

THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL LEADERS ON STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

by

LINDSAY REGINA SCOTT

(Under the Direction of Karen Bryant)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine how school leaders build capacity and support teachers with student-teacher relationships in an elementary school. The action research team examined the perspectives of school leaders and teachers as part of the school leadership team on how school leaders can build capacity and support teachers in establishing student-teacher relationships. The school leadership team sought perspectives on the impact of school leadership on student-teacher relationships through building capacity and supporting teachers. The following thematic findings emerged from the study: (a) school leadership is a positive and influential force in student-teacher relationships; (b) consistency is important for effective teacher-led practices; (c) school leaders are instrumental in strengthening teacher capacity for relationship-building; (d) teachers noted the need for leadership-driven initiatives; (e) there is a need for leadership support to ensure long-term success; and (f) leadership priorities were not consistently aligned to the needs of teachers. The findings supported that implementing professional learning related to social-emotional learning strategies, such as a positive behavior plan and morning meetings, supported school leaders in supporting teachers in establishing and sustaining student-teacher relationships.

INDEX WORDS: student-teacher relationships, school culture, school leaders, leadership

THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL LEADERS ON STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

by

LINDSAY REGINA SCOTT

B.S., Valdosta State University, 2008

M.A., Valdosta State University, 2011

Ed.S., Valdosta State University, 2013

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2025

© 2025

Lindsay Regina Scott

All Rights Reserved

THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL LEADERS ON STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

by

LINDSAY REGINA SCOTT

Major Professor:	Karen Bryant
Committee:	Jami Royal Berry
	Kaneshia Dorsan

Electronic Version Approved:
Ron Walcott
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2025

DEDICATION

To my parents, Lindsay Eugene and Donna Regina, whose endless love, sacrifices, and encouragement have been the foundation of my success. Their belief in me has been a constant source of strength and motivation, even in the most challenging times. This work is dedicated to them as a small token of my immense gratitude for all they have done.

To my grandmothers, Johnnie Mae and Ma, for their wisdom, kindness, and unwavering love throughout my life. Their strength and resilience have inspired me in more ways than I can express. This dissertation reflects the values and love they have instilled in me.

To my sister and nephew, Shayna and Andrew, for their unwavering support and for always cheering me on, even when the road ahead seemed uncertain. Your belief in me means more than words can express.

I also want to thank my bonus parents and family for your support, love, and encouragement. Your belief in me and your unwavering presence in my life has been a constant comfort throughout this journey. I sincerely appreciate all you have done.

Special thanks go to my friends Dani, Drea, Kiatah, and Jennifer for being a source of inspiration and emotional support. Your words of encouragement and willingness to listen have made this experience all the more memorable.

Finally, to everyone who has supported me along this journey—whether near or far, with words of encouragement or actions of kindness—you have each played an invaluable part in making this achievement possible. This dissertation reflects not only my hard work but also the

love, wisdom, and strength shared by those who have guided me. I dedicate this work with deep gratitude and love to all of you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my dissertation chair, Dr. Karen Bryant, whose guidance, patience, and expertise have been indispensable throughout this process. Your insightful feedback, constant support, and belief in my work have been instrumental in shaping this research. I am incredibly fortunate to have had you as my advisor.

I also sincerely thank my committee members, Dr. Jami Royal Berry, and Dr. Kaneshia Dorsan, for their invaluable contributions, thoughtful advice, and constructive critiques. Your support and expertise have significantly enhanced the quality of my work.

To my teachers and mentors, who ignited my passion for education and nurtured my intellectual curiosity throughout my academic journey. Your guidance, both in and out of the classroom, has been a cornerstone of my growth, and I am deeply thankful for the knowledge and wisdom you have imparted.

A special thank you goes to my colleagues for their support, camaraderie, and collaboration during this research. Your intellectual exchanges, encouragement, and willingness to share your own experiences have been a constant source of inspiration. I am grateful for your friendship and the sense of community you've provided throughout this journey.

Thank you to everyone who has been part of this journey. Your contributions have made a profound impact, and I am forever grateful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
The Impact of School Leaders on School Culture	1
The Impact of School Leaders on Student Learning	2
The Impact of School Leaders on Teachers.....	4
Statement of the Problem.....	5
The Purpose of Study.....	8
Research Questions	10
Definition of Terms.....	10
Theoretical Framework.....	11
Logic Model.....	15
Theory of Change	16
Overview of the Methodology	17
Interventions	18
Significance of the Study	20
Organization of the Dissertation	20
2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE	22

The Importance of Student-Teacher Relationships.....	23
Strategies Associated with Establishing Student-Teacher Relationships	25
Leadership Practices that Support Teachers with Student-Teacher Relationships	27
Chapter Summary	30
3. ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	33
Purpose of the Study	33
Research Questions	33
Rationale for Qualitative Research Design.....	34
Overview of Action Research Methods	35
Action Research Design.....	39
Context of the Study	47
Data Sources	54
Data Collection	56
Interventions	60
Data Analysis Methods	63
Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability	64
Subjectivity Statement	66
Limitations	67
Chapter Summary	67
4. FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE.....	68
Purpose of the Study	68
Research Questions	69
Context of the Study	70

Problem Framing Based on the Site.....	71
The Story and Outcomes.....	73
Findings from the Case	76
Chapter Summary	82
5. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE.....	83
Overview of Key Findings and Themes	84
Significant Findings Related to the Research Questions	87
Chapter Summary	106
6. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONNECTIONS TO LEADERSHIP	
PRACTICES.....	108
Summary of the Research Design.....	109
Summary and Discussion of the Findings	111
Limitations of the Current Study	113
Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners	114
Implications and Recommendations for Researchers	118
Implications and Recommendations for Policy Makers	120
Concluding Thoughts.....	122
References.....	125
Appendices	
A. Empirical Findings Table.....	145
B. Survey Protocols	147
C. Interview Protocols	148
D. Observation Protocols	150

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1.1: School Climate CCRPI scores for UAES (2018-2019, 2023, 2024).....	9
Table 1.2: Stakeholder Survey CCRPI scores for UAES (2018-2019, 2024)	9
Table 3.1: Action Research Design Team	44
Table 3.2: Action Research Implementation Team	46
Table 3.3: Action Research Timeline	47
Table 3.4: Student Demographics of UAES (2024)	50
Table 3.5: Teacher Demographics of UAES (2024).....	51
Table 3.6: Content Mastery CCRPI scores for UAES (2018,2019,2022,2023,2024)	53
Table 3.7: School Climate CCRPI scores for UAES (2018-2019, 2023,2024).....	54
Table 3.8: Interview Question Sample.....	57
Table 3.9: Focus Group Interview Question Sample	59
Table 3.10: Intervention Cycles	62
Table 3.11: Triangulation of Research Methods.....	65
Table 4.1: Content Mastery CCRPI scores for UAES (2018,2019,2022,2023,2024)	72
Table 4.2: School Climate CCRPI scores for UAES (2018-2019, 2023, 2024).....	73
Table 4.3: Action Research Implementation Team	74
Table 4.4: Action Research Design Team	75
Table 5.1: Summary of Research Questions Connected to Findings and Themes	86

Table 5.2: Initial Codes and Themes- RQ1	88
Table 5.5: Initial Codes and Themes- RQ2	94
Table 5.8: Initial Codes and Themes- RQ3	101

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1.1: Theoretical Framework	13
Figure 1.2: Logic Model of Study.....	15
Figure 3.1: Action Research Process	37
Figure 3.2: The Spiraling Nature of Action Research	40
Figure 3.3: Logic Model for the Study	41

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is considered the second most important school-based factor in classroom instruction to influence student learning (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Louis et al., 2010). Strong and sustainable school leadership is essential for schools. School administrators are expected to fulfill their administrative duties while adapting to the expectations of change and reform in schools and creating a strong school culture to form a positive organizational image in the community (Kalkan et al., 2020). School leaders influence aspects of school culture such as teacher supervision and retention, introducing new curricula and teaching techniques, student discipline, and student allocation to teachers and classes (Coelli & Green, 2012).

School leaders are pivotal to the success of any significant change in schools (Leithwood et al., 2019). School culture and leadership influence every aspect of the school, including school effectiveness. The individuals or groups identified as providing leadership in schools include principals, assistant principals, and teachers in formal leadership roles (Louis et al., 2010). Many leadership scholars have focused on discovering what school leaders do to improve and promote change within schools (Leithwood, 2021).

The Impact of School Leaders on School Culture

School leaders manage and promote a positive school culture while implementing multiple school reform initiatives (Hollingworth et al., 2018). The most effective and engaging school leaders understand that it is not just the content that is being taught that matters but also the environment and context in which the content is taught. A positive school culture is essential

for change initiatives to be implemented effectively, and school leaders play an important role in setting the school culture, which can improve the learning environment (Hollingworth et al., 2018).

The leadership styles of school leaders have an essential role in developing a positive and strong school culture. One of the leadership styles used by school leaders to build a positive school culture while improving the organizational image of schools is transformational leadership (Kalkan et al., 2020). Transformational leadership is a desired leadership style for school leaders to succeed in school reform, such as implementing school initiatives, increasing student achievement, and fostering positive school culture, which leads to a positive organizational image (Day et al., 2016). School leaders can analyze the importance of transformational leadership behaviors exhibited by school administrators to have a strong school culture and organizational image and to organize training and development programs for school administrators (Kalkan et al., 2020).

School leaders can influence positive school culture through how they exemplify and enact their educational vision, leadership styles, and personal values, but also through the adjustments they make to organizational priorities and structures (Ryu et al., 2022). School improvement and educational change indicate that leadership practices, organizational conditions, teacher motivational factors, and teacher learning are crucial for improving teachers' practices and school culture (Thoonen et al., 2012). Improving school leadership may be essential in building school-wide capacity in school culture.

The Impact of School Leaders on Student Learning

School leaders impact student achievement mainly by developing a governance structure for schools, creating school culture, and developing school-wide policies about retention,

adherence to the curriculum, and working conditions for teachers (Leithwood et al., 2004).

School leaders will likely significantly influence student learning outcomes if they focus on improving their schools' teaching and learning quality (Cruickshank, 2017). Effective leadership plays a vital role in the teaching and learning process; therefore, widespread interest has been introduced to improve leadership, which is a critical element in the success of any teaching institution (Karande et al., 2017).

Parents, policymakers, and politicians are convinced that school leaders, particularly principals, make a difference in the social and academic outcomes of the learners for whom they are responsible (Robinson & Gray, 2019). Effective leadership in teaching works towards improving learning and teaching and makes a difference in improving student learning (Karande et al., 2017). High-quality leaders achieve impact on student learning by setting directions through charting a clear course that everyone understands, establishing high expectations, and using data to track progress and performance (Karande et al., 2017). Successful leadership can play a significant and frequently underestimated role in improving student learning (Karande et al., 2017).

School leaders have a strong influence on the work setting, innovation capacity, and motivation and a considerably smaller influence on the instructional practices of their staff (Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017). Pietsch and Tulowitzki (2017) investigated the direct and indirect ties between various leadership styles and teachers' instructional practices. The findings revealed that school leaders' leadership practices affect teachers' instructional practices directly and indirectly. School leaders can use integrated leadership practices to build capacity and support teachers. Integrated leadership focuses on school leaders understanding and developing teachers based on individual teacher strengths and needs by promoting continuous professional

development, influencing school instructional practices, and encouraging academic capacity (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). School leaders influence the likelihood that teachers change their instructional practices and exert influence on the classroom practices of their teachers (Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017).

The Impact of School Leaders on Teachers

School leaders can play an essential role in building and supporting teachers by delegating authority and empowering teachers in ways that allow them to influence critical organizational decisions and processes (Sebastian et al., 2016). School leaders play a strategic role in teacher professional development by fostering a school-wide learning environment, examining core values influencing school practices, and managing the knowledge developed within schools (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Influential school leaders use teacher leadership to improve school culture while they work directly on professional development and school program coherence (Sebastian et al., 2016).

Gurr (2017) encourages school leaders to develop networks, collaborations, and partnerships to influence the family and external contexts. The school and home context includes the school organization, family, and external contexts that leaders must respond to and influence. School leaders influence the school context by developing a shared vision and mission and a positive culture, having appropriate structures, people, and processes in the school, actively engaging stakeholders within and outside the school, and promoting high expectations for all (Gurr, 2017).

Successful school leaders are focused on the development of adults in a school community. School leaders focus on the interest and ability to build the capacity of teaching and non-teaching staff to be better at what they do. School leadership emphasizes the role of school

leaders in building the capacity of teachers and other adults in the school, what someone brings to the role of school leader, and utilization by school leaders of various leadership views (Gurr, 2017). School leaders can develop people by providing teachers and others in the system with the necessary support and training to succeed and by making the organization work by ensuring that the entire range of conditions and incentives in districts and schools fully supports rather than inhibits teaching and learning (Karande et al., 2017).

Statement of the Problem

School leaders and teachers in the Urban Area Elementary School noted increased behavior referrals and decreased student academic engagement over the five years preceding the start of the action research study. According to Leithwood et al. (2019), discipline, climate, and collective teacher efficacy have had the most impact on student learning outcomes when used by school leaders. At the start of the second semester of the 2023-2024 school year, the Urban Area Elementary School saw an increase in inappropriate social and emotional student behaviors in kindergarten through fifth-grade students. The Urban Area Elementary School had increased student behavior referrals. It referred students to a school administrator for additional behavior support using strategies and interventions in the district's code of conduct. A corresponding decrease in student classroom engagement was also noted. The students received behavior referrals for refusing to follow directions or complete assignments, lack of focus on teacher-led instruction, avoidance behaviors such as running out of the classroom and emotional outbursts, inappropriate peer interactions such as physical altercations (fighting with peers), and inappropriate touching of peers. As a result of these behaviors, instructional time was interrupted for these students. The Urban Area Elementary School also scored low on the School Performance Rating on the Stakeholder Survey based on student, teacher, and parent perceptions

of a school's climate. The School Climate Stakeholder Survey scores based on the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) for the Urban Area Elementary School were 72.46 in 2018, 74.70 in 2019, and 69.42 in 2024. Based on survey results, students' perception of the school climate increased by 2.8% from 2018 to 2019 but decreased by 4.7% from 2019 to 2024. The survey remained in the low percentile.

Overview of the Research Site Context

The Urban Area Elementary School is located in a Southeastern state, in a large metropolitan county with 764,382 residents as of 2020. The county area is 271 square miles and comprises 11 cities and several unincorporated areas. The county where the study occurred is culturally diverse, with over 64 spoken languages and the nation's second most affluent African American population. The Large Metropolitan County houses two school districts. The Urban Area Elementary School is in a zip-code area between two unincorporated communities in the Large Metropolitan County. According to the 2020 census, the zip code area has a total population of 24,823 residents. The population consists of 11,666 White residents, 5,461 Black residents, 5,212 Hispanic or Latino residents, and the remaining 2,484 residents are American Indian, Asian, or Multi-Race residents.

The Urban Area Elementary School is part of a Metropolitan Area School District (MASD) that serves 98,957 students, consisting of 46,306 elementary school students, 19,924 middle school students, 26,524 high school students, 1,898 program school students, and 4,305 charter school students. The Metropolitan Area School District has 139 schools and centers with 76 elementary schools, 19 middle schools, 22 high schools, 14 program schools, and eight charter schools. The Metropolitan Area School District employs 16,242 employees, including 6,600 teachers. This diverse Metropolitan Area School District has students from 166 countries

and 178 spoken languages. As of the 2023-2024 school year, the district's student racial breakdown is 60% Black (58,912 students), 19% Hispanic (19,114 students), 12% White (11,457 students), 7% Asian (6,872 students), and 3% other (2,206 students). The Metropolitan Area School District is dedicated to giving every student the best possible education through an intensive core curriculum and specialized, challenging instructional and career programs. The Urban Area Elementary School establish a school-wide positive behavior plan for all students to decrease the number of student behavior referrals in the classroom.

The Urban Area Elementary School (UAES) served a population of 654 students. It houses grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The second and fourth grades had three classrooms, and pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first, third, and fifth grades had four classrooms. The number of students in pre-kindergarten was 64 (9%), kindergarten was 91 students (14%), first grade was 97 students (15%), second grade was 90 students (14%), third grade was 103 students (16%), fourth grade was 112 students (17%), and fifth grade was 97 students (15%). The average classroom size was about 24 students per class. The student gender demographic was 328 male students and 316 female students. The student race/ethnic group demographics were 77% African American or Black, 15% Hispanic or Latino, 1% White, 4% multi-racial, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native. The Urban Area Elementary School is a transient school, which results in student enrollment increasing and decreasing throughout the school year. This study used action research to develop a support system for teachers while building their capacity through student-teacher relationships. The support system included two administrators (principal and assistant principal), two academic coaches, one multi-tiered specialist, and one counselor.

The Purpose of Study

This study examined how school leaders build capacity and support teachers with student-teacher relationships in an elementary school. The action research team examined the perspectives of school leaders and teachers as part of the school leadership team on how school leaders can build capacity and support teachers in establishing student-teacher relationships. The school leadership team sought perspectives on the impact of school leadership on student-teacher relationships through building capacity and supporting teachers.

Interventions were designed to reduce behavior referrals and to increase classroom engagement. The School Climate scores based on the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) for the Urban Area Elementary School were 85.0 in 2018, 84.2 in 2019, and 82.40 in 2024. The School Climate Star Rating is a diagnostic tool to determine if a school is on the right path to improvement. The rating is based on four components: student, teacher, and parent perceptions of a school's climate, student discipline data, safe and substance-free learning environment survey data, and school-wide attendance. For the current school year, the Urban Area Elementary School had five behavior incidents involving nine participants, an increase from the previous school year of one behavior incident involving four participants. Table 1.1 shows the percentage of each school climate indicator that contributed to the overall school performance score for school climate.

Table 1.1*School Climate CCRPI scores for UAES (2018-2019, 2023, 2024)*

School Report Year	School Performance on Each School Climate Indicator			
	Stakeholder Survey	Discipline	Safe Learning Environment	Attendance
2018	72.46	93.88	80.77	92.80
2019	74.70	91.81	76.74	84.57
2023				70.08
2024	69.42	91.13	78.70	71.41

Note. Data from Southeastern State's CCRPI Reporting System.

The School Performance Rating on the Stakeholder Survey is based on student, teacher, and parent perceptions of a school's climate. The School Climate Stakeholder Survey scores based on the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) for the Urban Area Elementary School were 72.46 in 2018, 74.70 in 2019 and 69.42 in 2024. As shown in Table 1.2, the student's perception of the school's climate based on survey results increased by 2.8% from 2018 to 2019 but decreased by 4.7% from 2019 to 2024. The student survey had the lowest percentage of all stakeholders on the survey.

Table 1.2*Stakeholder Survey CCRPI scores for UAES (2018-2019, 2024)*

School Report Year	Stakeholder Survey		
	Student	Teacher/Staff/Administrator	Parent
2018	66.16	70.57	80.64
2019	68.97	71.22	83.90
2024	64.24	63.29	80.73

Note. Data from Southeastern State's CCRPI Reporting System.

Hallinger and Heck (2010) believe that leadership and capacity building operate as a mutual influence process, which lends further weight to this perspective on leadership as a highly responsive and contextualized relational process. The student achievement and school climate data helped to frame the overall research questions to guide the purpose and focus of the study.

Research Questions

To address the purpose of this action research study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. How do elementary teachers describe the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?
2. How can school leaders support and build teacher capacity related to student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?
3. What does the action research design and implementation team learn through the development and implementation of structures for building and supporting student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?

Definition of Terms

For this study, the following key terms are defined:

- “Administration” in the context of an urban elementary school is the principal and assistant principal.
- “School Leadership Team” in an urban elementary school context is a group of teacher leaders, principals, assistant principals, counselors, academic coaches, and multi-tiered system specialist (MTSS) who serve as instructional leaders by supporting teachers with school-wide instructional initiatives.

- “School Leaders” in the Urban Area Elementary School context are the principal, assistant principal, academic coaches, counselors, multi-tiered system specialist (MTSS) and teacher leaders who assume an administrative and/or instructional leader role within the school.

Theoretical Framework

This action research focused on how school leaders build capacity and support teachers with student-teacher relationships in an elementary school. The theoretical framework of teacher self-efficacy supports the action research cycle for this study. Self-efficacy beliefs are generally defined as one's ability to initiate and maintain the courses of action needed to produce an anticipated outcome (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy beliefs, specific to a task or an area of knowledge or performance, shape the behaviors and strategies that help one pursue their goal. Self-efficacy is informed by five influences: performance experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, imaginal experience, and physical and emotional states.

