The following documents was submitted to The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board (IRB): IRB application, interview protocol, consent letter for the school district requesting permission to conduct the study, and an informed consent form. The informed consent form provided a description of the study, the process, and described the ethical guidelines for the study to ensure that each participant had a clear understanding of the study and understand that their participation was voluntary (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Informed consent forms were secured from each participant before data collection. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the participant's identity and maintain confidentiality.

Positionality Statement

I have had the privilege of serving diverse student populations and working with teachers in Mississippi's Pine Belt region for 20 years as a classroom teacher, math coach, and school administrator. My experience as an educator provides me a unique vantage point to conduct this study. I was a math teacher for eight years, served as an academic coach for two years, and for the last ten years, I have served as a school administrator.

As a teacher, I had different experiences, some good and some bad, but all shaped my approaches as a school leader. In one school, I fortunate to have a principal who was a true instructional leader. The principal was visible in my classroom, observing and following up to give me feedback. However, the principal did not use a teacher evaluation or observation rubric to guide his observation. This principal provided me

with feedback, support, and professional development based on my growth areas as a teacher. Later, I became a teacher at another school in the Pine Belt region. During my time at this school, I only received one classroom observation with no feedback. When I asked the principal for feedback, I received only, "You did well." I thought, according to what I needed and desired critical feedback to improve my practices and student achievement. Instead, there was no direction, guidance, or professional development suggested. I realized that if I stayed in my current position, I would not grow as a teacher without quality feedback and decided to follow my dream, help coach, lead, and mentor teachers to grow into the professionals we desired.

Soon after, I accepted the role as an instructional coach for teachers at a low performing school. In this role, I observed teachers, provided non-judgmental feedback, conducted professional development, and provided instructional support to help teachers grow professionally. As a result, the school moved over 50% of minimal and basic students to proficiency within one year. This experience provided me the opportunity to move forward to become an administrator.

As an academic coach and administrator, I gain experience with using both the M-STAR and Mississippi Professional Growth rubrics to evaluate teaching practices. My experience as an academic coach and school administrator has allowed me to work with teachers across the Pine Belt region; thus, I am biased regarding this study's participants. In these roles, I have evaluated and provided feedback to various teachers (e.g., novice, developing, master, exceptional) based on their instructional practices using the Mississippi teacher evaluation system. However, this bias will not interfere with my ability to research the topic of teacher evaluations.

It is with these experiences I wanted to choose this topic for my dissertation. As a teacher, I have been on both ends of the spectrum when receiving feedback and professional development experiences. Receiving consistent observations and feedback contributed to my professional growth as a teacher and student academic success. As an academic coach and administrator, I developed the love of building teachers' capacity of whom God has trusted me to lead. These experiences together sparked an interest in studying the effectiveness of teacher evaluation and feedback. I wanted to examine teachers' experiences with teacher evaluation systems and how the evaluation system, specifically self-assessment, feedback, and professional development, contribute to their professional growth and student achievement.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the methodology procedures that will be used to conduct the research study, to describe the contextual site and the participants and the procedures for data collection and analysis. The researcher also explained the process for establishing trustworthiness and how ethical principles were maintained to protect the privacy of the participants throughout the study

CHAPTER IV– RESULTS

This qualitative research study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of professional evaluation systems and how they influence their professional growth and teaching practices. Purposely, the researcher sought to understand how teachers' receptiveness to evaluation feedback improves not only their teaching practices but also their student academic outcomes. A qualitative design allowed for a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions and experiences with feedback (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Chapter four presents a description of 14 teachers employed at one of the following elementary schools in the Pine Belt area: Brady Elementary, Brees Academy, Newton Elementary, Manning Elementary, and Wilson Magnet School. The chapter presents a comprehensive set of findings the resulted from semi-structured interviews with the participants. It describes the participants' perspectives and experiences and provides an overall understanding of the level and quality of feedback impacts teacher practices and students' outcomes.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers concerning teacher evaluation feedback and its effect on their professional growth?
2. What role to self-reflection play in influencing teaching practices and student achievement?
3. How does professional development influence teaching practices and student achievement?

Participants

The target participants for this study included elementary teachers with at least three years of teaching experience and who have been employed at their school site for three consecutive years. The study utilized purposive sampling to ensure that the participants had experience with teacher evaluation systems, MSTAR and TGR. The Interview Protocol included questions that asked about the participants' educational and professional experiences. Table I provides a snapshot of each participant. A pseudonym has been assigned to participants in the study to maintain confidentiality. A detailed description of each participant follows Table 1.

Table 1: Participant Summary Data

Pseudonym	Years of Experience	Education	Name of School	Years at School
Brandon	4	B.A.	Brady	4
Walter	19	M. Ed.	Brady	4
Danny	10	M. Ed.	Brady	7
Dixon	7	M. Ed.	Wilson	7
Patrick	21	M. Ed.	Wilson	21
Magic	9	M.Ed.	Brees	8
Tucker	22	Ph.D.	Brees	19
James	15	B.A.	Brees	13
Eddie	14	B.S.	Brees	3
Sean	9	M. Ed.	Newton	3

Madden	18	Ed.S.	Newton	8
Sams	10	M. Ed.	Newton	4
Matthews	23	M. Ed.	Manning	3
Anthony	11	Ed.S.	Manning	5

Brandon is a 2nd teacher at Brady Elementary School. She is certified in Elementary Education, grades kindergarten through eight. In the last two years, she has attended literacy professional development and LETRS training linked to her evaluation feedback. Wanting to meet the needs of her students has had the most significant influence on her professional growth.

Walter teaches kindergarten at Brady Elementary School. She is certified in Elementary Education. In the last two years, Walter have attended the Making the Connection conference and a math conference at Jackson State University. Walter said that her relationship with students has had the greatest influence on her professional growth.

Danny is a teacher at Brady Elementary School. Danny shared that the greatest impact on his professional growth has been the inspiration of his students.

Dixon is a teacher at Wilson Elementary School. She holds certification in Elementary Education, English (7-12), reading (K-12), and math (K-12). Dixon has not attended any professional development outside of her school within the last two years.

Patrick is a fourth grade English teacher at Wilson Elementary School. She holds certification in Elementary Education, grades kindergarten through eighth. In the last two years, Patrick has attended the Making Connection Conference, Reading Association

Conference, and an integrating technology training. Patrick shared being able to go to different professional developments and conferences have had the greatest influence on her professional growth.

Magic is a 5th-grade science teacher at Brees Elementary School. He is certified in Elementary Education. Over the last two years, he has participated in the LETRS training. Magic acknowledges his mentor, teacher, and academic coach for having the most significant impact on his professional growth.

Tucker is a 3rd grade teacher at Brees Elementary School. He is certified in Elementary Education, grades kindergarten through eight, social studies (7-12), and administration. Tucker has participated in math and iReady training. He credits collaboration with colleagues and educational field experts to have the greatest influence on his professional growth.

James is a 1st grade teacher at Brees Elementary School. He holds certification in Elementary Education, grades kindergarten through eighth and social studies (7-12). Over the last two years, James have participated in professional development focuses on data driven instruction and reading. When asked what has had the great impact on his professional growth, James shared, *“Mentors who has been out right honest with me.”*

Eddie teaches 2nd grade at Brees Elementary School. He is certified to teach reading and language arts, grades kindergarten through twelfth. In the last two years, Eddie has attended professional development focused on classroom management. He said that technology has had the greatest impact on his professional growth.

Madden has taught kindergarten for 18 years with eight of those years being at Newton Elementary Schools. She is certified in Elementary Education, grades

kindergarten through sixth. Madden have attended professional development training for iReady. Like Danny, Madden shared that her students have had the greatest influence on her professional growth.

Sean is a 4th grade English Language Arts teacher at Newton Elementary School. She is certified in Elementary Education, grades kindergarten through sixth and Social Studies and Reading, grades seventh through twelfth. Over the last two years, Sean has participated in technology and writing professional development. Sean shared that collaborating with and having professional conversations with colleagues have had the most significant impact on her professional growth.