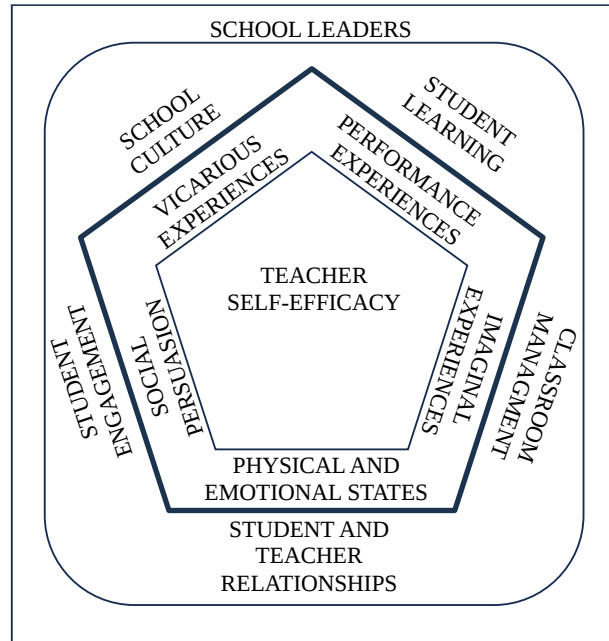
Bandura (1977) suggests that the most effective way of developing a strong sense of self-efficacy is through performance experiences. Performance experiences are when teachers or students with previous experience with success in teaching/learning have more confidence to complete similar tasks (high self-efficacy) than those who do not (low self-efficacy). Vicarious experience refers to the observed performances and experiences of others like oneself in a similar situation. Social persuasion refers to verbal encouragement or discouragement about a person's ability to perform. Imaginal experiences are visualizing oneself behaving effectively or successfully in a given situation. Physical and emotional states are based on the state a person is in and how it will influence the judgment of self-efficacy.

Teacher self-efficacy describes the beliefs a teacher maintains about his or her ability to successfully engage in and maintain courses of action necessary to accomplish a task at some level of proficiency in each context (Dellinger et al., 2008). It includes teachers' belief in their abilities to effectively handle the tasks, obligations, and challenges related to their professional activity. Teacher self-efficacy is crucial in influencing critical academic outcomes (students' achievement and motivation) and well-being in the working environment.

Self-efficacy derives from Bandura's social-cognitive theory of behavioral change (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy refers to a teacher's belief in their ability to successfully manage tasks, obligations, and challenges related to their professional role (Caprara et al., 2006). For teachers, teacher self-efficacy beliefs not only provide the motivation necessary to initiate a course of action (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1997) but also provide a critical filter for how individuals interpret and attribute environmental information about the success of their attempts (Bandura, 1986; Wheatley, 2002). Using teacher self-efficacy can create an opportunity to improve student outcomes by adjusting and strengthening the beliefs that teachers maintain about their abilities to build positive relationships with the students in their classroom (Ross & Bruce, 2007; Siwatu & Chesnut, 2015). Teachers who are confident in their abilities to deliver competent instruction and effective classroom management, seemingly through more effective responses to student needs, spend considerably more on teaching (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Figure 1.1

Theoretical Framework



Note. Adapted from Bandura's Self-Efficacy, 1977.

School leaders can improve teacher agency and ensure effective teaching participation in professional learning communities (Datnow, 2012; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger et al., 2017; Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Therefore, creating a work environment that motivates school leaders to increase teacher agency is critical in achieving the school's goals (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Leithwood & Sun, 2012). The people within the community where they work or learn constantly gather data on how they should act or perform to be considered socially accepted by the majority. Social acceptance impacts the self-efficacy of every individual within the organization. Self-efficacy is one's personal belief in his or her ability and competence to perform in each or future situation. In a school turnaround context, it boils down to finding ways to build an individual's (students, teachers, and leaders) confidence in their ability to achieve goals and success that may have never been experienced before.

Higher teacher self-efficacy beliefs are theorized to affect subjective interpretations of situations and free emotional resources that allow attention to be focused on building supportive and caring relationships with their students. Teachers' confidence influences their thought patterns and emotions and informs their beliefs about their role and capability to meet students' relational needs and how to respond to student interactions (Summers et al., 2017; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). Teacher self-efficacy beliefs within Bandura's social cognitive theory show that individuals appraise their abilities to successfully engage in specific behaviors as a function of their previous experiences, the consequences of engagements by like-peers, persuasive messages, and emotional solid/physiological reactions (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1997). These sources of information ultimately (a) provide the motivation to engage in specific behaviors and (b) set the filter that guides how individuals interpret and attribute environmental feedback to their behaviors. These outcomes are critical in understanding teacher ratings of relationship quality and improving the relationships teachers share with their students as they set the stage for understanding the relationships in a shared environment (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1997). Teachers confident in their ability to engage in various disciplinary and interaction techniques that promote healthy relationships are likelier to engage in these behaviors.

School leaders have direct and indirect effects on teachers. Supportive practices of school leaders affect teacher engagement in the learning and teaching processes (Kwakman, 2003). School leaders' expertise, skills, and perspectives will assist teachers in being successful in teaching and learning practices (Day & Leithwood, 2007). Teachers whose teaching and learning capacities are developed will directly impact student motivation and success (Lai et al., 2016). School leaders improve teacher self-efficacy (Liu & Hallinger, 2018), and teachers with solid

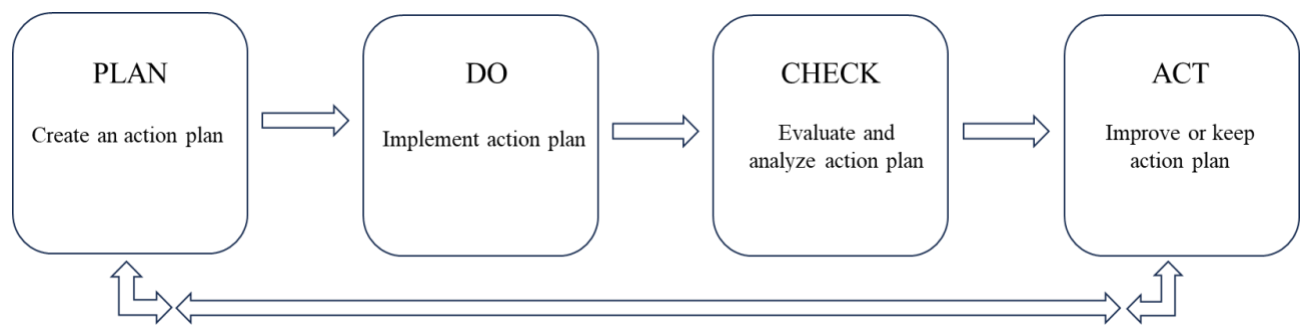
self-efficacy constantly try new teaching ideas and are willing to participate in the teaching process (Ross & Gray, 2006).

Logic Model

The logic model shown in Figure 1.2 provided the guide for the study, which examined how school leaders can impact student-teacher relationships by building capacity and supporting teachers. This model provides an opportunity for teachers to grow and a framework for school leaders to engage with the process.

Figure 1.2

Logic Model of Study



The study's foundation was the idea of continuous improvement of school leaders based on their knowledge and strategies for leading and supporting teachers. The current study examined how school leaders can engage in this process to support teachers in building student-teacher relationships.

The logic model used in this study consisted of four parts and provided a cycle of support and building capacity for school leaders and teachers. The cycle of support began with the School Leadership Team creating a plan of action by measuring current standards, brainstorming ideas for improvement, and setting objectives. The action plan was implemented by changing the existing procedures while adding support through professional development. The School

Leadership Team evaluated and analyzed improvements and implemented effective and preventative changes as needed. All existing data from the support cycle was analyzed and used to determine if there would be a permanent change to the school processes or if further adjustments are needed.

Theory of Change

This study examined how school leaders build capacity and support teachers with student-teacher relationships in an urban area elementary school. The action research team examined the perspectives of school leaders and teachers as part of the school leadership team on how school leaders can build capacity and support teachers in establishing student-teacher relationships. The school leadership team sought perspectives on the impact of school leadership on student-teacher relationships through building capacity and supporting teachers. Using teacher self-efficacy can create an opportunity to improve student outcomes by adjusting and strengthening the beliefs that teachers maintain about their abilities to build positive relationships with the students in their classroom (Ross & Bruce, 2007; Siwatu & Chesnut, 2015).

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to achieve an outcome or reach a goal (Bandura, 1977; Hajloo, 2014). This belief, specific to a task or an area of knowledge or performance, shapes the behaviors and strategies that help one pursue their goals (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy refers to a teacher's belief in their ability to successfully manage tasks, obligations, and challenges related to their professional role (Caprara et al., 2006). High self-efficacy can also motivate students to use specific learning strategies and to engage in self-directed learning (Zimmerman & Martinez-Ponz, 1990). One's sense of self-efficacy can provide the foundation for motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishment. People's beliefs in their efficacy are developed by five primary sources of influence: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences,

social persuasion, imaginal experience, and physical and emotional states (Bandura, 1977). School leaders improve teacher self-efficacy (Liu & Hallinger, 2018), and teachers with solid self-efficacy constantly try new teaching ideas and are willing to participate in the teaching process (Ross & Gray, 2006).

Overview of the Methodology

Action research is a method of systematic inquiry undertaken for and by the entities taking action. The primary reason for pursuing action research is to assist practitioners such as educators in improving and refine their actions (Sengupta, 2021). Educators use action research to become more effective at teaching and developing students, making them grow and make a real difference in their lives (Sagor, 2000). Implementing action research brings about organizational change, develops self-help competencies in organizational members, and adds to scientific knowledge (Coghlan, 2019). Action research is an empirical process since practitioners pursue problem-specific investigation in practice. This process aims to generate and disseminate knowledge in social sciences (Sengupta, 2021). Action research can be used to evaluate if work is contributing to one's own or other people's learning or whether there is a need to do something different. Action research could be seen as acting for oneself, others, and the world (McNiff, 2017).

Action research aims to improve practices and offer descriptions and explanations for what one does when one acts (McNiff, 2017). Educational action research is widely seen as a methodology for real-world social change (McNiff, 2017). Using an action research approach, practitioners aim to generate personal and collective theories about how their learning has improved practices and inform new practices for themselves and others (McNiff, 2017). Action research insists on teachers justifying their claims to knowledge by producing authenticated and

validated evidence and then making their claims public to subject them to critical evaluation (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). In this study, the primary practitioner and the action research team used the literature surrounding the impact of school leaders on school culture, student learning outcomes, and teacher instructional practices in the classroom to create a small group to support teachers with instruction that served as the implementation team.

The action research team supported elementary teachers by seeking out the role of school leaders as school culture leaders building teacher capacity and describing the impact of school leadership on student-teacher relationships. Educational action research focuses on studying the process of teaching and learning. This type of educational research aims to develop universal theories and discover generalized principles and best strategies that ultimately improve the quality of education (Efron & Ravid, 2020).

Action research was an appropriate methodology for this study because it involves people studying themselves and their work and asking questions about what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how they can improve it (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). It is a practical form of inquiry that enables anyone in every job to investigate and evaluate their work (McNiff, 2017).

Interventions

The primary intervention of this study took the form of a school leadership team comprised of academic coaches, multi-tiered system specialist, counselor, assistant principal, and the researcher. The primary intervention of this study was based on the feedback on the Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) worksheet and the Continuous School-wide Improvement Plan (CSIP). These are tools provided by the Southeastern State Department of Education and Metropolitan Area School District. These documents must be submitted before the start of a new school year. The Urban Area Elementary School (UAES) priorities were

content mastery in all core content areas and school climate. These participants were involved in two CSIP planning meetings and three monitoring cycle meetings. Student data were presented at these meetings, and all participants were asked to provide feedback on a Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) worksheet.

The CNA worksheet allowed the school leadership team to provide input on the strengths, needs, and priorities of the Urban Area Elementary School in student achievement and school climate. In these meetings, all stakeholders carefully examined the data, determined specific areas of need, and identified strategies to increase student achievement. Southeastern State Assessments, Metropolitan Area School District Assessments, and Southeastern State Academic Standards were reviewed with all stakeholders at all meetings. The school leadership team analyzed perception data over the last three years, as observed and documented during focus walks and informal and formal observations. The three-year trend data showed a need to increase the teacher expertise in priority areas based on the Continuous School-wide Improvement Plan.

The Urban Area Elementary School established a school-wide positive behavior plan that includes Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies for all students to decrease the number of student behavior referrals and increase student engagement in the classroom. Teachers participated in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies for professional development, such as how to establish Morning Meetings based on Responsive Classroom Strategies. Teachers learned how to implement daily Morning Meetings in their classrooms. Morning Meeting is an engaging way to start each day, build a strong sense of community, and set children up for success socially and academically. It promoted a climate of trust, academic growth, and positive behavior. The professional development was based on a school-wide positive behavior plan.

Teachers used SEL strategies to build positive student-teacher relationships and decrease student misbehavior and behavior referrals. The administrative team and counselor provided feedback to teachers, ensuring the appropriate use of SEL strategies.

Significance of the Study

As new federal and state standards and school accountability issues increase, the focus on effective school leaders becomes more prominent. School leaders are directly accountable for all students' academic success and maintaining a positive school culture. The researcher's findings provided school leaders with suggested information regarding the changing role of school leaders and their leadership behaviors that promote positive school culture through student-teacher relationships and information about strategies, programs, and organizational structures supported by school leaders that build capacity and support teachers in elementary schools. Various college and leadership preparation programs may benefit from the findings in the study to provide professional development for school leaders and to promote significant changes in schools.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study of this dissertation and lays out an overview of the research questions, the problem of practice, and methods for the study. Chapter 2 reviews the related literature for the study and discusses the importance of student-teacher relationships, strategies associated with establishing student-teacher relationships, and leadership practices that support teachers with student-teacher relationships. Chapter 3 describes the methodology involved in action research and the qualitative methods related to this study and amplifies the context in which the study was conducted. Chapter 4 examines the findings from the action research case.

Chapter 5 details the Analysis of Findings from the Action Research Case based on the action research cycles related to the research questions that guided this study. This chapter also describes and analyzes the interventions the researcher and the action research team implemented. Chapter 6 summarizes the study, discusses the findings from the research questions, and offers implications for school leaders and further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

School culture has an impact on the implementation of school reform initiatives. The power of school leaders can impact school culture by building a positive school culture and improving the organizational performance of schools by cultivating trust and relationship building. School culture can promote growth and leadership capacity in staff and maintain explicit and purposeful communication (Hollingworth et al., 2018). Educational researchers have chronicled many educational benefits correlated to positive school culture and relationships between teachers and students. This research has indicated that a school culture that consists of students who learn to regulate their emotions and thought processes has been linked to an increase in positive social and academic experiences, which is crucial to healthy development (Connor et al., 2016; Duong et al., 2019; Rice, 2019). Inversely, theory and preceding research have demonstrated that negative school culture and student-teacher relationships have been affiliated with low levels of academic performance (Van Craeyveldt et al., 2018).

While research is plentiful on the many benefits linked to establishing positive relationships with students, research on the actual strategies used by school leaders to support and build capacity in teachers to form positive student-teacher relationships is sparse (Yang et al., 2018). The connection between positive student-teacher relationships and academic achievement is a significant benefit, making this topic an important avenue for further research (Longobardi et al., 2021). Student-teacher relationships are relationships between teachers and students to promote trust and respect in the classroom. Positive student-teacher relationships help

students succeed and create a safe and welcoming learning environment (Coristine et al., 2022). Student-teacher relationships matter and remain essential as students' progress through school (Allen et al., 2021; Longobardi et al., 2016).

This literature review explores school leaders' impact on student-teacher relationships by examining their importance, determining strategies for establishing them and evaluating leadership practices that build capacity and support teachers in improving them. School leaders are pivotal to the success of any significant change in schools (Leithwood et al., 2019). Many leadership scholars have focused on discovering what school leaders do to improve and promote change within schools (Leithwood, 2021).

The Importance of Student-Teacher Relationships

Strong and positive relationships between teachers and students are fundamental to promoting student engagement, social-emotional development, and academic growth (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2019). Student-teacher relationships can be highly essential in an effective classroom. Student-teacher relationships are meaningful for students in their short-term and long-term education. Positive relationships may decrease behavioral problems and promote academic success (Coristine et al., 2022). Positive student-teacher relationships can develop more vital social and emotional skills. Students are more likely to absorb an increased amount of academic knowledge. Strong student-teacher relationships can make students feel confident through exploration and taking risks in their academic tasks. Students with a positive student-teacher relationship demonstrate more robust performance in the classroom, improve mental health, assist students in developing self-worth, and incorporate mutual respect in the classroom environment (Coristine et al., 2022).

Classroom Engagement

Student-teacher relationships have many advantages in the classroom, such as students developing solid social-emotional skills, increasing academic knowledge, and self-motivation (Coristine et al., 2022). The quality of student-teacher relationships may be paramount to student engagement in the classroom (Pianta et al., 2003). Students experience higher levels of overall school engagement when their relationships with teachers are marked by positive quality (Zee & Koomen, 2020). High-quality relationships with teachers increase the degree of engagement students experience when working on classroom assignments and increase a child's academic achievement (Hamre et al., 2013; Rucinski et al., 2018). Students who feel that the teacher recognizes their efforts and skills are more eager to explore and learn and have higher self-esteem and confidence in their learning ability (Zee & Koomen, 2020).

Student Learning Outcomes

The nature and quality of the early student-teacher relationships significantly impact a child's learning and development (Hamre & Pinata, 2001). According to Roorda et al. (2011), a positive student-teacher relationship stimulates learning behavior and supports students in dealing with the demands of the school context. Roorda et al. (2011) examined affective student-teacher relationships and school achievement. The study analysis showed that positive relationships accounted for positive student achievement with small effect sizes in primary and secondary education. Student-teacher relationships may have an impact on student learning and academic achievement. Students motivated to seek teacher approval based on relationships and interactions in the classroom may employ achievement-related behaviors to meet this goal (Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004). Positive relationships have been found to help teachers adopt more

effective teaching practices (Alsobaie, 2015). Moreover, they have been found to significantly contribute to improving student achievements (Edgerson et al., 2006).

Student Classroom Behaviors

Positive student-teacher relationships in early childhood have the potential to influence fewer behavioral concerns throughout elementary school (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). When students believe their teachers care for them, they are more likely to respond with more effort, set numerous goals for themselves, and exhibit greater compliance with teachers' behavioral and academic expectations (Zee & Koomen, 2020). Student-teacher relationships characterized by conflict or disconnect are associated with increased problem behaviors in young children and can compound the risk of school failure (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). A positive student-teacher relationship can improve appropriate behaviors, reduce the number of students on behavior intervention plans, and serve as positive behavior support for students in the classroom (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2019).

Strategies Associated with Establishing Student-Teacher Relationships

School leaders and teachers can engage in intentional practices to promote the development of positive relationships with all students (Cook et al., 2018). Student-teacher relationships are established by establishing personal connections with their students, ensuring students feel cared for and supported, establishing high expectations for student success, and providing constructive guidance to ensure students meet those expectations (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2019). Strong student-teacher relationships can be created by showing that the teacher cares about the students (Coristine et al., 2022). Student-teacher relationships can be established by talking with students, such as asking about their day. Another way could be by listening to

students' opinions, considering their interests, and learning about each student's unique learning styles (Coristine et al., 2022).

Social and Emotional Learning

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) involves implementing practices and policies that help children and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to enhance personal development, establish satisfying interpersonal relationships, and lead to practical and ethical work and productivity (Weissberg et al., 2015). SEL can build social-emotional skills by maintaining cooperative relationships, making responsible decisions, managing strong emotions, communicating clearly and assertively, solving problems effectively, recognizing emotions in oneself and others, and empathizing with others (Is & Matters, 2019). Schools can provide opportunities for teachers to get to know their students using SEL programs that give students agency for their classroom's emotional climate and develop students' understanding of engagement and relationships (Dobia et al., 2019).

Learner-Centered Instruction

Learner-centered teaching practices focus on student voices, promote higher-order thinking, align teaching with individual needs, and adapt instruction associated with positive student outcomes (Allen et al., 2021). Learner-centered instruction can take many forms and look different in schools and classrooms. Learner-centered practices include problem-based, project-based, and inquiry-based learning (An & Mindrila, 2020). The strategies and tools used for learner-centered instruction are getting to know individual students, building a positive and supportive culture, providing personalized learning experiences, providing authentic learning experiences, facilitating collaborative learning, and facilitating self-regulated learning (An &

Mindrila, 2020). Leader-centered education believes learners "make sense or make meaning out of information and experience in their way" (Reigeluth et al., 2017, p.12).

Positive Classroom Management

Teachers can establish student-teacher relationships by incorporating positive classroom management strategies before and during instruction. It is essential to explicitly state clear classroom rules, teach and reteach routines, and communicate expectations and consequences of misbehavior (Kennedy & Haydon, 2021). Establishing classroom rules and routines and intentionally teaching students what expected behaviors look like in the classroom setting effectively prevent problem behaviors before they occur (Alter & Haydon, 2017). Sharing with students what consequences for misbehavior will look like before they are needed also contributes to a sense of predictability and fairness in the classroom (Van Loan & Marlowe, 2013).

When addressing classroom misbehavior, it is essential to deliver direction in a calm voice, demonstrate respect for the student, and avoid power struggles (Van Loan & Garwood, 2020). Classroom misbehaviors can also be addressed by reteaching the classroom expectations, providing specific behavioral feedback about misbehaviors, and aligning with classroom rules (Murray & Pianta, 2007; Van Loan & Marlowe, 2013). These strategies can contribute to predictability and consistency in the classroom and support close student-teacher relationships (Kennedy & Haydon, 2021).

Leadership Practices that Support Teachers with Student-Teacher Relationships

School leaders have the opportunity and responsibility to create a learning environment that enables well-being in those they lead (Allen et al., 2018). A practical element of practice for school leaders to improve the outcome of students is to engage in meaningful attempts to

improve student-teacher relationships (Sutherland et al., 2019). School leaders can support teachers with student-teacher relationships by creating a safe and supportive learning environment for all stakeholders, ensuring time during the school day to establish positive relationships with students, supporting a school-wide behavior policy that is relational, and encouraging teachers to provide social and emotional support to students (Allen et al., 2018; O'Keeffe, 2013).

Leadership styles can promote a positive school culture that includes how others experience school leaders as caring, cultivating a caring community by building the caring capacity of others, creating dense social relationships within the school, creating conditions that enable caring, and developing caring contexts beyond the school (Ryu et al., 2022).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership draws attention to a broader array of school and classroom conditions that may need to be changed if learning is to improve (Leithwood & Levin, 2010). Transformational leadership has traditionally emphasized vision and inspiration, focusing on establishing structures and cultures that enhance the quality of teaching and learning, setting directions, developing people, and (re)designing the organization. Transformational leadership sees the leaders' prime focus as responsibility for promoting better measurable outcomes for students, emphasizing the importance of enhancing the quality of classroom teaching and learning (Day et al., 2016). Bass (1985) suggests that transformational leadership builds relationships by employing one or more factors associated with transformational leadership, such as charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Transformational leadership, as an external environmental factor, positively predicts the internal

social-emotional competence of the teacher, and then the teacher's internal social-emotional competence positively predicts the external student-teacher relationship (Tian et al., 2022).

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership encourages improving teachers' classroom practices as the school's direction (Leithwood & Levin, 2010). Instructional leadership is said to emphasize, above all else, the importance of establishing clear educational goals, planning the curriculum, and evaluating teachers and teaching (Day et al., 2016). Instructional leadership is "improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their best" through instructional leadership (The Wallace Foundation, 2012). The pivotal leadership practice of instructional leadership focuses on influential leaders having a "laser-like" focus on the quality of instruction in their schools, emphasizing research-based strategies to improve teaching and learning while initiating discussions about instructional approaches (The Wallace Foundation, 2012).

School leaders who implement instructional leadership practices can influence teachers' teaching strategies and support the development of motivation, loyalty, and satisfaction among teachers, which, in turn, influence student outcomes (Supovitz et al., 2010; Thoonen et al., 2012). The capacity to build good relationships with students and teachers may be seen as vital for instructional leadership. Positive relationships constitute the basis for effective instructional leadership (Robinson, 2010). Positive relationships with students and teachers enable school leaders to be authentic and open instructional leaders who can listen, empathize, interact, and connect with students and teachers in productive, helping ways. Through such relationships, school leaders as instructional leaders can engage with students and teachers in constructive and respectful conversations about teaching and learning (Le Fevre & Robinson, 2015).

Shared, Collaborative, and Collective Leadership

Shared, collaborative, and collective leadership practices significantly improve school outcomes compared to those focusing solely on the role of school leaders. However, they mask the complexity of leadership systems in real schools (Louis et al., 2010). Hallinger and Heck (2010) described team-oriented, shared, and collaborative leadership as similar concepts that collectively combine formal and informal leadership roles. Research has also operationalized distributed leadership as shared and collaborative (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

Shared leadership is teachers' influence over and participation in school-wide decisions with school leaders (Louis et al., 2010). Collaborative leadership can also affect school improvement capacity and student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Collaborative school leadership can positively impact student learning in reading and math by building the school's capacity for academic improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Collective leadership influences school decisions by educators, parents, and students associated with the school. Collective leadership is linked to student achievement through teacher motivation and work-setting characteristics (Louis et al., 2010).

Chapter Summary

The research suggests that positive relationship establishment is essential in shaping how students learn to interact with others and is related to positive outcomes in academic settings (Chen et al., 2020; Cook et al., 2018; Goldie & O'Conner, 2021). In the classroom context, a teacher-student relationship is the key to academic, social, and emotional success. When educators devote time to research-based strategies to establish positive student-teacher relationships, the benefits are numerous (Rice, 2019; Salisbury, 2018; Trang & Hansen, 2021).

The literature on building positive student-teacher relationships is plentiful. However, the available studies analyze unique components of student-teacher relationships. However, they need to elaborate on which practices and strategies school leaders find most impactful in supporting teachers in establishing, maintaining, and restoring student-teacher relationships. For example, student-teacher relationships motivate teachers to dedicate more time and resources to promote students' success. Supportive relationships with teachers help maintain students' interest in academic activities and foster positive peer relationships. Positive connections with teachers can promote students' academic and social-emotional well-being, safety, and belonging in a learning environment that can have a long-term impact on social and academic outcomes.

Research has demonstrated that teachers and school personnel benefit from positive student-teacher relationships. Student-teacher relationships are a necessary education component that increases job satisfaction, reduces teacher burnout, and curtails classroom management concerns (Arens & Niepel, 2019; Hamre & Pinata, 2004). Cook et al. (2017) conducted a study where the ratio of positive-to-negative interactions regarding students' classroom behavior was evaluated. The study revealed a positive association between positive interactions and improved student behavior but did not reveal specific information on what positive interactions look like in a classroom setting (Cook et al., 2017).

Although building positive student-teacher relationships has proven beneficial for teachers and students, research is only beginning to delve into how educators can intentionally work towards building positive student-teacher relationships. Few programs prepare educators to adequately establish, maintain, and restore positive student-teacher relationships in an academic setting (Cook et al., 2018). Therefore, more research is needed to examine the practices and strategies deeply intertwined with student-teacher relationships (Yang et al., 2018). To improve

relationship development and student success in schools, meaningful fieldwork regarding this avenue of research should be explored. At the same time, strategies and programs in the education field should be closely analyzed to assist future generations in cultivating meaningful relationships (Cook et al., 2017; Duong et al., 2019; Henry & Thorsen, 2018).

Chapter 3 describes the action research methodology and explores the foundation for further research development, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. The next chapter also describes in detail the interventions of this study.

CHAPTER 3

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

School leaders are pivotal to the success of any significant change in schools (Leithwood et al., 2019). According to Leithwood et al. (2019), discipline, climate, and collective teacher efficacy have had the most impact on student learning outcomes when used by school leaders. The power of school leaders can impact school culture by building a positive school culture and improving the organizational performance of schools by cultivating trust and relationship building. School culture can promote growth and leadership capacity in staff and maintain explicit and purposeful communication (Hollingworth et al., 2018). When educators devote time to research-based strategies to establish positive student-teacher relationships, the benefits are numerous (Rice, 2019; Salisbury, 2018; Trang & Hansen, 2021).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how school leaders build capacity and support teachers with student-teacher relationships in an elementary school. The action research team examined the perspectives of school leaders and teachers as part of the school leadership team on how school leaders can build capacity and support teachers in establishing student-teacher relationships. The school leadership team sought perspectives on the impact of school leadership on student-teacher relationships through building capacity and supporting teachers.

Research Questions

To address the purpose of this action research study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. How do elementary teachers describe the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?
2. How can school leaders support and build teacher capacity related to student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?
3. What does the action research design and implementation team learn by developing and implementing structures for building and supporting student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?

Chapter 3 explores the logic model that guided the study, explains the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis, and discusses the study's reliability, validity, and trustworthiness.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

While the benefits of positive student-teacher relationships are frequently referenced, there remains a need to understand how educators establish positive student-teacher relationships (Acar et al., 2021; Archambault et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2021; Cook et al., 2018). Yu et al. (2018) stated that more research is needed to pinpoint factors that advance positive student-teacher relationships. Lind et al. (2017) state that further research is needed to validate practices that lead to positive student-teacher relationships. A qualitative research method was used to gather data on the impact of elementary school leaders on building capacity and supporting teachers in establishing positive student-teacher relationships.

A qualitative research method is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world and consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, how people make sense of their world,

and the experiences they have in the world. Qualitative research strives to improve the lives of those involved. Qualitative research is unique in its ability to enable those experiencing inadequate practice or some form of injustice the opportunity to act by investigating the reasonings and creating a plan for how to resolve the concerning matter. The qualitative paradigm focuses on the voices of the participants. Therefore, the experts are the participants rather than the researchers (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

Qualitative research allowed the researcher to understand the essence of being a school leader who impacts student-teacher relationships. This study examined how school leaders support and build teacher capacity by establishing student-teacher relationships in an urban elementary school. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on the participants' perspectives on the impact of school leaders on student-teacher relationships. Using qualitative collection methods such as interviews, observations, and reviewing school artifacts, the study explored the impact of school leaders on student-teacher relationships with participants.

Overview of Action Research Methods

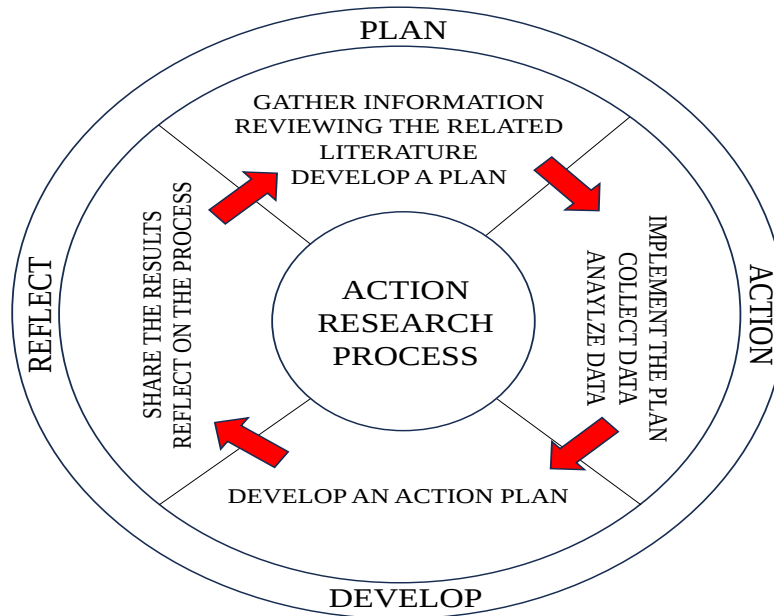
Action research is utilized by a researcher who is actively involved in the field that they are researching. More so, the researcher is driven to investigate their chosen topic to support those around them better (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The opportunity to delve into the personal history, passions, and goals of those involved in the research is one of the most rewarding and inspiring pieces of action research (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The distinctive features of action research exploit the researcher's personal experiences, cycling the reflective process with that of postulating ideas to enact change (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

Action research is often grounded in a social constructivism paradigm, a key aspect when exploring how school leaders impact student-teacher relationships. Social constructivism can be defined as a worldview wherein individuals seek an understanding of their known world in a manner that is of their own experience (Creswell, 2013). Constructivism is a philosophical view that holds that human beings construct reality through their interactions, interpretations, and experiences (Bloomberg, 2023). Constructivism assumes no objective truth exists but multiple subjective realities that depend on the participants' context and perspective. Constructivism values the meanings, insights, and understandings that people create in their social and cultural contexts. Constructivism aims to explore and understand the participants' meanings, perspectives, and experiences in their specific contexts (Bloomberg, 2023). Qualitative methods allow detailed data collection, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis. Constructivist researchers acknowledge their role and positionality as researchers and how they influence their data collection and analysis (Bloomberg, 2023).

Action research is a research method that aims to investigate and solve an issue simultaneously. In other words, as its name suggests, action research conducts research and acts simultaneously (Cohen et al., 2017). Action research has historically been viewed as cyclical (Mertler & Charles, 2008). Ordinarily, teacher-researchers design and implement a project, collect and analyze data to monitor and evaluate the project's effectiveness, and then make revisions and improvements to the project for future implementation (Mertler, 2009). Figure 3.1 illustrates the four-stage cycle of research the Action Research Design Team and researcher conducted to examine the specific steps of conducting this research study and the nine steps that comprise the action research process.

Figure 3.1

Action Research Process



Note. Adapted from Mertler (2009)

The guiding principles of action research promote the collaborative undertaking to confront certain communal conditions to create change for the benefit of those impacted (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Having the opportunity to address issues in the classroom setting alongside fellow educators and those invested in the more significant interests of the students is what educational action research inspires. Most educators pursue their profession as teachers due to their inspiration to connect, motivate, and help the youth in one form or another. Educators design research and implement methods that better suit students' development and performance, utilizing their energy and passion for research (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

Educational action research focuses on studying the process of teaching and learning. This type of educational research aims to develop universal theories and discover generalized principles and best strategies that ultimately improve the quality of education (Efron & Ravid,

2020). Educational action research and qualitative research act as cohesive principles in the classroom. The reflexivity of researchers' understanding of their previous experiences and approaches shapes their understanding of research (Creswell, 2013). Educational action research adapts the core values of action research and enhances those with collaboration with other teachers to address concerns experienced in the classroom.

The methodology of educational action research inspires those who desire modification to create change. When educational action research is involved, not only do the students benefit from improving the classroom setting, but the teachers also improve their morale and effectiveness (Creswell, 2013). Teachers are evaluated and developed through their ability to reflect on a lesson, analyze, and construct various methods of improving each lesson (Creswell, 2013). Each teacher has a unique understanding of the techniques used to improve the educational process. The reflective and developmental processes are almost always collaborative efforts. It would be a tactless oversight to exclude those with different viewpoints to aid in developing progressions in the classroom. The social aspect of classroom interactions paves the way for subjective interpretations of the experiences and connections between the student and the teacher (Creswell, 2013).

Action research is most influential and impactful when, in collaboration with other individuals of the same community, researchers become invested in questioning previous practices and exploring methods of improving them (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The action research team supported elementary teachers by seeking out the role of school leaders as school culture leaders building teacher capacity and describing the impact of school leadership on student-teacher relationships.

Action Research Design

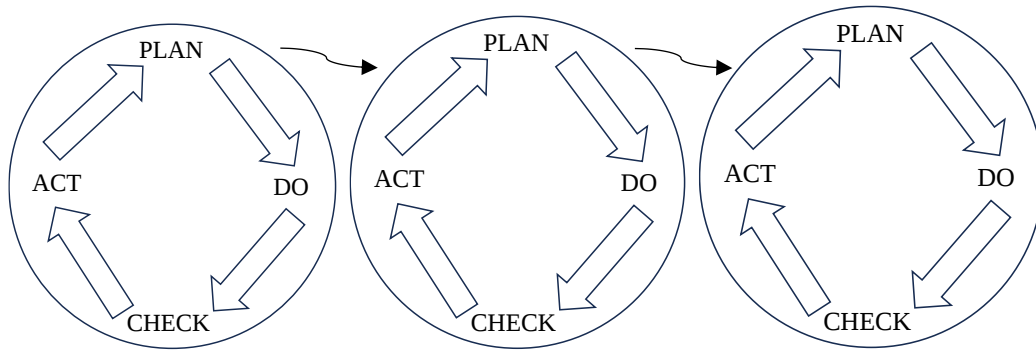
During the study, the Action Research Design team spiraled through the Plan-Do-Check-Act, the action research cycle designed to support school leaders in building capacity and supporting teachers in student-teacher relationships at the Urban Area Elementary School. Action research allowed the researcher and the participants to reflect on the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships, how school leaders can support and build capacity in teachers related to student-teacher relationships and learning through the development and implementation of structures for building and supporting student-teacher relationships.

The Spiraling and Iterative Nature of Research

Action research is a recursive, cyclical process (Johnson, 2016). Researchers who employ action research design and implement a plan, collect and analyze data to monitor and evaluate the plan's effectiveness, and then make revisions and improvements to the plan for future implementation (Mertler, 2009). Figure 3.2 shows the spiraling and iterative nature of action research, as Mertler (2009) envisioned. This study was significant because school culture, from the student's perspective, and behavior infractions were deficits in the Urban Area Elementary School. Focusing the school's efforts on improving student-teacher relationships has developed positive relationships, improved school culture, and minimized behavior infractions. The process for this study was cyclical: gathering information, planning actions, observing and evaluating activities, reflecting, and planning (Mertler, 2017). This process provided the design and implementation teams feedback on whether the interventions were effective.

Figure 3.2

The Spiraling Nature of Action Research



Note: Adapted from Mertler (2017); Shewhart & Deming (1986)

This iterative approach is often referred to in the literature as a Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle. PDCA is an iterative design and management method used in business to control and continually improve processes and products (Tague, 2023). The cycle draws its structure from the notion that constant evaluation of management practices and the willingness of management to adopt and disregard unsupported ideas is critical to the evolution of a successful enterprise (Shewhart & Deming, 1986). The Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle is a well-known model for the continuous improvement process. It teaches organizations to plan an action, do it, check how it conforms to the plan, and act on what has been learned (Johnson, 2016). This study used the PDCA cycle methodology to design and test a prototype to monitor how school leaders support and build capacity in teachers with student-teacher relationships.

Logic Model

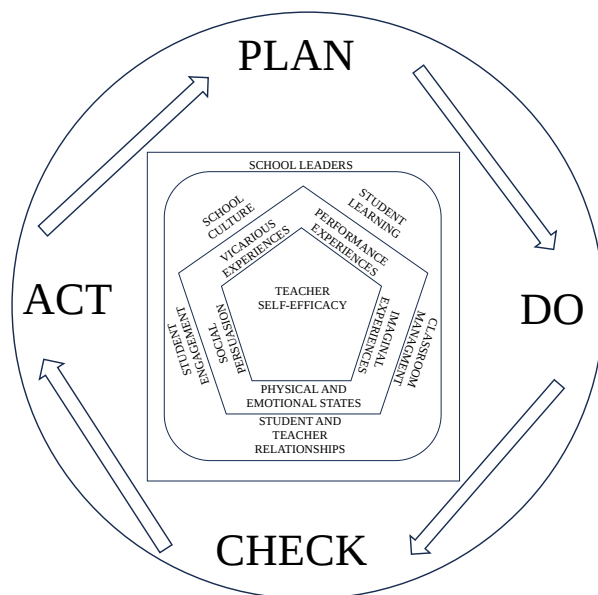
This study examined how school leaders impact student-teacher relationships by building capacity and supporting teachers. This model provides an opportunity for growth for teachers and a framework that allows school leaders to engage with the process. The foundation of the study was the idea of continuous improvement of school leaders based on their knowledge and

strategies used to lead and support teachers. The current study examined how school leaders can engage in this process to support teachers in building student-teacher relationships.

The logic model used in this study consisted of four parts and provided a cycle of support and building capacity for school leaders and teachers. The Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle shown in Figure 3.3 provided a specific structure for the School Leadership Team to create a plan of action by measuring current standards, brainstorming ideas for improvement, and setting objectives. The action plan was implemented by changing the existing procedures while adding support through professional development. The School Leadership Team evaluated and analyzed improvements and implemented effective and preventative changes as needed. All existing data from the support cycle was analyzed and used to determine if there would be a permanent change to the school processes or if further adjustments are needed.