Sams is a 5th grade English Language Arts teacher at Newton Elementary. She has multiple certifications: Elementary Education K-6, Math, Science, and Social Studies 7-12 and Special Education K-12. In the last two years, she has attended Ready curriculum training and writing professional development. Sams communicated that student understanding significantly influenced her professional development. She stated, *“I feel like I am growing when my students are growing.”*

Matthews is a 3rd-grade teacher at Manning Elementary School, certified in elementary education and school administrator. In the last two years, she has attended training focused on math and differentiated instruction. Matthews shared that pre and post-conference with the administrator has had a significant influence on her professional development.

Anthony teaches 6th grade English at Manning Elementary School. He is certified in reading, grades kindergarten through twelfth and English, grades seventh through twelfth. Anthony has attended writing professional development offered that his

school. Anthony shared that having an administrator who involves him/herself in the instructional process is essential and has greatly impacted their professional growth.

Themes

Upon the completion of semi-structured interviews with each participant, six major themes emerged: (a) quality feedback; (b) self-reflection; (c) instructional coaching; (d) improved practices; (e) collegial support; and (f) professional growth. The themes answered the research questions by revealing the participants' experiences and perceptions of evaluation feedback, self-reflecting, and professional development.

Quality Feedback

The first theme to emerge from the study was effective feedback. This theme surfaced as a result of examining the participants' perceptions of feedback received using the teacher evaluation system and its effect on their professional growth. The participants shared that feedback, informal and formal, had a positive influence on their teaching practices and professional development.

During the interview, **Brandon** reflected on her experience with feedback. She shared, *"I always take what they say on my evaluation and try to put them in practice...I believe they (administrators) both have been in education and in the classroom which gives them insight into the day to day procedures that we do and instruction."*

Likewise, **Walter, Patrick, and Dixon** shared that feedback received from their administrators made them more conscious of things they could do to improve their instruction.

Walter said, *“It gives me the opportunity to reflect on what I am doing in the classroom. Sometimes you do not notice the things you are doing, but sometimes other people can point those things out. This allows me to self-reflect on how I am teaching.”*

Patrick explained that because of feedback received during one of her evaluations she is *“more reflective with ensuring the students know and understand the standards because it helps them with what they are learning.”*

Tucker expressed, *“It impacts how I teach. I look for feedback because without it there really isn’t a good measure of how you are doing while you are teaching.”*

Participants, **Magic , James, Talbert, Sams, Anthony , and Eddie**, shared that feedback helps them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, recognizing areas in their teaching practices that need improvement. **James** also shared that he searches for professional development opportunities to better his craft.

Dixon, Matthews, and Danny stated they use evaluation feedback to strategically improve their instructional practices and increase evaluation scores. Per **Dixon**, *“I am very reflective of what he tells me. I want students to succeed, so I constantly changing what I am doing. I want to make sure I get that score of 4 on my evaluation.”*

Matthews shared, *“I take all feedback as data. If it is an area of concern or an area where I feel like I did not score as high as I would like, I take that and try to adjust my teaching or my strategies.”*

Danny said, *“I like to get feedback on things on how to redirect my instruction to meet students’ needs differently.”*

Self-Reflection

Self-reflection aids in teachers' pedagogical development and helps them to set clear goals for improvement (Marzano, 2020). The theme of self-reflection emerged as participants described how they use the Teacher Growth Rubric to self-assess their performance. Most participants spoke of the importance of using the self-assessment rubric to reflect on their instructional practice. The rubric is used as a guide to evaluate their practices improving their practices overtime.

Matthews shared she uses the self-assessment rubric to reflect on her practices and improve her success as a teacher: *“I always want to be better than I was before. The only success is when you can outdo yourself. If I score a three in an area, then I try to look at the rubric to see what I need to do differently to score a four.”*

Likewise, Sams expressed that although it is nearly impossible to receive a score of four in all areas of the Teacher Growth Rubric, she uses the rubric as a guide to improve her practices: *“What you are trying to do is work toward that and know that there is always room for growth... It gives me a guide as to what the administrator is looking for when I am observed. I want to make sure I am including these indicators not just for my observation but also for me to improve my teaching.”*

Walter mentioned, *“It really makes you be more reflective with yourself. It helps me know how to reach my students. I can determine what strategies I use really helps them learn the content and standards.”*

Although most participants shared that using the self-assessment rubric to reflect helps to improve their practices and overall evaluation scores, participants employed at

Wilson Elementary (Patrick and Dixon), Eddie, and Anthony shared they have not used the rubric to reflect on their practices.

Instructional Coaching

The third emergent theme was instructional coaching. All participants shared the instructional coaching, which consist on ongoing feedback and discussion with the school administrator, helped to inform their practices, thus improving student achievement. Each participant felt that pre and/or post conferences with the administrator contributed to their teaching practices and professional growth. **Sams** held that feedback from her administrator helped to improve her students' writing skills. She voiced, *"My students now are stronger than my students last year because my teaching practices are growing based on feedback and professional development I received."*

Patrick shared, *"I have grown. I have shown growth from the first evaluation and the last. I make sure I am incorporating feedback each time."*

Magic expressed, *"These conversations help me to know what I need to work on. I know what I need to do next and the areas I need to work on for my students. It is about being the best for my students."*

James stated, *"These conferences give me and the principal the opportunity to discuss how I can strengthen areas where I am doing good or not so good. In the end, it makes me reflect on my craft, so I can grow."*

Walter said, *"When we go over the evaluation and discuss areas they are concerned about so the next time I can improve on what I am doing. They encourage me by telling me the strengths of the lesson. Then, I look at the concerns and strengths and build upon those."*

Tucker conveyed, *“The post conference is so important because you don’t know what you did wrong or what you are doing right. This conference lets you know what exactly where you stand. So you have the rubric and you discuss what your next steps are to improve.”*

Anthony imparted, *“It is important to have those conference because it gives the opportunity to make sure I completely understand their suggestions. If I don’t understand the comments or suggestions, then I can’t effectively carry it out. So the conferences are opportunity to get clarity.”*

Dixon voiced, *“It makes me reflect and evaluate myself. He asks me what could I have done better during the time he is in the classroom. What can I do to improve or what do I think needs to get better?”*

Eddie shared, *“The post conference has really contributed to my professional growth. When I get in the conference, I really have to look at students, and how I taught the lesson really don’t match. During the conference, I get suggestions on how to improve my teaching not the lesson, but my actual teaching methods. I get good feedback on how to teach math.”*

Brandon mentioned, *“I always try to take their advice and put it to use to become better at what I do.”*

Improved Practices

Evaluations inform systems that support teaching and learning (Maslow & Kelley, 2012). Some participants shared school administrators linked teachers’ evaluation to professional development, which improved their instructional practices and student achievement. Several participants also expressed they chose professional development

based on evaluation feedback and interests. When asked how professional development influence student outcomes, **Magic** expressed, *“In the past, I took back a lot of strategies into the classroom. Close reading strategy was one I used to help students with comprehension. So, I was able to implement the strategy and saw immediate results with my students.”*

Relatedly, **Anthony** shared, *“This makes us better teachers to our students because we are capitalizing on our strongest areas and improving our weak areas. Now we can give the kids what they need.”*

Eddie added, *“Some professional development offers different techniques to implement instruction. And you can get different things from different people.”*

Sams stated, *“I think professional development greatly improve student outcomes because it gives teachers just additional resources additional way to attaching a particular standard or problem that we may not have got previously.”*

Dixon voiced, *“It makes me break the content down more for my students. I may try different teaching methods I have not used before because some learn different than others.”*

Magic expressed, *“Any professional development that I have gotten in this district, I have so much to make me a better teacher. We have a MDE literacy coach. Having that person to person professional development where she models. Then she will come back and see me do what she modeled for me with my students.”*

Matthews communicated a different perspective on professional development. While she believes professional development improves teaching practices and student achievement, she shared it is not effective *“unless the person implements what was*

presented.” She further elaborated, “I have been to professional development to receive information. But it does not become import or useful unless you actually use it.”