Figure 3.3

Logic Model for the Study



Note: Adapted from Bandura (1977); Shewhart & Deming (1986)

Theory of Change

This study examined how school leaders build capacity and support teachers with student-teacher relationships in an urban elementary school. The action research team examined the perspectives of school leaders and teachers as part of the school leadership team on how school leaders can build capacity and support teachers in establishing student-teacher relationships. The school leadership team sought perspectives on the impact of school leadership on student-teacher relationships through building capacity and supporting teachers. Using teacher self-efficacy can create an opportunity to improve student outcomes by adjusting and strengthening the beliefs that teachers maintain about their abilities to build positive relationships with the students in their classroom (Ross & Bruce, 2007; Siwatu & Chesnut, 2015).

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to achieve an outcome or reach a goal (Bandura, 1977; Hajloo, 2014). This belief, specific to a task or an area of knowledge or performance, shapes the behaviors and strategies that help one pursue their goals (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy refers to a teacher's belief in their ability to successfully manage tasks, obligations, and challenges related to their professional role (Caprara et al., 2006). High self-efficacy can also motivate students to use specific learning strategies and to engage in self-directed learning (Zimmerman & Martinez-Ponz, 1990). One's sense of self-efficacy can provide the foundation for motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishment. People's beliefs in their efficacy are developed by five primary sources of influence: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, imaginal experience, and physical and emotional states (Bandura, 1977). School leaders improve teacher self-efficacy (Liu & Hallinger, 2018), and teachers with solid self-efficacy constantly try new teaching ideas and are willing to participate in the teaching process (Ross & Gray, 2006).

The Case

Case study research represents a much broader category of analysis (Yin, 2017). The topics of case study research vary widely. Doing case study research means conducting an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its natural context using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2017). Case study research typically focuses on an individual representative of a group or organization, such as a school administrator (Hancock et al., 2021). In this study, the researcher explored how school leaders impact student-teacher relationships in an urban area elementary school. The action research was completed at an urban area elementary school with a recent trend of low school climate data based on a school climate survey from the perspective of students and an increase in behavior infractions with a decrease in student achievement data.

The researched phenomenon is studied in its natural context, bounded by space and time (Hancock et al., 2021). The researcher investigated student-teacher relationships in an urban elementary school during a specific time. Case study research is richly descriptive because it is grounded in deep and varied sources of information (Hancock et al., 2021). The researcher and Action Research Design Team illustrated how school leaders can impact student-teacher relationships by developing and implementing structures related to student-teacher relationships with surveys, observations, and interviews. These qualitative methods were used to obtain the data needed to answer the proposed research questions.

Action Research Design Team

The action research design team comprised of the principal, assistant principal, academic coaches, multi-tiered system specialist (MTSS), and counselor. They developed and implemented structures for building and supporting student-teacher relationships as a team. During the

process, the team gathered information about the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships and how school leaders can support and build teacher capacity with student-teacher relationships related to the Urban Area Elementary School. This information included compiling observation notes and school culture data from surveys, interviews, and observations. After reviewing this information, a plan was created for the action research implementation team. The researcher evaluated and reflected after teachers were provided professional development and time to practice. Table 3.1 lists the members of the Action Research Design Team and their roles in this study.

Table 3.1

Action Research Design Team

Team Member	Primary Role at Urban Area Elementary School	Action Research Role
Primary Researcher	Principal	Led and conducted all research with the Action Research Design Team for data analysis. The Primary Researcher brought 6 years of experience as an assistant principal and 3 years of previous instructional coaching experience.
Assistant Principal	Assistant Principal	Provided context and charge for the schoolwide leadership team and perspective for action research. Brought 20 years of administrative experience and 3 years as an assistant principal.
Counselor	Counselor	Provided 10 years of classroom instruction experience with 10 years of counseling experience.
Multi-tiered Specialist	Multi-tiered Specialist	Provided 16 years of classroom instruction experience with 3 years of

Team Member	Primary Role at Urban Area Elementary School	Action Research Role
Academic Coach (Math)	Academic Coach	instructional coaching experience. Provided 15 years of classroom instruction experience with 5 years of instructional coaching experience.
Academic Coach (Reading)	Academic Coach	Provided 15 years of classroom instruction experience with 5 years of instructional coaching experience.

Action Research Implementation Team

The Action Research Implementation Team consisted of teachers in third through fifth grade. The teachers' years of experience varied from 10 to 25 years of experience. Each teacher was certified in multiple content areas. Some teachers had additional certifications, including gifted certification, English as a Second Language (ESOL) certifications, and special education certifications. Each teacher who participated has worked at the Urban Area Elementary School for three or more years. Teachers participated based on a schoolwide initiative for support with establishing and sustaining student-teacher relationships to improve school culture and minimize behavior infractions. Table 3.2 lists the members of the Action Research Implementation Team, their primary role at the Urban Area Elementary School, and their teaching experience.

Table 3.2*Action Research Implementation Team*

Team Members	Primary Role at Urban Area Elementary School	Teaching Experience
Third Grade Teacher	Third Grade	Provided 24 years of classroom instruction experience.
Fourth Grade Teacher	Fourth Grade	Provided 10 years of classroom instruction experience.
Fifth Grade Teacher	Fifth Grade	Provided 10 years of classroom instruction experience.

Research Plan and Timeline

This research aligned with building capacity and supporting teachers with student-teacher relationships because the study results reviewed teacher feedback and professional development that provided wide-ranging descriptions. This research aimed to build teacher confidence in establishing and sustaining student-teacher relationships. Table 3.3 outlines implementing a schoolwide positive behavior plan and Morning Meetings to build student-teacher relationships within the research cycles.

Table 3.3*Action Research Timeline*

Date	Action Research Activity
October 2024 – November 2024	Teachers participated in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies for professional development and complete a survey about their current practices. The professional development was based on a schoolwide positive behavior plan and the implementation of morning meetings. Teachers used SEL strategies to build positive student-teacher relationships and decrease student misbehavior and behavior referrals. The action research team conducted interviews and classroom observations and provide feedback to teachers, ensuring the appropriate use of SEL strategies.
November 2024- December 2024	The research design team established a schoolwide positive behavior plan and Morning Meeting framework that includes Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies for all students to decrease the number of student behavior referrals and increase student engagement in the classroom.
December 2024- January 2025	Teachers implemented daily Morning Meetings and the schoolwide positive behavior plan in their classrooms. Morning Meetings are an engaging way to start each day, build a strong sense of community, and set children up for success socially and academically. They promoted a climate of trust, academic growth, and positive behavior. The action research team conducted interviews and classroom observations and provide feedback to teachers, ensuring the appropriate use of SEL strategies in the schoolwide positive behavior plan and Morning Meetings.

Context of the Study

School leaders and teachers in the Urban Area Elementary School (UAES) noted increased behavior referrals and decreased student academic engagement over the last five years. According to Leithwood et al. (2019), discipline, climate, and collective teacher efficacy have had the most impact on student learning outcomes when used by school leaders. This study used the action research process to develop a support system for teachers while building capacity in

teachers with student-teacher relationships in an elementary school. The support system included two administrators (principal and assistant principal) and school-based leaders.

The Urban Area Elementary School is located in a Southeastern state, in a Large Metropolitan County with 764,382 residents as of 2020. The county area is 271 square miles and comprises 11 cities and several unincorporated areas. The Large Metropolitan County is culturally diverse, with over 64 spoken languages and the nation's second most affluent African American population. The Large Metropolitan County houses two school districts. The Urban Area Elementary School is in a zip-code area between two unincorporated communities in the Large Metropolitan County. According to the 2020 census, the zip code area has a total population of 24,823 residents. The population consists of 11,666 White residents, 5,461 Black residents, 5,212 Hispanic or Latino residents, and the remaining 2,484 residents are American Indian, Asian, or Multi-Race residents.

Profile of the District

The Urban Area Elementary School is part of a Metropolitan Area School District (MASD) that serves 98,957 students, consisting of 46,306 elementary school students, 19,924 middle school students, 26,524 high school students, 1,898 program school students, and 4,305 charter school students. The Metropolitan Area School District has 139 schools and centers with 76 elementary schools, 19 middle schools, 22 high schools, 14 program schools, and eight charter schools. The Metropolitan Area School District employs 16,242 employees, including 6,600 teachers. This diverse Metropolitan Area School District has students from 166 countries and 178 spoken languages. As of the 2023-2024 school year, the district's student racial breakdown is 60% Black (58,912 students), 19% Hispanic (19,114 students), 12% White (11,457 students), 7% Asian (6,872 students), and 3% other (2,206 students). The Metropolitan Area

School District is dedicated to giving every student the best possible education through an intensive core curriculum and specialized, challenging instructional and career programs.

Profile of the School

The mission of the Urban Area Elementary School (UAES) is to teach the whole child within a collaborative effort between the home, school, and community to ensure academic success within a safe, nurturing learning environment. The school strives to provide engaging learning opportunities in a safe and caring environment and to encourage partnerships between parents, staff, students, and the community. The vision of the Urban Area Elementary School is an engaging educational environment that prepares global leaders. The school recognizes the benefits of diversity and brings a positive awareness of individual, cultural, and ethnic differences.

Student Demographics

The Urban Area Elementary School (UAES) serves a population of 654 students. It houses grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Second and fourth grades have three classrooms, and pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first, third, and fifth grades have four. The number of students in pre-kindergarten was 64 (9%), kindergarten was 91 students (14%), first grade was 97 students (15%), second grade was 90 students (14%), third grade was 103 students (16%), fourth grade was 112 students (17%), and fifth grade was 97 students (15%). The average classroom size was about 24 students per class. As shown in Table 3.4, the student gender demographic was 328 male students and 316 female students. The student race/ethnic group demographics were 77% African American or Black, 15% Hispanic or Latino, 1% White, 4% multi-racial, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native. The Urban

Area Elementary School is a transient school, which results in student enrollment increasing and decreasing throughout the school year.

Table 3.4

Student Demographics of UAES (2024)

	Enrollment	
Total Enrollment	654	100%
Economically Disadvantaged	654	100%
Black / African American	504	77%
Hispanic/Latino	98	15%
English Language Learners	57	9%
Students with Disabilities	49	8%
Multi-Racial	27	4 %
Asian/Pacific Islander	16	2%
White	8	1%
American Indian / Alaska Native	1	0.2%

Note. Data from UAES Files

Staff Characteristics

The staff of Urban Area Elementary School is caring, competent, dedicated, and committed to academic excellence and success for all students. They establish and embrace high student, parent, and staff performance expectations. A data-driven curriculum provides the framework for instruction, and professional learning is ongoing. Effective leadership is apparent as administrators are involved in instructional activities, data collection, and motivation of both staff and students. In addition, a strong sense of community exists among all stakeholders who share responsibility for achieving school goals.

The Urban Area Elementary School had 75 faculty members (42 certified teachers, 10 paraprofessionals, 15 classified staff members), two administrators (principal and assistant principal), two academic coaches, one multi-tiered specialist, one behavior intervention specialist, and two counselors. The Urban Area Elementary School provides instruction by

highly qualified teachers who meet the standards established by the southeastern state. All teachers hold an educator certification issued by the southeastern state in a core content or special area of instruction. The certified teachers hold various educational degrees from various colleges and universities and have a wide range of teaching experience. As shown in Table 3.5, 28% of teachers had bachelor's degrees, 36% of teachers had master's degrees, 24% of teachers had specialist degrees, and 5% of teachers had doctorate degrees. Fifty-seven percent of teachers have 11-20 years of teaching experience or 21> years of teaching experience, 19% of teachers have 6 to 10 years of teaching experience, and 25% have 0 to 5 years of teaching experience.

Table 3.5
Teacher Demographics of UAES (2024)

	Teachers	Percent
Certified Teachers	42	100%
Female	37	88%
Master’s Degree	15	36%
11-20 Years of Experience	12	28%
21> Years of Experience	12	28%
Bachelor’s Degree	12	28%
0-5 Years of Experience	10	25%
Specialist Degree	10	24%
6-10 Years of Experience	8	19%
Doctorate Degree	5	12%
Male	5	12%

Note. Data from UAES Files

The Urban Area Elementary School staff share a common goal of excellence for all students. Teachers are dedicated to improving teaching techniques and increasing student academic achievement. The environment of high standards for teachers and students is very attractive to new and prospective teachers. All teachers with zero to three years of teaching experience are provided with a two-member teacher support team for their first three years.

Monthly meetings explain procedures and protocols for the school district and school. The teacher support team also provides personal support for individual teachers. In addition to a mentor, new teachers are assigned a grade-level buddy and immersed in collaborative grade-level work to provide additional support. Furthermore, teachers are provided orientation and familiarization workshops on the Teacher Keys Evaluation System and given monthly feedback on their progress.

Staff retention for the 2023-2024 school year was 90%, with most staff members returning for the upcoming school year. In addition, teachers and staff frequently seek opportunities to enhance their professional practice. Teacher applicants are carefully screened as vacancies occur, with applications initially reviewed on the Paperless Applicant Tracking System. The system is the online job application system used by the Metropolitan Area School District (MASD). The principal selected the best-qualified candidates after the interview process is completed. During the interview, candidates are rated on their responses to specific questions. Only highly qualified teachers are recommended for employment. The Metropolitan Area School District's human resources department verifies certification and other key qualifiers.

Academic Achievement and School Climate Data

The priority areas of the Urban Area Elementary School (UAES) were content mastery in all core content areas and school climate. The College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) overall scores for the Urban Area Elementary School were 65.0 in 2018 and 77.8 in 2019. The CCRPI overall content mastery scores for the Urban Area Elementary School were 40.0 in 2018, 48.4 in 2019, 31.3 in 2022, 37.7 in 2023, and 38.5 in 2024. Content mastery addresses whether students achieve at the level necessary to be prepared for the next grade, college, or career. This component includes achievement scores in English Language Arts,

Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies on the Southeastern State Standardized Assessments. While the overall content mastery score is low, there is a slight increase.

Table 3.6
Content Mastery CCRPI scores for UAES (2018,2019,2022,2023,2024)

School Report Year	School Performance in each Content Area		
	English Language Arts	Mathematics	Science
2018	42.74	42.58	32.15
2019	49.23	50.21	48.04
2022	34.57	28.61	29.49
2023	43.52	34.92	28.19
2024	42.84	39.31	22.90

Note. Data from Southeastern State’s CCRPI Reporting System

The School Climate scores based on the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) for the Urban Area Elementary School were 85.0 in 2018, 84.20 in 2019, and 82.40 in 2024. The School Climate Star Rating is a diagnostic tool to determine if a school is on the right path to improvement. The rating is based on student, teacher, and parent perceptions of a school's climate, student discipline data, safe and substance-free learning environment survey data, and schoolwide attendance. For the 2023-2024 school year, the Urban Area Elementary School had five behavior incidents involving nine participants, an increase from the previous school year of one behavior incident involving four participants.

Table 3.7*School Climate CCRPI scores for UAES (2018-2019,2023,2024)*

School Report Year	School Performance on Each School Climate Indicator			
	Stakeholder Survey	Discipline	Safe Learning Environment	Attendance
2018	72.46	93.88	80.77	92.80
2019	74.70	91.81	76.74	84.57
2023				70.08
2024	69.42	91.13	78.70	71.41

Note. Data from Southeastern State’s CCRPI Reporting System

Data Sources

The Urban Area Elementary School (UAES), located in a Southeastern state, has experienced increased student misbehaviors, behavior referrals to the office, and decreased student achievement data. The study examined how school leaders build capacity and support teachers with student-teacher relationships in an elementary school through the perspectives of school leaders and teachers. Various data sources were used to understand how school leaders can build capacity and support teachers in establishing student-teacher relationships and the impact of school leadership on student-teacher relationships through building capacity and supporting teachers.

Participants

This study targeted teachers within the Urban Area Elementary School to establish and maintain student-teacher relationships to improve schoolwide discipline and student achievement. Positive student-teacher relationships have historically improved students' performance and overall emotional happiness (Poulou, 2020). Also, research shows that, although teachers are aware of the importance of positive student-teacher relationships, they

often do not use proactive practices to cultivate the relationship. Instead, they rely on reactive strategies with students failing to meet their expectations (Jennings & Greenburg, 2009). The study provided teachers with a scale to examine their starting points and measure their progress at the end of the study. The teachers in the study were third through fifth-grade teachers at the Urban Area Elementary School. Many teachers had been teaching for four years or more and benefited from cultivating positive student-teacher relationships within their classrooms.

Selection Criteria

The selection criteria for participants in this dissertation are thoughtfully designed to ensure the attainment of comprehensive and insightful data relevant to the research objectives. Initially, teachers were invited to participate in the study in various ways. The researcher presented the research and timeline to teachers in a meeting. From there, teachers were provided information in an email about the study, which focused on building positive student-teacher relationships to increase the percentage of positive student perspectives about school climate. The invitees included all homeroom teachers at UAES. Teachers who chose to participate contacted the researcher and completed the appropriate documentation. Teachers were selected from third through fifth grade because of the impact of student misbehaviors during instruction throughout each grade. Positive relationships are significant during the transition to the next grade level when students have increased academic demands (Duong et al., 2019). For example, students who had a positive relationship with their teachers before entering a new grade had a greater interest in school after the transition (Cheung, 2019). Overall, participants who possess expertise, diversity, openness, and willingness to engage played a crucial role in enriching the study's findings and advancing knowledge on the impact of student-teacher relationships.

The next section of this chapter describes the data collection methods included in this action research study.

Data Collection

Data collection was an essential part of this action research. Data collection is collecting information to answer one's research questions and confirm or reject a hypothesis (Glanz, 2014). The researcher, action research team, and participants reviewed and analyzed the collected data, which supported and answered the research questions. The data collection method centered on surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations, and reflective journaling.

Surveys

Surveys are a way to check whether information acquired from participants in the first cycles of a process is relevant to other individuals and groups (Stringer & Aragon, 2020). For this study, the survey is designed to help better understand how teachers view their practices about student-teacher relationships. Participants indicated their opinions about each statement by indicating whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or disagreed. The survey used a 5-point Likert Scale, which allows participants "to show their level of agreement (from strongly disagree to agree strongly) with the given statement (items) on a metric scale" (Ankur et al., 2015). Data was then assigned a number starting with -2 for Strongly Disagree, -1 for Disagree, 0 for Neither Disagree or Agree, 1 for Agree, and 2 for Strongly Agree and summated to discover the intervention's effectiveness. Lefever and Matthiasdottir (2006) feel that surveys make analysis easier, prevent data loss, and provide convenience to participants. The survey allowed the researcher to record critical data and save that data for later analysis. Surveys were an excellent way of capturing the participants' opinions during the study. Surveys are simple methods to find out valuable information.

Interviews

Interviews were used in the study to provide information to understand the participants' thought processes and beliefs about the impact of school leaders on student-teacher relationships in the Urban Area Elementary School. Interviews allowed the researcher to learn the intricacies of the participants' practices and experiences from their point of view (Glanz, 2014). Bloomberg (2023) state that interviews for qualitative research are in-depth to capture the perceptions, attitudes, and emotions of the interview participants. The interview process began with the researcher asking participants to respond to structured interview questions. Sample interview questions are highlighted in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8

Interview Question Sample

Research Questions	Interview Questions
Q1: How do elementary teachers describe the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?	How do school leaders model the importance of student-teacher relationships? What impact has been made on school culture or practices by school leadership modeling the importance of student-teacher relationships?
Q2: How can school leaders support and build teacher capacity related to student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?	How do school leaders draw on the expertise and experience within the staff to enhance teacher self-efficacy and capacity?

The interviews were transcribed during the study. The interviews were conducted one-on-one using questions from the research study. Each participant was asked to respond to the same questions in interviews. The researcher used descriptive interview questions to elicit detailed opinions and perceptions from each participant about experiences with implementing

interventions. Feedback collected from participants provided teachers a platform to contribute their input into the impact of student-teacher relationships in the classroom. The interview data allowed the action research team members to form a perceptive analysis of teachers' self-efficacy and the effectiveness of their student-teacher relationship-building practices. After each recorded session, the interview was transcribed verbatim, and copies of the transcripts were provided for the action research team to analyze and search for meanings in developing a student-teacher-building relationship-building protocol process. Interviews supported data collection to increase understanding of the experiences of others while also making meaning of them (Siedman, 2006).

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a form of interview used in this research study. Focus groups gave the researcher different thoughts, perceptions, and experiences on the subject matter (Akyıldız & Ahmed, 2021). During the focus group, the participants were gathered to share perspectives and thoughts regarding relationship-building practices in their classrooms. The researcher guided the focus group discussion. The teachers who participated in the focus group answered questions about what they were doing in their classrooms that they felt best benefited in establishing and sustaining student-teacher relationships. Within answering these questions, the teachers also discussed things they have done to improve themselves, as things they have done in the past were different at the time of the research. Stringer and Aragon (2020) suggested that focus group members should each have opportunities to describe their experience and present their perspectives on the items discussed. During the collaborative session, teachers could offer each other support and strategies they used in their classrooms. Table 3.9 illustrates samples of focus group interview questions.