Collegial Support

The fifth emergent theme was supportive relationships. Team building and collaboration are critical to enhancing systems and successful practices (Pardeya & Dhunpath, 2018; Senge,1990). Several participants shared that support relationships with their colleagues contributed to their professional growth.

Walter shared, *“My colleagues and I observe each other for peer observations. They can tell me my strengths and what I need to work on to improve. Then, they offer me somethings I can try differently. This allows me to self-reflect on how I am teaching.”*

Brandon expressed, *“My first year, my mentor teacher took me under her wings, shared resources with me, and conferenced with me. She helped me so much, just from her experience.”*

Likewise, **Magic** shared, *“She (mentor teacher) was someone who was accepting. She did not criticize me. If I had questions, she spent time with me. If I needed support with a child or with planning a lesson, she was there for support.”* Magic also credits the academic coaches for providing feedback that help her grow as a teacher.”

Tucker added, *“I sometimes go and get information from another colleague. I consult with someone with expertise in that area.”*

Sean felt that the greatest impact on her professional growth is working with colleagues in PLCs: *“Having those conversations with colleagues on things they use that work best, and then implement those in my classroom.”*

Professional Growth

Teacher evaluation is an essential function of teacher effectiveness. Professional growth also emerged as a theme from interviews conducted with the participants. Participants' reflection of the evaluation process revealed that feedback contributed to professional growth. **Magic shared**, *"I believe my instructional strategies has improved since getting feedback. It is like adding on to my foundation day in and day out. So, when I get feedback all the time, help me to get better."* Similarly, Talbert, Sam, Tucker, and Adam, conveyed that feedback has made them better educators.

Sean communicated, *"Over the years, there are areas where I have improved. I wanted to get better. I needed the feedback."*

Sam said, *"Receiving feedback contributes to my professional growth. I learn more about my strengths and weaknesses. It is the biggest component."*

Tucker expressed, *"I have improved over the years. I have all the components and a lot of information. This is huge for me. Also, I improved in professional responsibilities."*

Dixon added, *"Receiving feedback has had the greatest influence on my professional growth. I have been in the same place teaching for seven years. So I am always seeking input on my teaching, so I can do better. I think I am improving with feedback because my student work is getting better."*

Anthony said, *"The evaluation process has made me a better educator. It made me reflect on my instructional practices and want to improve them. It has challenged me to be the best teacher."*

Danny stated, *"The areas of my teaching practice that has improved as a result of receiving feedback."*

James voiced, *“I believe receiving feedback has really contributed to my professional growth. When you give me the feedback, then you are giving me something to work with. This is important to me because I want to continue to grow.”*

Summary

Chapter four presented a detailed analysis of interview transcripts identified six themes from the data: (a) quality feedback; (b) self-reflection; (c) instructional coaching; (d) improved practices; (e) collegial support; and (f) professional growth. Interviews with participants were scheduled in the late Spring and Summer 2020. The interview window was extended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All participants openly shared their experiences with the Teacher Growth Rubric and feedback. Participants voiced that evaluation feedback contributed to their professional growth and student achievement although participants did not use feedback in the same manner.

CHAPTER IV – DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how teachers make sense of instructional feedback from performance evaluation and its effect their teaching practices and student outcomes. This research sought to find how performance evaluation systems can be improved to increase teacher effectiveness. The researcher served as the human instrument to conduct semi-structured interviews. An interview protocol utilizing 19 open-ended questions was created using the systems thinking framework together with common themes in teacher evaluation literature (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Merriam, 2009). This chapter provides a summary of a discussion of findings related to research questions, relation to findings to theoretical framework, limitations, implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Discussions of Findings

This section provides a discussion on the findings in relations to each research question and the review of the literature. The results of this study confirmed six themes from the experiences and perceptions of teachers in the Pine Belt area of Mississippi: (a) quality feedback; (b) self-reflection; (c) instructional coaching; (d) improved practices; (e) collegial support; and (f) professional growth.