Table 3.9*Focus Group Interview Question Sample*

Research Questions	Interview Questions
Q1: How do elementary teachers describe the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?	Are there identified student-teacher relationship-building practices recommended or mandated in our school? If so, what are they? How often are these strategies used in your classroom/in the classrooms you have observed?
Q2: How can school leaders support and build teacher capacity related to student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?	What professional learning opportunities are available at our school to help all teachers improve student-teacher relationships? Have you recently been involved in professional learning opportunities focused on high-impact, research-informed strategies? If so, how did it impact your instruction or classroom culture?

Observations

Observations are central and fundamental methods in qualitative inquiry and are used to discover and explain complex interactions in natural social settings (Bloomberg, 2023).

Observing to collect data allowed the researcher to immerse themselves in the setting and record the actions of the participants. Conducting observations was vital to collect field notes to determine the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships and implementing structures for building and supporting student-teacher relationships after professional learning occurred.

Reflective Journaling

The researcher used reflective journaling throughout the research process. Journaling records events, ideas, and thoughts over time, often with a particular purpose or project in mind (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). The researcher reflected upon notes and thoughts from

observations. This process allowed the researcher to make changes or accommodations needed to support the action research team and participants during the study.

Validity in research and the data collection process created trustworthiness in the research process. Trustworthiness in research allows the participants and readers to feel that the research is credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable (DeVault, 2019). At the same time, validity concerns how much a study accurately reflects or evaluates the concept or ideas being investigated (Noble & Heale, 2019). Qualitative data allowed the researcher, action research team, and participants to determine trends in the data. The participants could trust the researcher by debriefing with the action research team and creating a review process.

Interventions were created to support the study participants. The action research design team collected data on the interventions developed to describe the impact of school leaders on student-teacher relationships. The interventions are examined next.

Interventions

Interventions are any specific instructional practice, program, or procedure that a researcher implements to investigate its effect on the behavior or achievement of an individual or group (Glanz, 2014). It is vital that the action research team tests their ideas, collects evidence on their effectiveness, evaluates the results, and proposes new ideas or alters the research questions (Dickens & Watkins, 1999). The study examined how school leaders build capacity and support teachers with student-teacher relationships in an elementary school. The action research team examined the perspectives of school leaders and teachers as part of the school leadership team on how school leaders can build capacity and support teachers in establishing student-teacher relationships. The interventions selected for the study were composed by the researcher and the

research design team based on the feedback on the Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) worksheet and the Continuous Schoolwide Improvement Plan (CSIP).

The CNA worksheet allowed the research design team to provide input on the Urban Area Elementary School's strengths, needs, and priorities in student achievement and school climate. The team selected three interventions for each action cycle to reduce behavior referrals and increase classroom engagement. The cycles occurred from October 2024 to January 2025. During Cycle 1, the teachers completed a survey on how they view their practices concerning student-teacher relationships and participated in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) professional development. The professional development was based on a schoolwide positive behavior plan and the implementation of morning meetings. Teachers used SEL strategies to build positive student-teacher relationships and decrease student misbehavior and behavior referrals. The action research team conducted interviews and classroom observations and provided feedback to teachers, ensuring the appropriate use of SEL strategies.

In Cycle 2, the research design team established a schoolwide positive behavior plan and Morning Meeting framework that included Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies for all students to decrease the number of student behavior referrals and increase student engagement in the classroom. In Cycle 3, teachers implemented daily Morning Meetings and the schoolwide positive behavior plan in their classrooms. Morning meetings can build positive relationships while setting children up for social and academic success at the beginning of each school day. It promoted a climate of trust, academic growth, and positive behavior. The action research team conducted interviews and classroom observations. It provided feedback to teachers, ensuring the appropriate use of SEL strategies in the schoolwide positive behavior plan and Morning Meetings. After each cycle, qualitative methods produced data analyzed by the

team to inform how to proceed in the study. The intervention cycles for the study are provided in Table 3.10.

Table 3.10

Intervention Cycles

Cycles	Interventions
Cycle 1: October – November 2024	1. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies for professional development are based on a schoolwide positive behavior plan and the implementation of morning meetings. 2. The action research team collected and analyzed data through surveys, interviews, observations, and focus groups.
Cycle 2: November-December 2024	1. The research design team established a schoolwide positive behavior plan and Morning Meeting framework that includes Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies for all students to decrease the number of student behavior referrals and increase student engagement in the classroom.
Cycle 3: December 2024-January 2025	1. Teachers implemented daily Morning Meetings and the schoolwide positive behavior plan in their classrooms. 2. The action research team conducted interviews and observations and provide feedback to teachers, ensuring the appropriate use of SEL strategies in the schoolwide positive behavior plan and Morning Meetings. 3. The research design team analyzed data from interviews, observations, and focus groups to inform the study's procedure.

Data Analysis Methods

Qualitative action research aims to observe, reflect on, and create an action plan (Glesne, 2016). Coding and thematic analysis were used to analyze the qualitative data. The survey, interviews, observations, and reflective journals were analyzed to determine teachers' fidelity in using social and emotional learning strategies from professional learning that supported establishing student-teacher relationships. This data was also used to analyze the degree of classroom culture change by implementing the schoolwide positive behavior plan and morning classroom meetings with teachers who have struggled with student-teacher relationships. The researcher reviewed the data and developed codes and themes within the study. Then, based on the codes and themes, specific trends from the study became a focal point.

Coding

Coding is essentially a system of classification, which is the process of noting what is of interest or significance while identifying different data segments and labeling them to organize the information contained in the data (Bloomberg, 2023). As Vaismoradi et al. (2016) states, coding as the data reduction process is an element of data organization in most qualitative approaches. Data in this research was analyzed using coding. The coded data came from observations, interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Within this qualitative study, coding utilized procedures that allowed the researcher to develop consistency and agreement without quantifying intercoder reliability (Patton, 2015). The action research team used coding to take the sizeable quantitative set obtained in the study and make meaning out of it. The researcher opted to use the online coding platform Delve and uploaded all transcripts of the focus groups and interviews. Data was then assigned a code. When coding was completed, the researcher

developed themes to answer the research questions. Coding the data from interviews, observations, focus groups, and reflective journals led to the emergence of themes.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is another way the data analysis took place within the study. After the coding process within the data analysis, themes emerged from the study. Thematic analysis showed the connections within the study, transparency, and truthfulness and facilitated the transferability of findings to readers (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The researcher followed the phases of thematic analysis to ensure that accurate meaning was taken from the qualitative data obtained in the study. It was important that the researcher reviewed all the data and found patterns, which turned into themes, from the study's various types of qualitative data. These themes are creative and interpretive stories about the data produced at the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skills, and the data themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The themes formulated provided answers to the study's research questions.

Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability

Trustworthiness was maintained in the study by fulfilling the principles of reliability, validity, and generalizability. Establishing the trustworthiness of the research and data collection process is a necessary step in the qualitative action research process (Bloomberg, 2023). A wide array of research methods was used to provide reliability and validity of data and analysis of that data to answer the research questions. This process involved the meticulous analyses of data collected from multiple methods, which allowed for a more "accurate and valid estimate of qualitative results" (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006, p. 42). Triangulation involves using different sources of information to increase the validity of a study (Guion et al., 2011). Data triangulation

is one of the most effective ways to address the validity and reliability of the data collected (Bloomberg, 2023; Glanz, 2014; Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006). It is achieved using various research methods, analysis, and actions to limit bias. The triangulation of research methods aligned to the research question is presented in Table 3.11.

Table 3.11

Triangulation of Research Methods

Research Questions	Data Collection	Analysis Approach	Timeline
Q1. How do elementary teachers describe the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?	Interviews Focus Group Observations Action team meeting notes	Coding for Themes Mean Score Analysis	October 2024 – January 2025
Q2. How can school leaders support and build teacher capacity related to student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?	Interviews Focus Group Survey Action team meeting notes	Mean Score Analysis Coding for Themes	October 2024 – January 2025
Q3. What does the action research design and implementation team learn by developing and implementing structures for building and supporting student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?	Interviews Focus Group Observations Action team meeting notes Reflective Journal	Coding for Themes Coding for Themes Reflection	October 2024 – January 2025

Trustworthiness or validity is vital to action research as it accurately reports the content analysis process (Elo et al., 2014). Throughout the study, the researcher had to combat perceptions of data during the study to create trustworthiness. Data was obtained from multiple sources, and numerous methods were used. A reflective journal was kept throughout the study. All interview questions were field checked so improvements could be made, and daily check-ins were completed. After reviewing the data, the researcher recognized the importance of stating

what it revealed during the study instead of adding opinions about why the data was the way it was unless the participants explicitly stated their thoughts and opinions. These thoughts included qualitative information in the research, focusing on data and explicit evidence rather than opinions (Reich, 2021). The researcher recognized that for the participants to trust the research study, the researcher had to remain neutral and focus on support and constructive criticism rather than critiquing or evaluating. The researcher remained neutral throughout the study and supported the overall growth of the participants rather than diminishing or judging their thoughts and opinions.

Subjectivity Statement

As a school leader at the Urban Area Elementary School, the researcher recognized and was mindful of the potential biases that could have impacted this study. Qualitative research is the systematic inquiry into social phenomena in natural settings. These phenomena can include, but are not limited to, how people experience aspects of their lives, how individuals and groups behave, how organizations function, and how interactions shape relationships (Teherani et al., 2015). While there were advantages to having background information about the school, staff, and culture, there were also potential drawbacks to having such knowledge.

The researcher realized that the personal opinions of the researcher and non-participants could impact the perception of teachers participating in the study. These thoughts included opinions about practices the researcher felt should occur in classrooms and conversations about personal perceptions of the impact of student-teacher relationships. The researcher started a personal journal to record thoughts, opinions, frustrations, and questions to combat personal opinions. The researcher remained neutral during the study and did not respond leadingly during interviews and focus group discussions. The questions used during the interviews and focus

groups were clear, direct, and neutralized for the participants, which helped the researcher control their feelings toward personal opinions and the opinions of others.

Limitations

Limitations are characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation or findings from research (Bloomberg, 2023). The study is backed by low school climate and achievement data. However, it originated from the experiences and curiosity of a local school leader. This fact threatens to place a school leadership bias on its findings.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 focused on the research methods associated with this study. Action research was chosen as the preferred method of study as it is less complex than traditional research, can be used by practitioners to solve identified problems, and is specific to an organization (Glanz, 2014). The action research design and implementation teams focused on establishing positive student-teacher relationships to increase student engagement. Surveys, observations, focus groups, and interviews were chosen as the primary research methods due to their reliability and applicability to the study. Methods were used to contain researcher influence and bias, including a reflective journal, check-ins, and peer debriefing. All qualitative data was collected anonymously and stored on protected software. This data was coded and analyzed for themes and patterns to answer the research questions. Chapter 4 of the study provides the findings of ways school leaders supported teachers in establishing student-teacher relationships in the Urban Area Elementary School.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE

The Urban Area Elementary School (UAES) noted increased behavior referrals and decreased student academic engagement over the five years preceding the start of the action research study. The UAES has consistently struggled with low College and Career Readiness Index scores. Accompanying these low scores is an extremely low school climate, as evidenced by state climate surveys. School climate is essential for ensuring students feel safe and comfortable enough to learn (Alves et al., 2020). The School Climate Stakeholder Survey scores based on the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) for the Urban Area Elementary School were 72.46 in 2018, 74.70 in 2019, and 69.42 in 2024. Based on survey results, students' perception of the school climate increased by 2.8% from 2018 to 2019 but decreased by 4.7% from 2019 to 2024. The survey remained in the low percentile. A noticeable divide between school staff, particularly teachers and students, created a school climate that was not conducive to the achievement needed by students at the Urban Area Elementary School. As a result of these behaviors, instructional time was interrupted for students. This action research study used a design team that included a diverse staff within the school to propose interventions to an implementation team of teachers to discover ways to positively enhance the school climate to affect student achievement and school improvement.

Purpose of the Study

This study examined how school leaders build capacity and support teachers with student-teacher relationships in an elementary school. The action research team examined the

perspectives of school leaders and teachers as part of the school leadership team on how school leaders can build capacity and support teachers in establishing student-teacher relationships. The school leadership team sought perspectives on the impact of school leadership on student-teacher relationships through building capacity and supporting teachers. This study aimed to provide valuable information on interventions that hold the potential to affect student-teacher relationships positively. The UAES and other schools could enact meaningful and effective interventions designed to improve school climate through reduced behavior referrals and to increase student engagement.

Research Questions

To address the purpose of this action research study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. How do elementary teachers describe the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?
2. How can school leaders support and build teacher capacity related to student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?
3. What does the action research design and implementation team learn by developing and implementing structures for building and supporting student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?

Chapter 4 describes the context of the study from the case study. The context includes a description of the school, academic achievement, school climate ratings, and the problem-framing in the context of the Urban Area Elementary School, the site of this action research. The chapter continues by telling the story of the action research study, its three-month progress, and its outcomes. The timeline of data collection methods included a survey, interviews, focus

groups, observations, and reflective journal notes, as described as they occurred within the three-cycle action research study. The research additionally describes the alignment between the research questions and theoretical framework.

Context of the Study

School leaders and teachers in the Urban Area Elementary School (UAES) noted increased behavior referrals and decreased student academic engagement over the last five years. According to Leithwood et al. (2019), discipline, climate, and collective teacher efficacy have had the most impact on student learning outcomes when used by school leaders. This study used the action research process to develop a support system for teachers while building capacity in teachers with student-teacher relationships in an elementary school. The support system included two administrators (principal and assistant principal) and school-based leaders.

The Urban Area Elementary School is in a Southeastern state, in a Large Metropolitan County with 764,382 residents as of 2020. The county area is 271 square miles and comprises 11 cities and several unincorporated areas. The Large Metropolitan County is culturally diverse, with over 64 spoken languages and the nation's second most affluent African American population. The Large Metropolitan County houses two school districts. The Urban Area Elementary School is in a zip-code area between two unincorporated communities in the Large Metropolitan County. According to the 2020 census, the zip code area has a total population of 24,823 residents. The population consists of 11,666 White residents, 5,461 Black residents, 5,212 Hispanic or Latino residents, and the remaining 2,484 residents are American Indian, Asian, or Multi-Race residents.

Problem Framing Based on the Site

School leaders and teachers in the Urban Area Elementary School (UAES) noted increased behavior referrals and decreased student academic engagement over the five years preceding the start of the action research study. At the start of the second semester of the 2023-2024 school year, the Urban Area Elementary School saw an increase in inappropriate social and emotional student behaviors in kindergarten through fifth-grade students. The Urban Area Elementary School had increased student behavior referrals. Students were referred to a school administrator for additional behavior support using strategies and interventions in the district's code of conduct. A corresponding decrease in student classroom engagement was also noted. The students received behavior referrals for refusing to follow directions or complete assignments, lack of focus on teacher-led instruction, avoidance behaviors such as running out of the classroom and emotional outbursts, inappropriate peer interactions such as physical altercations (e.g., fighting with peers), and inappropriate touching of peers. As a result of these behaviors, instructional time was interrupted for these students. The Urban Area Elementary School also scored low on the School Performance Rating on the Stakeholder Survey based on student, teacher, and parent perceptions of a school's climate and content mastery in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science.

The priority areas of the Urban Area Elementary School (UAES) were content mastery in all core content areas and school climate. The College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) overall scores for the Urban Area Elementary School were 65.0 in 2018 and 77.8 in 2019. The CCRPI overall content mastery scores for the Urban Area Elementary School were 40.0 in 2018, 48.4 in 2019, 31.3 in 2022, 37.7 in 2023, and 38.5 in 2024. Content mastery addresses whether students achieve at the level necessary to be prepared for the next grade,

college, or career. This component includes achievement scores in core content areas on the Southeastern State Standardized Assessments. While the overall content mastery score is low, there is a slight increase.

Table 4.1
Content Mastery CCRPI scores for UAES (2018,2019,2022,2023,2024)

School Report Year	School Performance in each Content Area		
	English Language Arts	Mathematics	Science
2018	42.74	42.58	32.15
2019	49.23	50.21	48.04
2022	34.57	28.61	29.49
2023	43.52	34.92	28.19
2024	42.84	39.31	22.90

Note. Data from Southeastern State’s CCRPI Reporting System

The School Climate scores based on the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) for the Urban Area Elementary School were 85.0 in 2018, 84.20 in 2019, and 82.40 in 2024. The School Climate Star Rating is a diagnostic tool to determine if a school is on the right path to improvement. The rating is based on student, teacher, and parent perceptions of a school's climate, student discipline data, safe and substance-free learning environment survey data, and schoolwide attendance. For the current school year, the Urban Area Elementary School had five behavior incidents involving nine participants, an increase from the previous school year of one behavior incident involving four participants.

Table 4.2

School Climate CCRPI scores for UAES (2018-2019, 2023, 2024)

School Report Year	School Performance on Each School Climate Indicator			
	Stakeholder Survey	Discipline	Safe Learning Environment	Attendance
2018	72.46	93.88	80.77	92.80
2019	74.70	91.81	76.74	84.57
2023				70.08
2024	69.42	91.13	78.70	71.41

Note. Data from Southeastern State’s CCRPI Reporting System

The Story and Outcomes

A qualitative research method was used to gather data on the impact of elementary school leaders on building capacity and supporting teachers in establishing positive student-teacher relationships. The researcher presented the research and timeline to teachers in a meeting. From there, teachers were provided information in an email about the study, which focused on building positive student-teacher relationships to increase the percentage of positive student perspectives about school climate. The invitees included all third, fourth, and fifth-grade homeroom teachers at UAES. Teachers who participate contacted the researcher and complete the appropriate documentation. Teachers were selected from third through fifth grade because of the impact of student misbehaviors during instruction throughout each grade.

Action Research Implementation Team

The Action Research Implementation Team comprised of third, fourth, and fifth-grade teachers. The teachers' years of experience varied from ten to twenty-five years of experience. Each teacher was certified in multiple content areas. Some teachers had additional certifications, including gifted certification, English as a Second Language (ESOL) certifications, and special

education certifications. Each teacher who participated has worked at the Urban Area Elementary School for three or more years. Teachers participated based on a schoolwide initiative to support establishing and sustaining student-teacher relationships to improve school culture and minimize behavior infractions. Table 4.3 lists the Action Research Implementation Team members, their primary role at the Urban Area Elementary School, and their teaching experience.

Table 4.3

Action Research Implementation Team

Team Members	Primary Role at Urban Area Elementary School	Teaching Experience
Third Grade Teacher	Third Grade	Provided 24 years of classroom instruction experience.
Fourth Grade Teacher	Fourth Grade	Provided 10 years of classroom instruction experience.
Fifth Grade Teacher	Fifth Grade	Provided 10 years of classroom instruction experience.

This study targeted teachers within the Urban Area Elementary School to establish and maintain student-teacher relationships to improve schoolwide discipline and student achievement. Positive student-teacher relationships have historically improved students' performance and overall emotional happiness (Poulou, 2020). Also, research shows that, although teachers are aware of the importance of positive student-teacher relationships, they often do not use proactive practices to cultivate the relationship. Instead, they rely on reactive strategies with students failing to meet their expectations (Jennings & Greenburg, 2009). The study provided teachers with a scale to examine their starting points and measure their progress at the end of the study. The teachers in the study were third--, fourth--, and fifth-grade teachers at

the Urban Area Elementary School. Many teachers had been teaching for three years or more and benefited from cultivating positive student-teacher relationships within their classrooms.

Action Research Design Team

The action research design team comprised the principal, assistant principal, academic coaches, Multi-tiered System Specialist (MTSS) chair, and counselor. Together, they developed and implemented structures for building and supporting student-teacher relationships. During the process, the team gathered information about the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships and how school leaders can support and build teacher capacity with student-teacher relationships related to the Urban Area Elementary School. This information included compiling observation notes and school culture data from surveys, interviews, and observations. After reviewing this information, a plan was created for the action research implementation team. The researcher evaluated and reflected after teachers were provided professional development and time to practice. Table 4.4 lists the members of the Action Research Design Team and their roles in this study.

Table 4.4

Action Research Design Team

Team Member	Primary Role at Urban Area Elementary School	Action Research Role
Primary Researcher	Principal	Led and conducted all research with the Action Research Design Team for data analysis. The Primary Researcher brought 6 years of experience as an assistant principal and 3 years of previous instructional coaching experience.
Assistant Principal	Assistant Principal	Provided context and charge for the schoolwide leadership

Team Member	Primary Role at Urban Area Elementary School	Action Research Role
		team and perspective for action research. The AP has 20 years of administrative experience and 3 years of experience as an assistant principal.
Counselor	Counselor	Provided 10 years of classroom instruction experience with 10 years of counseling experience.
Multi-tiered System Specialist	Multi-tiered System Specialist	Provided 16 years of classroom instruction experience with 3 years of instructional coaching experience.
Academic Coach (Math)	Academic Coach	Provided 15 years of classroom instruction experience with 5 years of instructional coaching experience.
Academic Coach (Reading)	Academic Coach	Provided 15 years of classroom instruction experience with 5 years of instructional coaching experience.

Findings from the Case

The study began in October 2024, when IRB approval was obtained. In early October, an interest email was sent to school leaders and third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade teachers at the Urban Area Elementary School. The email identified the study's title and invited anyone interested to attend an interest meeting. During the interest meetings, the researcher presented the Urban Area Elementary School's College and Career Readiness Index (CCRPI), school climate surveys, discipline data, and Continuous School Improvement Plan (CSIP) goals to identify the problem and obtain consent forms for the interested Action Research Design Team members and

participants. The researcher also explained her role in the study and clarified that the study was not evaluative and was purely voluntary.

In the first meeting with the Action Research Design Team, the researcher presented the literature review findings on ways school leaders can support teachers in building and sustaining student-teacher relationships. Both the theoretical framework and logic model were also introduced to the team. The Action Research Design Team reviewed school practices and data to devise a plan for implementation and professional development for the third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade teachers. This meeting outlined the schoolwide expectations for the school year. After the meeting, individual interviews for the design team took place. The interviews helped guide the implementation by developing an understanding of what was currently in place building-wide and further actions needed for effective implementation. The interventions selected for the study were composed by the researcher and the research design team based on the feedback on the Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) worksheet and the Continuous Schoolwide Improvement Plan (CSIP). The CNA worksheet allowed the research design team to provide input on the Urban Area Elementary School's strengths, needs, and priorities in student achievement and school climate. The team selected three interventions for each action cycle to reduce behavior referrals and increase classroom engagement.

The Action Research Design Team reviewed school data and discussed the teacher interviews and survey questions in preparation for interviewing teachers. After the interviews and surveys, the Action Research Design Team reviewed the information provided from the interviews, the teacher efficacy survey data, and school data to prepare for professional development. The plan was set for the study, which included professional development for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies taking place in collaborative planning and data

meetings. The team determined that the researcher would observe teachers twice during the study.

The cycles occurred from October 2024 to January 2025. During Cycle 1, the teachers completed a survey on how they view their practices concerning student-teacher relationships and participated in professional development in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies. The professional development was based on a schoolwide positive behavior plan and the implementation of Morning Meetings. Teachers used SEL strategies to build positive student-teacher relationships and decrease student misbehavior and behavior referrals. The action research team conducted interviews and classroom observations and provided feedback to teachers, ensuring the appropriate use of SEL strategies.

In Cycle 2, the research design team established a schoolwide positive behavior plan and Morning Meeting framework named Panther PRIDE that included Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies for all students to decrease the number of student behavior referrals and increase student engagement in the classroom. The action research team conducted interviews and classroom observations and provided feedback to teachers, ensuring the appropriate use of SEL strategies.

In Cycle 3, teachers implemented daily Morning Meetings and the schoolwide positive behavior plan in their classrooms. Morning meetings can build positive relationships while setting children up for social and academic success at the beginning of each school day. It promoted a climate of trust, academic growth, and positive behavior. The action research team conducted interviews and classroom observations. It provided feedback to teachers, ensuring the appropriate use of SEL strategies in the schoolwide positive behavior plan and Morning

Meetings. After each cycle, qualitative methods produced data analyzed by the team to inform how to proceed in the study.

Surveys

During Cycle 1 of the study, each teacher completed a survey to help better understand how they view their practices concerning student-teacher relationships. Participants indicated their opinions about each statement by indicating whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed. Survey questions used a Likert Scale. When all surveys were completed, a Likert Scale summation produced data on whether an intervention was effective. Thematic analysis was used to analyze data from the scaled questions. More negative responses of Strongly Disagree received a -2 effect. The response of Disagree provided a -1 effect. Neither Disagree nor Agree provided a 0. Agree received a one, and Strongly Agree received a 2.

The survey analyzes teachers' responses to questions about their student-teacher relationships. The data provides insights into how teachers perceive their engagement, motivation, and instructional practices as key to fostering strong relationships with students.

Interviews

Interviews were used in the study to provide information to understand the participants' thought processes and beliefs about the impact of school leaders on student-teacher relationships in the Urban Area Elementary School. The interviews for this research study took place during all cycles with the Action Research Design Team and Action Research Implementation Team and were transcribed during the study.

The interviews were conducted one-on-one using questions from the research study. Each participant was asked to respond to the same questions in interviews. The researcher used descriptive interview questions to elicit detailed opinions and perceptions from each participant

about experiences with implementing interventions. Feedback collected from participants provided teachers a platform to contribute their input into the impact of student-teacher relationships in the classroom. The interview data allowed the action research team members to form a perceptive analysis of teachers' self-efficacy and the effectiveness of their student-teacher relationship-building practices. After each session, the interview was transcribed verbatim, and copies of the transcripts were provided for the action research team to analyze and search for meanings in developing a student-teacher-building relationship-building protocol process.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a form of interview used in this research study. During the focus group, the participants were gathered to share perspectives and thoughts regarding relationship-building practices in their classrooms. The researcher guided the focus group discussion. The teachers who participated in the focus group answered questions about what they were doing in their classrooms that they felt best benefited in establishing and sustaining student-teacher relationships. The focus group took place during all cycles. After speaking with the implementation team, the focus group reviewed data from the observations. During the focus group, the team answered questions about SEL strategies, Panther PRIDE, and Morning Meetings and what they felt was beneficial or what they would like to improve on in their classrooms.

Within answering these questions, the teachers also discussed things they have done to improve student-teacher relationships, as things they have done in the past were different at the time of the research. At the end of each action cycle, focus groups were held with the implementation team. Questions were aligned with the research questions detailed in the study. The focus groups described how the team perceived the impact of the interventions. However,

the strength of the focus groups was the collaboration, transparency, and opportunity to provide feedback that the team enjoyed. The focus group thought that the process helped bridge the gap between school leaders and teachers and provided valuable information on how school leaders could act to improve the school climate and student achievement. The focus groups also echoed the leadership qualities that help teachers build and sustain student-teacher relationships while improving the school climate from the scholarly literature. The participants appreciate leaders who build trust, make positive relationships, support teachers, are consistent and transparent, and obtain feedback (Daily et al., 2020; Mette, 2020; Rafferty, 2003). After each session, the interview was transcribed verbatim, and copies of the transcripts were provided for the action research team to analyze and search for meanings in developing a student-teacher-building relationship-building protocol process.

Observations

Classroom observations to collect data allowed the researcher to become immersed in the setting and record the actions of the participants. Conducting observations was vital to collect field notes to determine the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships and implementing structures for building and supporting student-teacher relationships after professional learning occurred. Observations focused on the implementation of SEL strategies, Panther PRIDE, and Morning Meetings and how these strategies impacted student-teacher relationships in the classrooms. During the focus group meeting, the implementation team reviewed data from the observations.

Reflective Journaling

The researcher used reflective journaling throughout the research process. Reflecting upon notes and thoughts from observations allowed the researcher to make changes or accommodations needed to support the action research team and participants during the study.

Chapter Summary

The research examined how elementary school leaders build capacity and support teachers by establishing and maintaining student-teacher relationships. This chapter provided an overview of the research process for each cycle. The beginning established the story behind the study and moved into how the study progressed. As the study concluded, Chapter 4 reviewed how the study's results were gathered and processed during the study.

Chapter 5 presented the case findings presented in the study. This chapter provided an in-depth description of data collection, findings, and analysis. Triangulation of multiple data sources, including responses from interviews, surveys, focus groups, observations, and the researcher's journal, was used to extrapolate themes. The researcher revisited the three action research questions regarding the findings presented in the chapter.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE

The Urban Area Elementary School consistently struggled with low College and Career Readiness Index scores. Accompanying these low scores was an extremely low school climate, as evidenced by state climate surveys. School climate is essential for ensuring students feel safe and comfortable enough to learn (Alves et al., 2020). A noticeable divide between school stakeholders, particularly teachers and students, created a school climate that was not conducive to the student achievement needed at one urban area elementary school. For some teachers, the ability to easily make connections and build positive relationships with students that help them thrive in a school setting is second nature. Other teachers struggle to build positive relationships with students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). This study aimed to provide valuable information on what interventions supported by school leaders positively affect student-teacher relationships so that one urban area elementary school and other schools could enact meaningful and effective interventions that improve school climate, student achievement, and classroom engagement. To address the purpose of this action research study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. How do elementary teachers describe the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?
2. How can school leaders support and build teacher capacity related to student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?

3. What does the action research design and implementation team learn through the development and implementation of structures for building and supporting student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?

This action research study used a design team complete with school leaders to propose interventions to an implementation team. The teachers discovered ways to try and enhance student-teacher relationships to affect student achievement and school climate positively.

This research is important because positive student relationships have historically been shown to improve students' performance and overall emotional happiness (Poulou, 2020). Also, although teachers know the importance of positive relationships, they often do not use proactive practices to cultivate the relationships. Furthermore, research indicates that training and professional development on how to build positive relationships with students have positive outcomes (Duong et al., 2019; Shields-Lysiak et al., 2020).

Chapter 5 provides a thematic analysis of the data collection and findings obtained about the research questions through two action research cycles of three interventions in this research study. Responses from the action research team in a survey, focus group, individual interviews, and observation feedback were assigned to research questions and organized into themes. A theme "captures something important about the data about the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis and themes connect to the research questions, purpose of the study, theoretical framework, and logic model.

Overview of Key Findings and Themes

The action research teams' findings address the purpose of the research, which was to discover ways school leaders can enhance student-teacher relationships at the Urban Area

Elementary School. The school leadership team sought perspectives on the impact of school leadership on student-teacher relationships through building capacity and supporting teachers. The study's findings addressed the research problem, examining how school leaders build capacity and support teachers with student-teacher relationships in an elementary school and aiming to improve it so that overall school improvement could occur.

The study included school leaders and teachers from The Urban Area Elementary School. Data such as individual and focus group interviews, surveys, classroom observational notes, and a researcher's journal were collected. Multiple data points were gathered before, during, and after each action research cycle.

The theoretical framework of teacher self-efficacy supports the action research cycle and was adapted from Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy model for this study. Self-efficacy is informed by five influences: performance experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, imaginal experience, and physical and emotional states. This action research focused on how school leaders build capacity and support teachers with student-teacher relationships in an elementary school. The theoretical framework expressed the scope of the study, and the logic model fit the pieces together to illustrate the relationships between the combined pieces through the Plan, Do, Check, Act continuous cycle of improvement (Shewhart & Deming, 1986). The foundation of the study was based on the idea of continuous improvement of school leaders based on their knowledge and strategies used to lead and support teachers. The study sought to examine how school leaders can engage in this process to serve as a means of support for teachers in building student-teacher relationships. Table 5.1 shows the findings and themes that emerged for each research question.

Table 5.1*Summary of Research Questions Connected to Findings and Themes*

Research Questions	Findings	Themes
RQ1: How do elementary teachers describe the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?	Teachers acknowledged that school leadership is crucial in shaping student-teacher relationships, but implementation is inconsistent. Teachers who receive leadership support report stronger relationships and higher engagement. However, there is no formalized system to ensure sustained leadership involvement.	1. School leadership is a positive and influential force in shaping student-teacher relationships. 2. Consistency is important for effective teacher-led practices.
RQ2: How can school leaders support and build teacher capacity related to student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?	Teachers emphasized the need for professional development, structured mentorship, and research-based training to strengthen their capacity. However, leadership-driven initiatives in these areas are lacking, leaving teachers to rely on informal strategies.	1. School leaders are instrumental in strengthening teacher capacity for relationship-building. 2. Teachers noted the need for leadership-driven initiatives.
RQ3: What does the action research design and implementation team learn through the development and implementation of structures for building and supporting student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?	Findings suggest that the long-term sustainability of student-teacher relationships depends on continuous leadership support and alignment between leadership priorities and teacher needs. Without structured leadership involvement, implementation inconsistencies emerge.	1. There is a need for leadership support to ensure long-term success. 2. Leadership priorities were not consistently aligned to the needs of teachers.

Significant Findings Related to the Research Questions

This study explored the role of school leadership in fostering student-teacher relationships, supporting teacher capacity, and ensuring sustainable relationship-building structures in an urban area elementary school. The survey, interviews, focus groups, and observations analysis revealed several key themes that align with the study's research questions.

RQ1: How do elementary teachers describe the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships?

The first research question aimed to understand how elementary teachers described the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships. The interviews and focus group were analyzed following a thematic analysis., the researcher followed the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019). The researcher followed the phases of thematic analysis to ensure that accurate meaning was taken from the qualitative data obtained in the study. It was important that the researcher reviewed all the data and found patterns, which were used to identify themes, from the various types of qualitative data employed in this study. These themes are creative and interpretive stories about the data produced at the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skills, and the data themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The formulated themes provided answers to the study's research questions.

In the familiarization stage, researchers immerse themselves in the raw data—reading transcripts and listening to recordings—to fully understand the context, tone, and nuances of participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This process involves noting initial impressions, recurring themes, and subtle cues, which lays a solid foundation for later coding and theme development, ensuring that the subsequent analysis remains deeply informed by the participants' lived experiences.

In the initial coding phase, the researcher systematically reviewed the data to identify and label meaningful features that capture key elements of participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This process involved breaking the data into manageable segments and assigning codes reflecting recurring patterns, notable insights, and subtle nuances. These initial codes serve as the building blocks for later thematic development, ensuring that the analysis remains closely aligned with the participant's experiences and the overall context of the study. Table 5.2 below shows the initial codes and subsequent category found within the interview transcripts for the first research question.

Table 5.2

Initial Codes and Themes- RQ1

Initial Themes	Codes
The Impact of School Leadership on Student-Teacher Relationships	Modeling, Engagement, Positive interactions, Trust, Respect, Collaboration, Supportive school culture, Relationship-building, Inclusive atmosphere
The importance of consistency in teacher-led practices	teacher, students, student-teacher, relationships, building, collaboration, classroom, daily practices, engagement

The researcher examined the initial themes to verify their accurate data representation and to confirm their meaningful contribution to the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The researcher scrutinized the themes to confirm that they were logical, unique, and substantiated by the data that had been coded. The researcher examined the transcripts to confirm that sufficient evidence supported each theme and assessed whether any themes required refinement, merging, or

removal. The researcher verified that the selected themes matched the research questions and enabled detailed, credible interpretation of the data through repeated evaluations.

The researcher carefully described and assigned a name to the themes to effectively represent their meaning and importance in the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The researcher refined the themes to remain unique yet coherent while adequately representing the identified data patterns. The researcher created a brief theme description that maintained its essential meaning and demonstrated their connection to the research questions. The researcher's detailed theme naming brought the organization to the analysis, which helped present the findings and their implications effectively and cohesively. Table 5.3 below highlights how the researcher defined the themes, while Table 5.4 depicts how the final themes were defined and aligned with the research questions.

Table 5.3

Defining Themes-RQ1

Initial Theme	Defined Theme
The impact of school leadership on student-teacher relationships	School leadership is a positive and influential force in shaping student-teacher relationships.
The importance of consistency in teacher-led practices	There is a need for sustained and consistent implementation of teacher-driven strategies to foster and maintain student-teacher relationships.

Table 5.4*Alignment of Final Themes-RQ1*

Final Theme	Alignment with Research Question	Definition
School leadership is a positive and influential force in shaping student-teacher relationships.	RQ1	School leadership is a positive and influential force in shaping student-teacher relationships. It models effective interactions, fosters a supportive school culture, and provides the necessary resources and guidance to help teachers build meaningful connections with students.
The importance of consistency in teacher-led practices	RQ1	Educators must regularly implement and reinforce relationship-building strategies to ensure sustained student engagement, trust, and positive classroom environments, particularly in the absence of formal leadership support.

Theme 1: School Leadership is a Positive and Influential Force in Student-Teacher Relationships

The theme ***School Leadership is a Positive and Influential Force in Shaping Student-Teacher Relationships*** emphasizes school leaders' essential function in building strong bonds between teachers and students. Leadership is a positive force that strengthens relationships through exemplary behavior modeling and establishing trust and respect while delivering vital resources and professional growth opportunities. The participants reported that school leaders used modeling positive interactions as their primary approach to creating better student-teacher

relationships. One participant stated, "School leaders model the importance of student-teacher relationships by clearly prioritizing them in school communication and setting expectations for engagement."

The respectful and caring behavior displayed by administrators establishes a model for teachers to emulate while highlighting relationship-building as a fundamental component of school culture. The participants also perceived that leadership support generated a school atmosphere that teachers found both inclusive and collaborative while motivating them to place importance on student relationships. One teacher explained, "By fostering a supportive school culture, encouraging reflection, and offering teacher resources, school leaders create an environment where strong student-teacher relationships are valued and nurtured." This suggests that leadership activities extend beyond expectation setting because they actively transform school culture to support teachers in developing significant relationships with students.

In addition, participants viewed school leaders as actively identifying and providing support for teachers who demonstrated excellence in establishing strong connections with their students. One participant noted, "They provide professional development opportunities, demonstrate positive interactions with students and staff, and recognize teachers who excel in relationship-building." This recognition demonstrated that building student relationships requires collective effort rather than being solely a teacher's responsibility. Participants repeatedly highlighted how leadership affects school culture. The school administration's focus on student-teacher relationships created a foundation of increased trust and respect, leading to greater community engagement. As one respondent explained, "Demonstrating the importance of the student-teacher relationship by school leadership creates a trusting, respectful, and collaborative school culture environment."

In addition, administrative focus on student-teacher connections was perceived to produce organizational benefits beyond singular relationships and created a supportive school climate that educators and students experience. Participants emphasized that leadership-driven professional development and capacity-building efforts were crucial in strengthening relationships. As one teacher described, “School leaders can model the importance of student-teacher relationships by actively engaging with students, showing genuine interest in their lives, publicly praising teachers who build strong connections with students, and prioritizing professional development focused on relationship building.” The takeaway from the participants was that school leaders should demonstrate appropriate behaviors while developing intentional frameworks to help teachers build meaningful connections with their students.

Participants recognized school leadership as essential to developing and maintaining effective student-teacher relationships throughout this theme. School administrators ensured teachers could build meaningful connections with students by demonstrating effective interactions and cultivating collaboration while offering training and recognition alongside integrating relationship-building into school values. School achievement depends on continuous leadership participation and deliberate actions to maintain student-teacher relationships as fundamental components.

Theme 2: Consistency is important for effective teacher-led practices.

Teachers highlighted the necessity of maintaining consistency in their relationship-building efforts, including daily greetings, positive reinforcement, and proactive communication with students and families. Observations confirmed that classrooms with structured, teacher-led relationship-building practices saw higher student engagement and trust. However, responses from the focus group suggested that leadership does not consistently reinforce these efforts.

While some teachers informally mentor new colleagues and share best practices, no formal system is in place to ensure that relationship-building strategies are implemented uniformly across classrooms. It suggests a need for leadership-driven professional development and support to sustain teacher-led relationship-building initiatives.

For example, participants in the focus group emphasized the significance of teacher-led strategies in fostering student-teacher relationships and the necessity for these practices to be implemented consistently. The responses indicate that while specific student-teacher relationship-building strategies exist, they are primarily teacher-driven rather than formally mandated by leadership. One participant outlined some of the key relationship-building practices used by teachers, stating: "Some of the recommended student-teacher building practices in the building are listening and validating students' feelings, contacting parents for good behavior, encouraging the students and celebrating their successes, beginning each day as a fresh start, being authentic with the students, and getting to know the students as individuals."

Another teacher confirmed that these strategies are not occasional but are used consistently in classrooms, saying, "All these strategies are used daily in classrooms." Teachers also described daily actions to maintain positive relationships, such as: "Students receive a 'good morning' every morning." Despite the commitment to these practices, there was an acknowledgment that these efforts are primarily teacher-led rather than reinforced by school leadership. One participant noted, "Some staff members stress the importance of the student-teacher relationships when the opportunity arises." Additionally, mentorship among teachers plays a critical role in maintaining consistency. Another participant explained, "We have stressed the importance of this relationship with teammates and new teachers that have been mentored over the years."