Research Question One

Research Question 1 asked, "what are the perceptions of teachers concerning teacher evaluation feedback and its effect on their professional growth?" The following themes resulted from Research Question One: quality feedback and professional growth. This study indicated that teachers perceive feedback from performance evaluation as a positive influence on their teaching practices and professional development. The

participants reported that feedback helps them identify their strengths and weaknesses and recognizes areas in their teaching practices that need improvement. Marzano (2020) confirmed the sole purpose of performance evaluation is to provide feedback and guidance for improving professional practice. He explained performance feedback teachers receive from observations may improve educators' professional growth by helping teachers reflect and improve practices. These findings support that quality feedback contributes to improving teaching practices as teachers use feedback to grow professionally (Marzano, 2020).

Research Question Two

Research Question 2 asked, “what role do self-reflecting play in influencing teaching practices and student achievement?” The themes that emerged from research question two were self-reflection and collegial support. Teachers in this study believe self-reflection is used as a catalyst for improvement. The rubrics encompass observation components across teacher practice domains to guide them in making decisions regarding their performance (Steinburg & Kraft, 2017). Most teachers reported that the professional growth rubric was used as a guide to evaluate their practices. Further, the participants identified that self-reflection was a valuable contribution to their professional growth, thus improving students’ outcomes.

Regarding collegial support, participants shared working collaboratively with their colleagues during PLCs and conducting peer-observation with feedback contributed to their professional growth. The participants shared that their colleagues shared resources, provided critical feedback without being judgmental, and was available when they had questions, all of which support the finding of research conducted Pardeya and

Dhunpath (1998) and Senge (1990). Both Pardeya and Dhunpath (1998) and Senge (1990) argued that collaboration is critical to enhancing systems and successful instructional approaches.

Research Question Three

Research Question 3 asked, “how do professional development influence teaching practices and student achievement.” The following themes resulted from research question three: instructional coaching and professional development. Teacher evaluation alone is a “weak lever” for improving teaching practices due to the lack of relationship between evaluation and professional development (Smylie, 2014). Findings in this study were consistent with the results of Darling-Hammond (2013), which found that teacher evaluation is effective when it supports professional growth in teachers. The participating teachers interviewed in this study identified instructional coaching as a premise for their professional development. Instructional coaching consisted of ongoing feedback and discussion from administrators, consultants, and mentor teachers. Their perception of instructional coaching allowed them to receive individualized professional development based on observational feedback.

Results Related to Theoretical Framework

This study was viewed through the lens of the systems thinking framework. Systems thinking was appropriate for this study because it provides a systematizing means for how structures are organized, the interdependence of structures, the ensuing dynamics of the structures, and how they are held together, regarding this study would be the teaching evaluation system. It helps one have a deeper understanding of the

components (e.g., feedback, self-assessment, professional development) of the teacher growth rubrics and how it plays a role in professional growth and student achievement.

The findings of this study supported the system thinking theory (Fairchild, 2015). The results revealed that quality feedback, self-reflection, professional development, and collegial support contributes to teachers' professional growth. Participants in this study reported that administrators and their colleagues' feedback helped them become reflective in their practices and improve their instructional practices and approaches. The participants also shared feedback and self-reflection using the self-assessment motivated them to adjust their practices to strengthen evaluation scores and to seek professional development opportunities aligned with their instructional needs, supporting the personal mastery premise of the system thinking theory.

Most participants shared the administrators would have conferences with them before and after observations to ask questions about their lesson, provide feedback, and ensure they were working to maintain the school's shared vision regarding school and instructional goals and student achievement. This finding supports Senge (1990), which suggests that leaders must clearly understand the organization's function and engage in open dialogue with team members. System thinking presents that schools could be revitalized by promoting quality and coherence in education (Lannon, 2018; Senge, 1990). While school operations are continually evolving, teacher evaluation systems help to maintain quality and consistent instructional practices.