In summary, this theme highlights the central role of teachers in ensuring the consistency of student-teacher relationship-building practices, even in the absence of formal leadership-driven initiatives. Teachers independently implement daily routines and mentoring efforts to reinforce these relationships, demonstrating a strong commitment to sustaining student engagement and trust. However, the findings suggest consistency in teacher-led practices is crucial; greater leadership involvement could further support and institutionalize these efforts to ensure long-term sustainability across classrooms and grade levels.

RQ2: How can school leaders support and build teacher capacity for student-teacher relationships?

The second research question aimed to understand how school leaders supported and built teacher capacity for student-teacher relationships. The interviews and focus group were analyzed following a thematic analysis for the second research question. Similarly, the researcher followed the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019). Table 5.5. below, highlights the initial codes and themes that were identified in the data for the second research question.

Table 5.5

Initial Codes and Themes- RQ2

Initial Themes	Codes
Supporting and Building Teacher Capacity for Student-Teacher Relationships	Professional development, Mentorship, Teacher leaders, Peer collaboration, Reflection, Leadership roles, Growth mindset, Coaching, Best practices, Teacher efficacy
The lack of formal leadership-driven initiatives	strategies, professional learning, opportunities, mentorship, support, training

The researcher then examined the initial themes to verify their accurate data representation and

to confirm their meaningful contribution to the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The researcher scrutinized the themes to confirm that they were logical, unique, and substantiated by the data that had been coded. The researcher examined the transcripts to confirm that sufficient evidence supported each theme and assessed whether any themes required refinement, merging, or removal. The researcher verified that the selected themes matched the research questions and enabled detailed, credible interpretation of the data through repeated evaluations.

The researcher carefully described and assigned a name to the themes to effectively represent their meaning and importance in the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The researcher refined the themes to remain unique yet coherent while adequately representing the identified data patterns. The researcher created a brief theme description that maintained its essential meaning and demonstrated their connection to the research questions. The researcher's detailed theme naming brought the organization to the analysis, which helped present the findings and their implications effectively and cohesively. Table 5.6 below highlights how the researcher defined the themes, while Table 5.7 depicts how the final themes were defined and aligned with the research questions.

Table 5.6

Defining Themes-RQ2

Initial Theme	Defined Theme
The lack of formal leadership-driven initiatives	strategies, professional learning, opportunities, mentorship, support, training
Supporting and building teacher capacity for student-teacher relationships	School leaders are instrumental in strengthening teacher capacity for relationship-building

Table 5.7*Alignment of Final Themes-RQ2*

Final Theme	Alignment with Research Question	Definition
School leaders are instrumental in strengthening teacher capacity for relationship-building	RQ2	School leaders are instrumental in strengthening teacher capacity for relationship-building by providing professional development, fostering collaboration, offering mentorship opportunities, and creating a school culture that prioritizes meaningful student-teacher connections.
The lack of formal leadership-driven initiatives	RQ2	The absence of structured, research-informed programs and professional development opportunities led by school leadership to support and sustain student-teacher relationship-building efforts, leaving teachers to rely on informal or self-directed strategies.

Theme 3: School leaders are instrumental in strengthening teacher capacity for relationship-building.

The third theme demonstrates how school leadership plays a vital role in developing teacher abilities for relationship-building by providing essential knowledge and support. Participants indicated that school leaders build a stronger teaching workforce by providing professional development, mentorship, peer collaboration, and reflective practice. One of the primary strategies identified by participants was professional development opportunities. One respondent

noted, "School administrators model the importance of continued professional learning by actively participating in professional development opportunities and prioritizing learning as a key part of the school's culture." This highlights that school leaders do not simply mandate professional learning; instead, they lead by example, actively engaging in the process to encourage teachers to do the same.

Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of teacher leadership and mentorship, where experienced educators guide their peers. One teacher shared, "School leaders also promote teachers learning in smaller sessions with leaders well versed in the school expectations." This form of peer collaboration and shared leadership provides teachers with hands-on, relevant learning experiences that directly impact their ability to build student relationships.

Another critical aspect of leadership's role in strengthening teacher capacity is creating a culture of reflection and continuous improvement. One participant said, "This emphasis on learning fosters a collaborative and reflective school environment where educators feel supported and empowered, leading to higher levels of teacher efficacy and a more dynamic, responsive educational atmosphere." This statement underscores that when school leaders promote professional learning and self-reflection, teachers gain confidence and adaptability in building relationships with students.

Moreover, school leaders contribute to teacher capacity by providing structured access to research and best practices. One participant noted, "School leadership plays a key role in keeping staff up to date with relevant research by curating and sharing current educational studies, best practices, and evidence-based strategies." School leaders ensure that teachers are equipped with

practical, evidence-based approaches to student engagement by facilitating access to data-driven insights and contemporary research.

Another key theme in participant responses was leadership's role in fostering teacher collaboration. One educator explained, "Leaders can provide access to professional development opportunities, facilitate collaborative discussions on research findings, and encourage integrating new knowledge into teaching practices." This reinforces the idea that teacher capacity is built through formal training and ongoing conversations, shared learning, and collective problem-solving.

Finally, some participants highlighted that school leaders are facilitators of knowledge and resources, ensuring teachers stay informed and supported. One teacher described this role by stating:

A school leader's primary role in keeping staff updated with relevant research is to actively promote a culture of continuous learning by providing access to research, facilitating professional development opportunities based on current findings, encouraging critical analysis of data, and creating a space where teachers can discuss and implement research-based practices in their classrooms; effectively acting as a conduit between new educational research and the teaching staff.

This illustrates the proactive role of school leaders in providing learning opportunities and guiding teachers in applying new strategies to enhance student relationships.

Participants consistently recognized school leaders as key facilitators of teacher capacity-building, particularly in fostering student relationships. Administrators gave teachers the tools and confidence to establish and sustain strong student relationships through professional development, mentorship, research-based learning, peer collaboration, and reflective practice.

These findings emphasize the importance of ongoing leadership support in ensuring that teachers are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of educational relationship-building.

Theme 4: Teachers noted the need for leadership-driven initiatives.

Participants in the focus group emphasized the absence of structured leadership-driven initiatives to support student-teacher relationship-building. Responses indicated that teachers are not provided with formal training or professional learning opportunities to develop their capacity in this area, leaving them to rely on their own experiences and informal strategies. One participant highlighted this gap: "There are no professional learning opportunities we are aware of." This sentiment was echoed when participants were asked whether they had been involved in professional learning focused on high-impact, research-informed strategies, to which the response was, "No, we have not been involved in professional learning opportunities focused on high-impact, research-informed strategies."

These statements demonstrate that leadership has not prioritized formal training or structured initiatives to support teachers in fostering student-teacher relationships. Instead, teachers rely on self-directed efforts and peer collaboration rather than leadership-driven development. The findings suggest a clear need for school leaders to establish professional learning structures actively, offering consistent training, mentorship programs, and evidence-based strategies to better equip teachers for relationship-building. Without leadership-driven initiatives, the sustainability of student-teacher relationships depends entirely on individual teacher efforts, which can lead to classroom inconsistencies.

The survey presents an analysis of the responses from teachers assessing their student-teacher relationships. The data provides insights into how teachers perceive their engagement, motivation, and instructional practices in fostering strong relationships with students. The

following sections summarize key findings and present visual representations of response distributions. Most teachers expressed positive perceptions regarding their student-teacher relationships, with most responses falling within the 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree' categories. Common themes observed across responses included a strong commitment to student support, positive reinforcement, and engagement. However, response variations suggest areas for further leadership support in professional development and strategy implementation. The following figures in Appendix D illustrate the distribution of responses for each survey question, providing a visual representation of how teachers assess their role in fostering student-teacher relationships.

In summary, the analysis of survey responses suggests that teachers perceive student-teacher relationships as an essential aspect of their practice. Leadership support significantly sustains these relationships through professional development, mentorship, and structured feedback mechanisms. While teachers generally feel confident in their ability to engage with students, continued support in instructional strategies and collaborative learning may enhance long-term success.

RQ3: What does the action research design and implementation team learn by developing and implementing structures for building and supporting student-teacher relationships?

The third research question aimed to understand what the action research design and implementation team learned by developing and implementing structures for building and supporting student-teacher relationships. Similarly to the previous research questions, the interviews and focus group were analyzed following a thematic analysis for the third research question. Similarly, the researcher followed the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019). Table 5.8. below, highlights the initial codes and themes that were identified in the data for the second research question.

Table 5.8*Initial Codes and Themes- RQ3*

Initial Themes	Codes
Learning from the Development and Implementation of Relationship-Building Structures	Continuous improvement, Strategies, Action research, Implementation, Feedback, Collaborative learning, School initiatives
Disconnect between leadership priorities and teachers' needs	impact, school, administration, success, leadership

The researcher then examined the initial themes to verify their accurate data representation and to confirm their meaningful contribution to the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The researcher scrutinized the themes to confirm that they were logical, unique, and substantiated by the data that had been coded. The researcher examined the transcripts to confirm that sufficient evidence supported each theme and assessed whether any themes required refinement, merging, or removal. The researcher verified that the selected themes matched the research questions and enabled detailed, credible interpretation of the data through repeated evaluations.

The researcher carefully described and assigned a name to the themes to effectively represent their meaning and importance in the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The researcher refined the themes to remain unique yet coherent while adequately representing the identified data patterns. The researcher created a brief theme description that maintained its essential meaning and demonstrated their connection to the research questions. The researcher's detailed theme naming brought the organization to the analysis, which helped present the findings and their implications effectively and cohesively. Table 5.9 below highlights how the researcher defined the themes, while Table 5.10 depicts how the final themes were defined and aligned with the research questions.

Table 5.9*Defining Themes-RQ3*

Initial Theme	Defined Theme
Disconnect between leadership priorities and teachers' needs	There is a misalignment between leadership priorities and the support, resources, and professional development teachers need to build and sustain student-teacher relationships effectively.
Learning from the development and implementation of relationship-building structures	The need for leadership support to ensure long-term success

Table 5.10*Alignment of Final Themes-RQ3*

Final Theme	Alignment with Research Question	Definition
The need for leadership support to ensure long-term success	RQ3	Leadership support is essential for ensuring the long-term success of student-teacher relationship-building initiatives by providing continuous guidance, resources, professional development, and a school culture that prioritizes meaningful connections.
Leadership priorities were not consistently aligned to the needs of teachers	RQ3	The misalignment between school administrators' focus areas and the support, resources, and professional development teachers require to build and sustain student-teacher relationships effectively.

Theme 5: There is a need for leadership support to ensure long-term success.

The theme, "The Need for Leadership Support to Ensure Long-Term Success," underscores the necessity of ongoing leadership involvement in sustaining school relationship-building efforts. Participants emphasized that long-term success depends on continuous improvement, structured support systems, research-based strategies, and collaborative learning opportunities that school leaders consistently reinforce. One of the key aspects participants highlighted was the role of leadership in fostering continuous improvement in student-teacher relationship-building efforts. As one participant explained, "Administrators also create opportunities for teachers to collaborate, reflect on their practice, and share new insights with colleagues, demonstrating their commitment to continuous improvement and setting an example for lifelong learning." This suggests that leadership must actively refine and enhance strategies to support teachers in relationship-building, ensuring that efforts remain relevant and effective over time.

Another essential factor participants pointed out was the need for school leaders to integrate structured, research-based strategies into their initiatives. One respondent noted, "School leadership plays a key role in keeping staff up to date with relevant research by curating and sharing current educational studies, best practices, and evidence-based strategies." By incorporating current educational research and data-driven strategies, school leaders provide teachers with practical tools to strengthen student relationships and sustain these efforts long-term.

Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of embedding relationship-building into broader school initiatives rather than treating it as a one-time effort. One participant highlighted this: "All school initiatives are focused on school data and relevant/current strategies

that promote school improvement." This reinforces the idea that successful relationship-building must be integrated into school policies, instructional frameworks, and student support systems to remain impactful over time.

Participants also mentioned the importance of leadership in fostering collaboration and seeking teacher feedback to improve relationship-building strategies. One teacher noted, "School leaders draw on teacher expertise by asking for their input and feedback when working with difficult students and families." This demonstrates that effective leadership involves engaging teachers as active participants in the decision-making process, ensuring that their insights and experiences shape the long-term success of these initiatives.

Finally, school leaders' role in recognizing and reinforcing positive teacher-student relationships was a recurring theme in participant responses. One teacher described this: "School leaders praise teachers for using positive strategies/communication with their students and families." This acknowledgment motivates teachers to prioritize student relationships and ensures consistency in best practices across the school community.

In summary, participants consistently stressed that long-term success in relationship-building depends on continuous leadership support. By modeling continuous improvement, integrating research-based strategies, embedding relationship-building into school initiatives, fostering collaboration, and recognizing effective practices, school leaders create sustainable systems that allow teachers to develop and maintain meaningful student relationships over time. These findings highlight the critical role of leadership in ensuring that student-teacher relationship-building remains a lasting priority within schools.

Theme 6: Leadership priorities were not consistently aligned to the needs of teachers.

The focus group participants pointed out that school leadership priorities diverge from the professional development and support teachers need to build effective student-teacher relationships. Teachers expressed concerns about the lack of leadership-driven professional learning opportunities and the absence of structured support systems for building and maintaining strong relationships with students. One participant commented on the absence of professional development opportunities by explaining, "There are no professional learning opportunities that we are aware of."

Another participant replied that they had not engaged in professional learning sessions directed at high-impact, research-based educational strategies, "No, we have not been involved in professional learning opportunities focused on high-impact, research-informed strategies."

Focus group feedback indicates leadership priorities do not match teachers' requirements for structured professional development, mentorship, or access to research-based strategies. In essence, within this theme, educators understand student-teacher relationships as critical but lack the proper training and leadership support to build and keep these bonds strong. School leadership must match their focus with teacher-specified support areas to guarantee educators obtain the necessary resources and training for success.

The researcher also completed observations. During classroom observations, teachers implemented Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies alongside the Panther PRIDE positive behavior system and Morning Meetings. The observations revealed how teachers create learning environments that support safety and structure while engaging students in their emotional development and classroom culture management. Multiple observations showed inconsistent teacher effectiveness; some educators implemented SEL strategies and Panther

PRIDE expectations consistently during morning meetings, but others demonstrated inconsistent execution.

Chapter Summary

The research study aimed to improve how elementary school leaders build capacity and support teachers by establishing and maintaining student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school. This chapter provided the analysis of findings from the research study based on data from interviews, surveys, focus groups, observations, and the researcher's journal notes. The data had six overall themes that relate to one of the research questions.

Research Question 1 investigated how elementary teachers describe the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school. Teachers acknowledged that school leadership is crucial in shaping student-teacher relationships, but implementation is inconsistent. Teachers who receive leadership support report stronger relationships and higher engagement. However, there is no formalized system to ensure sustained leadership involvement. Two themes emerged from the findings: school leadership is a positive and influential force in shaping student-teacher relationships, and consistency is important for effective teacher-led practices.

Research Question 2 focused on how school leaders can support and build teacher capacity related to student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school. Two themes emerged through the data: school leaders are instrumental in strengthening teacher capacity for relationship-building, and teachers noted the need for leadership-driven initiatives. Teachers emphasized the need for professional development, structured mentorship, and research-based training to strengthen their capacity. However, leadership-driven initiatives in these areas are lacking, leaving teachers to rely on informal strategies.

Research Question 3 sought the perspectives of the action research design and implementation team learn through developing and implementing structures for building and supporting student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school. Findings suggest that the long-term sustainability of student-teacher relationships depends on continuous leadership support and alignment between leadership priorities and teacher needs. Without structured leadership involvement, implementation inconsistencies emerge. There is a need for leadership support to ensure long-term success, and leadership priorities were not consistently aligned with the needs of teachers, which were the two themes.

This data supported the findings that implementing professional learning related to social-emotional learning strategies, a positive behavior plan, and Morning Meetings supported school leaders in supporting teachers in establishing and sustaining student-teacher relationships. The beginning of this chapter provided the themes that emerged from the study and findings from each action research cycle. As the study concluded, show how the findings were related to the research questions. Chapter 6 presents the study's conclusions and discusses the implications and the connections to future leadership practices.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONNECTIONS TO LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

This study examined how school leaders build capacity and support teachers with student-teacher relationships in an elementary school. The action research team examined the perspectives of school leaders and teachers as part of the school leadership team on how school leaders can build capacity and support teachers in establishing student-teacher relationships. The school leadership team sought perspectives on the impact of school leadership on student-teacher relationships through building capacity and supporting teachers.

To address the purpose of this action research study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. How do elementary teachers describe the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?
2. How can school leaders support and build teacher capacity related to student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?
3. What does the action research design and implementation team learn through the development and implementation of structures for building and supporting student-teacher relationships in one urban area elementary school?

This chapter presents the researcher's propositions to school and system leaders, implications for policy, and suggested areas of further research. The propositions and implications are based on the themes from the study's findings.

Summary of the Research Design

A qualitative research method was used to gather data on the impact of elementary school leaders on building capacity and supporting teachers in establishing positive student-teacher relationships. In this study, the researcher explored how school leaders impact student-teacher relationships in an urban elementary school. The action research was completed at an urban area elementary school with a recent trend of low school climate data based on a school climate survey from the perspective of students and an increase in behavior infractions with a decrease in student achievement data.

Action Research

The action research team supported elementary teachers by seeking out the role of school leaders as school culture leaders building teacher capacity and describing the impact of school leadership on student-teacher relationships. During the study, the Action Research Design team spiraled through the Plan-Do-Check-Act, the action research cycle designed to support school leaders in building capacity and supporting teachers in student-teacher relationships at the Urban Area Elementary School. Action research allowed the researcher and the participants to reflect on the impact of school leadership on building and sustaining student-teacher relationships, how school leaders can support and build capacity in teachers related to student-teacher relationships and learning through the development and implementation of structures for building and supporting student-teacher relationships.

The action research design and implementation teams focused on establishing positive student-teacher relationships to increase student engagement. Surveys, observations, focus groups, and interviews were chosen as the main research methods due to their reliability and applicability to the study. Methods were used to contain researcher influence and bias, including

a reflective journal, check-ins, and peer debriefing. All qualitative data was collected anonymously and stored on protected software. This data was coded and analyzed for themes and patterns to answer the research questions.

Theoretical Framework

The action research team examined the perspectives of school leaders and teachers as part of the school leadership team on how school leaders can build capacity and support teachers in establishing student-teacher relationships. The school leadership team sought perspectives on the impact of school leadership on student-teacher relationships through building capacity and supporting teachers. The theoretical framework of teacher self-efficacy supports the action research cycle for this study.

Self-efficacy beliefs are generally defined as one's ability to initiate and maintain the courses of action needed to produce an anticipated outcome (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy beliefs, specific to a task or an area of knowledge or performance, shape the behaviors and strategies that help one pursue their goal. Self-efficacy is informed by five influences: performance experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, imaginal experience, and physical and emotional states. Using teacher self-efficacy can create an opportunity to improve student outcomes by adjusting and strengthening the beliefs that teachers maintain about their abilities to build positive relationships with the students in their classroom (Ross & Bruce, 2007; Siwatu & Chesnut, 2015).

Logic Model

The foundation for the study was the idea of continuous improvement of school leaders based on their knowledge and strategies for leading and supporting teachers. The current study

sought to examine how school leaders can engage in this process to support teachers in building student-teacher relationships.

The logic model used in this study consisted of four parts and provided a cycle of support and building capacity for school leaders and teachers. The Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle provided a specific structure for the study to create a plan of action by measuring current standards, brainstorming ideas for improvement, and setting objectives. The action plan was implemented by changing the existing procedures while adding support through professional development. The Action Research Design Team evaluated and analyzed improvements and implemented effective and preventative changes as needed. All existing data from the support cycle was analyzed and used to determine if there would be a permanent change to the school processes or if further adjustments are needed. This model provides an opportunity for growth for teachers and a framework that allows school leaders to engage with the process.

Summary and Discussion of the Findings

The findings of the action research team address the purpose of the research, which was to discover ways school leaders can enhance student-teacher relationships at the Urban Area Elementary School. The school leadership team sought perspectives on the impact of school leadership on student-teacher relationships through building capacity and supporting teachers. The study's findings addressed the research problem, examining how school leaders build capacity and support teachers with student-teacher relationships in an elementary school and aiming to improve it so that overall school improvement could occur. The analysis of findings from the research study was based on data from interviews, surveys, focus groups, observations, and the researcher's journal notes. The data analysis resulted in six overall themes related to one research question.