Limitations

The current study was limited to fourteen teachers from five elementary schools in three school districts in the Pine Belt community. Participants include teachers with

various teaching backgrounds and experiences, which presented a limited view of teachers' perception of performance evaluation feedback and its influence on teaching practices and student outcomes. Elementary teachers teach students in larger instructional blocks than middle or high school teachers. Also, elementary teachers teach more than one subject area. Future studies should be conducted to include middle school and high school teachers who teach departmentalized classes with smaller class sizes. This would assist with teachers' perception of performance evaluation feedback.

The sample only included schools in the Pine Belt area of Mississippi who had a rating from A-D level schools. This limitation confines the researcher's capability to make generalities about findings pertinent to all schools and districts in the state of Mississippi. Moreover, interviews were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, which may have produced emotional distress with teachers and the researcher. These issues related to stress may negatively distort results. This study focused primarily on teachers' perception of performance feedback and their experiences with the Mississippi Professional Growth Rubric.

Implications for Practice

The researcher examined 14 elementary teachers' perceptions about the effectiveness of performance evaluation feedback on their professional growth and implications on their teaching practices. The schools in this study consisted of performance ratings ranging from A to D rated schools. Brady Elementary school is currently an A-rated school based on 2018-2019 data. However, in previous years this school was once rated an F school. Newton elementary is presently rated a C school based on 2018-2019 data. In last years, this school also was rated as an F -rated school.

Brees Elementary and Manning Elementary are both currently rated as a B school based upon 2018-2019 data. These schools were once rated a D level school in previous years. The common denominator in all these schools was implementing the Mississippi Professional Growth Rubric, which required administrators to provide specific feedback (MDE, 2019).

When analyzing the results of this study, the findings indicated that performance evaluation feedback provides evidence of strengths and weaknesses. Reasonably, using the evidence gathered during observations for professional growth opportunities and job-embedded coaching sessions has a greater influence on teaching practices and student outcomes. Numerous studies have revealed that improving teacher effectiveness using teacher evaluation is vital to teachers' professional development and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Marzano, 2012; Smylie, 2014). Without feedback, observations alone will have limited to no impact on teaching and learning (Goe, Biggers & Croft, 2012). It is crucial for districts and schools to develop an implementation plan for using evaluation data to guide teacher professional growth, thus teaching practices and learning outcomes for students.

This study's results might be of interest to schools and districts in Mississippi who are looking for a more systematic approach to improve teaching practices and student outcomes. School districts and schools in Mississippi can use the findings of this study for guidance. Schools wanting to strengthen teaching practices and student outcomes through performance evaluation feedback should consider requiring the collection of evidence to align or link professional development over time for individual teachers.

According to the Mississippi Growth Rubric, Domain four, standard eight indicators require the following for teachers' professional responsibilities:

- Proactively seeks out and participates in professional learning activities
- Fully integrates knowledge gained in professional learning communities, collaboration with peers and leadership, and focused professional development
- Strengthens teaching practice based on observer feedback and other types of performance data
- Shares new information and lessons learned with colleagues (MDE, 2019)

These indicators are part of the rubric to evaluate teachers. School districts must be willing to use performance evaluation results to align or link professional development to improve teaching practices and student outcomes. Schools looking to make this change should do the following:

- Train evaluators on how to interpret results and make decisions to align teacher evaluation results with professional development.
- Ensure quality professional development to teachers according to Learning Forward
- To stimulate reflection and professional learning, schools and districts need to move beyond a performance rating score and make evaluation part of a comprehensive system designed to enhance the professional growth of individuals and schools as a whole.

As we move beyond the numbers, ratings, and one-sided conversations, performance evaluation will create support systems for teachers. In this study, teachers

sought out ways to improve their teaching through their own reflections and self-efficacy for learning. This study adds to research conducted by the (Tuma, Hamilton, & Tsai, 2017), which explained how regular feedback strengthens instructional practices (Tuma, Hamilton, & Tsai, 2017). However, Mississippi requires only two informal classroom observations and one formal observation per teacher each school year. It is the district or school's discretion to determine the frequency of informal observations (MDE, 2019). Districts and schools looking to improve student outcomes should consider this study's findings regarding the impact of observation feedback on teachers' professional growth. They should also consider the school level processes to increase the frequency of observations and feedback conversations.

According to the National Council on Teacher Quality (2019) report, “Linking Evaluation to Professional Growth,” Mississippi rated “nearly meets goal” on the goal prescribed by teacher policy. The requirement of the goal is for, “The state to ensure teachers receive feedback about their performance and should require professional development to be based on the needs identified through teacher evaluation” (NCTQ, 2019, p.1). In the summative observation conference, the state of Mississippi requires professional growth opportunities to be discussed with the teachers (NCTQ, 2019).

Recommendations for Future Research

After conducting this study, the researcher believes further research in the state of Mississippi should be done to investigate the following:

1. Two of the teachers in this study reported they did not receive feedback from observations. They actually mentored teachers, observed new teachers to provide feedback, and conducted professional development. Based on findings in the

results of this study, future research should concentrate on distinguishing teacher performance evaluation between novice and expert teachers or teachers who are considered master teachers.

2. This study focused primary on teachers' perception regarding performance evaluation feedback in Mississippi. It was determined through the findings that feedback provides teacher with opportunities to reflect on their practice and grow professionally. Further research should be done to determine principal's perspective in Mississippi on how they build the capacity of staff through providing actionable feedback and linking it to quality professional development for teachers.
3. The state of Mississippi is in the process of implementing multiple measures of student growth to be included in the teachers' evaluation score (MDE, 2019). More research is needed to better understand how teachers' impact student learning based on these multiple measures. Currently, teachers in Mississippi are only evaluated using the Professional Growth system. Value-Added Model (VAM) is in the piloting stage of implementation (MDE, 2019).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers make sense of instructional feedback from performance evaluation and its effect on their teaching practices and student outcomes. A qualitative phenomenological design was used to obtain an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions and experiences of evaluation feedback and how it influences their practices and student outcomes. An interview protocol was used to guide the individual, semi-structured interviews. This chapter

summarizes findings related to research questions related to the theoretical framework, limitations, implications for practice, and future research recommendations.

Data analysis identified six themes related to the research questions: (a) quality feedback; (b) self-reflection; (c) instructional coaching; (d) improved practices; (e) collegial support; and (f) professional growth. As a whole, these themes emerged from all the participants. However, each teacher's experience was unique in understanding their perception of their educational experiences with teacher performance evaluation. The findings suggested that evaluation feedback has an impact on teaching practices and student outcomes.

After reflecting on my research experience, I realized I could have included more questions regarding the frequency of observations and feedback, the quality of professional development linked to feedback, and the relevance of professional development to teachers' individual needs according to feedback. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I was unable to complete more interviews at each contextual site. Maybe, in the future, I will be able to extend this research to include more participants. I would also like to have principals' perspectives of evaluation feedback.

APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Performance Evaluation and Feedback

1. How has feedback, formal and informal, influenced your classroom practices?
2. Explain how your evaluation feedback has been used for individualized professional development.
3. How does your principal or evaluator link teacher evaluation to professional development?
4. What systems are in place at your school to evaluate teacher performance based on instructional goals and professional coaching and development?
5. In what ways do you think that administrators' expertise play part in their ability to conduct teacher evaluations and provide feedback?
6. How have pre- and post-conferences contributed to your teaching practice and professional growth?

Influence on Teaching Practice

1. How do you use evaluation feedback to improve your teaching practices?
2. Explain how you use evaluation feedback to create short-term and long-term goals.
3. How have you used the Teacher Growth Rubric (TGR) to self-assess your own performance?

Influence on Student Outcomes

1. Considering feedback, what are some steps that you have taken to improve student learning outcomes.
2. How do you use student learning outcomes to evaluate your instructional performance?
3. In your opinion, how does professional development influence student outcomes?

APPENDIX B –IRB Approval Letter

Office of
Research Integrity



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NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate 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 involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident template on Cayuse IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-18-184

PROJECT TITLE: My Dissertation 2018

SCHOOL/PROGRAM: School of Education, Educational Research and Admin

RESEARCHER(S): Joanna Barnes, Lilian Hill

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved

CATEGORY: Expedited

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

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