Discussion of Findings from Research Question 1

The findings suggest that when school leaders actively promote student-teacher relationships through visible actions and policies, teachers feel more supported and empowered to foster positive student interactions. It also suggests a need for leadership-driven professional development and support to sustain teacher-led relationship-building initiatives. Participants noted that administrators prioritizing relationship-building create an environment where students feel valued, respected, and engaged. However, inconsistencies in leadership approaches were reported, with some teachers stating that relationship-building strategies are more of an individual teacher responsibility rather than a structured leadership priority. Teachers highlighted the necessity of maintaining consistency in their relationship-building efforts, including daily greetings, positive reinforcement, and proactive communication with students and families.

Discussion of Findings from Research Question 2

Teachers emphasized the need for professional development, structured mentorship, and research-based training to strengthen their capacity. However, leadership-driven initiatives in these areas are lacking, leaving teachers to rely on informal strategies. Teachers identified professional development, mentorship, and research-based training as essential tools for enhancing their ability to build relationships with students. Many participants expressed that while they recognize the importance of student-teacher relationships, they lack formal training in implementing effective strategies. Despite recognizing the importance of student-teacher relationships, teachers expressed frustration at the lack of structured initiatives provided by school leadership.

Discussion of Findings from Research Question 3

The study findings emphasized that sustaining student-teacher relationships requires ongoing leadership involvement. Teachers reported that while they employ relationship-building strategies in their classrooms, the lack of long-term leadership support creates challenges in maintaining these efforts consistently. Findings suggested that the long-term sustainability of student-teacher relationships depends on continuous leadership support and alignment between leadership priorities and teacher needs. Without structured leadership involvement, implementation inconsistencies emerge. Leaders must engage in ongoing dialogue with teachers to better align professional learning initiatives with classroom realities.

Limitations of the Current Study

Limitations are characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation or findings from research (Bloomberg, 2023). The study is backed by low school climate and achievement data; however, it originated from the experiences and curiosity of a local school leader. This fact threatens to place a school leadership bias on its findings. The author of this study has identified the following limitations: researcher experience level, time, the researcher's position, selection bias, and state school climate data gaps due to COVID-19.

The researcher in this study was new to action research and was finishing a doctoral degree while working full-time as a principal in a large, urban school district. Everything was being done for the first time, from managing a focus group to developing surveys and completing semi-structured interviews. A lack of experience could have influenced the findings of the study. The role of the researcher as a principal may have also influenced who joined the study. The researcher's role influenced the teachers' behavior during observations and their responses to interview questions. Before conducting interviews with the teachers, they were asked to answer

honestly. However, responses to interview questions may have been unconsciously oriented around supporting the goals of building and sustaining student-teacher relationships. Despite numerous attempts to announce that the study was non-evaluative, some staff members may not have genuinely trusted the researcher or used other perceptions to avoid the study. Their voices could go unheard and cause selection bias.

This study used state school climate data during a traditional start of school and after two non-traditional school years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 was a worldwide pandemic, which could have also caused a gap in state school climate data. The researcher was also limited in terms of resources and what interventions could take place due to the sensitivity of staff and leadership turnover at the school. Despite these declared limitations, the interventions chosen for the study were the best attempt to discover ways to enhance the school climate. Future approaches to action research revolving around school climate, student-teacher relationships, and student engagement could address these limitations to provide a more comprehensive study. The final limitation is that this study only examined relationships from the teacher's perspective. Students were not allowed to contribute to the study and share their views on how the implementation of interventions did or did not change relationships between teachers.

Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners

This study illustrates the crucial responsibility of school leaders to enhance student-teacher connections by developing teacher skills and offering continuous support. Establishing a strong positive environment within schools relies on relationships, and leaders must understand that relationship-building extends beyond teacher duties and becomes essential for successful school management (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016; Daily et al., 2020). School leaders must create explicit guidelines and embed relationship-building as a key element of their school's

culture to prioritize student-teacher relationships. Structured policies that encourage meaningful student interactions should include daily student check-ins, proactive family communication, and restorative practice implementation (MacNeil et al., 2009; Wang & Degol, 2015). Administrative leadership requires active engagement in relationship-building through positive student interaction modeling to establish a shared understanding of the importance of these connections among all teachers (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020).

The study indicates that professional development programs should expand to offer teachers mentorship and effective relationship-building practices (Smith et al., 2020). Many teachers understand that building strong student relationships is essential but frequently receive no formal training on how to do it properly (Daily et al., 2020). School leaders must create professional development opportunities based on research covering areas including social-emotional learning, trauma-informed pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). Teacher training programs must include interactive workshops, role-playing activities, and reflective practices to enable educators to build and enhance their interpersonal capacities (Daily et al., 2020). Mentorship programs that connect seasoned teachers with their newer or struggling peers deliver essential advice on building classroom relationships (Smith et al., 2020). Teachers benefit from continuous professional learning, which enables them to incorporate these teaching strategies into their everyday classroom activities (Read et al., 2015).

The study revealed a central challenge stemming from the uneven level of leadership support for student-teacher relationship-building initiatives (MacNeil et al., 2009; Wang & Degol, 2015). Teachers reported that some administrators stress building positive student relationships as essential to leadership, while others overlook this responsibility (Cherkowski &

Walker, 2016). The inconsistency creates fragmented efforts that obstruct the maintenance of long-term improvements (Daily et al., 2020). School leaders should maintain an ongoing commitment to relationship-building programs by establishing frameworks that support long-term continuation (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). Periodic meetings with teachers to evaluate their requirements, difficulties, and achievements enable administrators to deliver prompt assistance and resources (Smith et al., 2020). An advisory board or committee that includes administrators, teachers, parents, and students will guarantee continuous dialogue and accountability when dedicated to improving student-teacher relationships. When schools incorporate relationship-building activities into their improvement plans and maintain these efforts as ongoing priorities, they will establish their importance and ensure that leadership approaches remain consistent (Kostyo et al., 2018).

A key suggestion includes setting up systems of accountability that allow for monitoring progress and assessing the effects of initiatives to build student-teacher relationships (Wang & Degol, 2015). The lack of evaluation mechanisms prevents schools from assessing the effectiveness of strategy implementation and its resultant success (Daily et al., 2020). School leaders can utilize student perception surveys to gain valuable feedback on student-teacher interactions and pinpoint areas that need development (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). Teachers can refine their relationship-building strategies through collaborative peer observations, a valuable assessment tool (Read et al., 2015). Regular school climate assessments must examine essential elements, including trust levels and belonging, alongside favorable teacher-student interaction rates (MacNeil et al., 2009). Analyzing trends in disciplinary records and student performance enables educators to understand if stronger student-teacher relationships result in fewer behavioral problems and greater student participation (Wang & Degol, 2015).

Implementing accountability measures allows school leaders to sustain relationship-building as an ongoing priority instead of a short-term program (Kostyo et al., 2018).

A supportive school environment that enables teacher collaboration while building meaningful student relationships proves essential (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016). Educational leaders must establish professional learning communities (PLCs) to support educators as they share best practices, discuss teaching challenges, and create new engagement strategies for students (Smith et al., 2020). School systems need to endorse interdisciplinary collaboration because it enables teachers from multiple subject areas to unite in developing classroom activities that build cross-classroom relationships (Read et al., 2015). Student leadership councils and advisory groups that integrate students into decision-making processes help them participate in developing school policies and initiatives that improve school climate and engagement (Kostyo et al., 2018). Developing robust partnerships between families and community organizations strengthens student support networks by emphasizing the significance of establishing connections outside school settings (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020).

Research findings reveal that successful and engaging school environments depend heavily on the quality of student-teacher relationships (Wang & Degol, 2015). The success of student-teacher relationships depends heavily on school leaders who create supportive conditions (MacNeil et al., 2009). Practitioners who prioritize relationship-building and expand professional development opportunities while sustaining leadership involvement and accountability measures alongside a collaborative school culture build thriving environments for students and teachers (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016). Schools prioritizing strong student-teacher relationships gain benefits such as improved student behavior and academic achievement and increased teacher satisfaction (Daily et al., 2020). The dedication to relationship-building initiatives represents an

educational approach and a promise to develop an inclusive and supportive learning atmosphere that benefits every student (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020).

Implications and Recommendations for Researchers

This study provides multiple insights and guidance for researchers examining how school leadership affects relationships between students and teachers. Further investigation is necessary to understand how leadership initiatives affect school relationship-building efforts over time. The research emphasizes school leaders' support of teachers. However, it suggests further studies should investigate if such efforts last across several academic years to understand leadership continuity effects on student participation and teacher performance (MacNeil et al., 2009; Wang & Degol, 2015). Future studies need to assess the impact of various leadership approaches on school relationship-building by examining demographic differences among schools and disparities in teacher experience and student backgrounds (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016). By understanding these dynamics, educators can determine which leadership strategies lead to creating a positive school environment, according to Daily et al. (2020).

Developing and assessing structured professional development programs to improve student-teacher relationships represents a vital research path. This research highlights the importance of teacher relationship-building training while pointing out the need to examine further which professional development methods produce the best outcomes in student engagement and teacher effectiveness (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). Research that compares different training approaches, including mentorship programs and trauma-informed teaching methods, provides important information about effective practices for teachers and education leaders (Smith et al., 2020). It is essential for researchers to study the evolution of

teacher self-efficacy through professional development and to assess if purposeful interventions produce concrete student outcome improvements (Read et al., 2015).

Researchers should examine how accountability and assessment tools monitor student-teacher relationship development. This study proposes student surveys, teacher self-assessments, and school climate evaluations, but further research must identify which measures reliably and validly assess relationship quality in educational settings (MacNeil et al., 2009). Research moving forward needs to concentrate on improving assessment instruments that generate practical information for educators so they can effectively close student engagement gaps (Wang & Degol, 2015). Longitudinal studies can determine how better student-teacher relationships cause changes in academic success, attendance, and behavioral results (Daily et al., 2020).

Researchers need to expand their studies to explore student viewpoints regarding relationship-building strategies. The research prioritizes school leadership and teacher perspectives. However, new studies need to include student input to better understand student perceptions of relationship-building programs, as Kostyo et al. (2018) suggested. By examining student feedback about the most effective strategies that help them feel supported by their teachers, we can gather important information to create more student-centered relationship-building approaches (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020).

Upcoming research needs to investigate how state and district policies affect school leadership practices through their impact on student-teacher relationships. Policy investigations across different levels regarding their impact on relationship-building can offer strategic advice for policymakers who want to enhance school environments and student involvement (Daily et al., 2020). Studies must examine how school funding and leadership training affect relationship-building initiatives to create educational policies supporting strong student-teacher connections

(Kostyo et al., 2018). Scholars exploring these research gaps will deepen the understanding of how leadership in schools combined with structured interventions creates better relationships within educational environments, leading to improved outcomes for both students and teachers.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy Makers

School climate is a powerful force in school improvement and should be a focus of education policy. Current education issues, such as low student achievement and teacher retention, can be counteracted with a healthy school climate (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). School climate is all about building relationships. These relationships include school leaders, teachers, students, parents, partners, and all other stakeholders. Encouraging positive school relationships, especially between students and teachers, brings positive results (Daily et al., 2020). School leaders play a significant role in managing the quality of school climate (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016; Daily et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020; MacNeil et al., 2009; Read et al., 2015; Wang & Degol, 2015). School leaders must instill a passion for the school climate by supporting teachers in establishing positive relationships with students. School climate should constantly be on a leader's mind when making decisions that affect the school. A school and its climate are a product of its leaders (MacNeil et al., 2009).

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) encourages schools to emphasize how school relationships and climate can lead to better student outcomes rather than looking only at overall achievement (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). School leaders should be required to include school climate goals in school improvement plans, and funds should be allocated to enhance school climate using research-based interventions. ESSA allows states to create new approaches to school accountability and continuous improvement. ESSA requires states to include at least one indicator of school quality or student success. Some states are making efforts to build

positive school climates in their ESSA plans, and how these states intend to measure and use information from this indicator to create more equitable and inclusive learning environments for all students (Kostyo et al., 2018). Policy considerations for implementation of strategies to improve school climate are leveraging school improvement funding or Title IV grants under ESSA to implement school climate surveys and improve school climate and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies, identifying ways to acknowledge success and share best practices of school that have improved school climate, and the implementation of high-quality programs, professional development, and school organizational changes to support student development based upon an analysis using school climate surveys (Kostyo et al., 2018). Leadership programs and school districts should provide continuous professional development for school leaders centered around the qualities shown to be present in successful school leaders. Schools only look to increase academic achievement if they look at the school climate. School climate can have powerful effects on student learning, and schools should use an assessment of culture and a climate survey to identify problem areas. (Wang & Degol, 2015).

School leadership is about making deep relationships at all levels to bring positive change (Mette, 2020). Leaders need to provide a vision for increasing school climate and use that vision to encourage the development of quality student-teacher relationships that include trust, approachability, positivity, and creativity. Influential and motivational school leaders are instrumental in improving the school climate for students with economic disadvantages, building collegiality, and setting professional standards for everyone (Smith et al., 2020). School leaders must focus on improving the school climate regarding relationships, safety, equity, satisfaction, and connection. If these are all positive, the school will have a positive environment (Daily et al., 2020). Policymakers should consider ways states design accountability and improvement

systems, offer guidance, and provide funding to build a positive school climate (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020).

Concluding Thoughts

This study demonstrates how school leadership is pivotal in developing robust student-teacher relationships and creating a healthy school climate. Educational leaders directly shape teachers' capacity to create lasting bonds with students, which affects both student participation and academic success while influencing school culture (MacNeil et al., 2009; Wang & Degol, 2015). The findings demonstrate that effective leadership must prioritize relationship-building instead of depending on teachers to manage it alone. Educational institutions with systematic programs, teacher development opportunities, and accountability structures create supportive environments that make students feel appreciated (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). Leadership engagement over time guarantees that relationship-building work becomes an enduring commitment instead of a short-lived project (Daily et al., 2020).

This study emphasizes the importance of professional development led by educational leaders, which provides teachers with essential tools and techniques to promote student engagement. Educators recognize the significance of building positive connections with students but do not receive structured training to apply effective methods (Smith et al., 2020). Teaching professionals can develop stronger student relationships by participating in mentorship programs, social-emotional learning workshops and applying trauma-informed teaching strategies (Read et al., 2015). When schools include student perspectives in their relationship-building programs, they can learn which methods resonate best with students' points of view (Kostyo et al., 2018). Schools that engage students in developing engagement initiatives produce strategies that better

match their distinct requirements and experiences, according to Darling-Hammond and DePaoli (2020).

Leadership must consistently monitor and evaluate student-teacher relationships to fulfill important requirements. Educational institutions should create dependable accountability mechanisms to monitor relationship-building progress by utilizing student surveys and assessments of school climate alongside teacher reflections (Wang & Degol, 2015). The lack of standardized assessment measures prevents an accurate evaluation of leadership strategies' effectiveness in building positive relationships and identifying necessary adjustments to improve outcomes (Daily et al., 2020). School leaders who define explicit evaluation metrics can use data to improve student engagement and strengthen teacher support systems.

Future studies must investigate the effects of leadership practices on student-teacher relationships within various educational environments. The effectiveness of strategies to build relationships in schools depends on differences in student population characteristics, leadership approaches, and teacher experience (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016). Research into the influence of policy on leadership duties regarding student-teacher relationships reveals methods education systems can use to enhance school leader support for building positive school environments (Kostyo et al., 2018). Further research is necessary to understand how leadership training programs interact with policy initiatives and teacher development processes.

This research demonstrates how school leadership fundamentally influences the relational environment within educational institutions. Educational leaders can establish thriving environments for students and teachers by focusing on student-teacher relationships while ensuring structured professional development, leadership consistency, and accountability measures (MacNeil et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). When schools establish

strong relationships between students and teachers, they achieve better academic results and increase student motivation and teacher satisfaction (Daily et al., 2020). Educational institutions achieve best practice status through relationship-building initiatives which show their dedication to creating inclusive learning spaces that support every student (Wang & Degol, 2015).

References

- Acar, S., Harun T., Myers, D., Van der Sman, C. and Uysal, R. (2021). Creativity and well-being: A meta-analysis. *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, 55(3), 738-751.
- Akyıldız, S. T., & Ahmed, K. H. (2021). An overview of qualitative research and focus group discussion. *International Journal of Academic Research in Education*, 7(1), 1-15.
- Allen, K. A., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 30(1), 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9389-8>
- Allen, K.A., Slaten, C.D., Arslan, G., Roffey, S., Craig, H., & Vella-Brodrick, D.A. (2021). School belonging: The importance of student and teacher relationships. In M.L. Kern and M.L. Wehmeyer (Eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education*, 39-57. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64537-3_21
- Alsobaie, M. F. (2015). The principal's relationship with teacher and development literacy of elementary school students. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(35), 149–155. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1086319>
- Alter, P. & Haydon, T. (2017). Characteristics of effective classroom rules: A review of the literature. *Teacher Education and Special Education*. 40(2), 114–127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406417700962>
- Alves, B. L. M., Penner Pauls, M., Stoltz, T., & Pauls, M. J. (2020). School climate in the brazilian school context: An integrative literature review. *International Journal for Innovation Education and Research*, 8(3), 277-293. <https://doi.org/10.31686/ijer.vol8.iss3.2228>
- An, Y. & Mindrila, D. (2020). Strategies and tools used for learner-centered instruction.

- International Journal of Technology in Education and Science*, 4(2), 133- 143.
- Ankur, J., Saket, K., Satish, C., & Pal, D. K. (2015). Likert scale: Explored and explained. *British Journal of Applied Science & Technology*, 7(4), 396- 403.
<https://doi.org/10.9734/BJAST/2015/14975>
- Archambault, I., Vandenbossche-Makombo, J. & Fraser, S.L. (2017). Students' oppositional behaviors and engagement in school: The differential role of the student-teacher relationship. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 26, 1702–1712.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0691-y>
- Arens, K., & Niepel, C. (2019). School attitude and perceived teacher acceptance: Developmental trajectories, temporal relations, and gender differences. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89(4), 689-706. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12252>
- Auerbach, C. F., & Silverstein, L. B. (2003). *Qualitative data: An introduction to coding and analysis*. New York University Press.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2),191–215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191>
- Bandura, A. (1986). The explanatory and predictive scope of self-efficacy theory. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 4(3), 359-373.
<https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.1986.4.3.359>
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W.H. Freeman, New York.
- Bass, B.M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York: Free Press.
- Bloomberg, L.D. (2023). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: a road map from the beginning to the end* (5th edition). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in*

- Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589-597.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Caprara, G. V., Barbaranelli, C., Steca, P., & Malone, P. S. (2006). Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs as determinants of job satisfaction and students' academic achievement: A study at the school level. *Journal of School Psychology*, 44, 473-490.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2006.09.001>
- Chen, G., Zhang, J., Chan, C., Michaels, S., Resnick, L., & Xiaorui, H. (2020). The link between student-perceived teacher talk and student enjoyment, anxiety, and discursive engagement in the classroom. *British Educational Research Journal*, 46(3), 631-652.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3600>
- Chen, M., Zee, M. & Roorda, D.L. (2021). Assessing student–teacher relationship quality in cross-cultural contexts: Psychometric properties of student–teacher relationship drawings. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 19(5), 770-784, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2021.1952862>
- Cherkowski, S., & Walker, K. (2016). Purpose, passion and play. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 54(4), 378-392. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jea-10-2014-0124>
- Cheung, C. S. (2019). Parents' involvement and adolescents' school adjustment: Teacher–student relationships as a mechanism of change. *School Psychology*, 34(4), 350.
- Coelli, M., & Green, D. A. (2012). Leadership effects: School principals and student outcomes. *Economics of Education Review*, 31(1), 92-109.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2011.09.001>

- Coghlan, D. (2019). *Doing action research in your own organization* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Coghlan, D., & Brydon-Miller, M. (Eds.). (2014). *The SAGE encyclopedia of action research*. Sage.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). Routledge.
- Connor, C., Day, S., Phillips, P., Sparapani, N., Ingebrand, S., McLean, L., Barrus, A., & Kaschak M. (2016). Reciprocal effects of self-regulation, semantic knowledge, and reading comprehension in early elementary school. *School Psychology Review*, 47(3), 226-243. <https://doi.org/10.17105/SPR-2017-0025>
- Cook C. R., Coco S., Zhang Y., Fiat A. E., Duong M. T., Renshaw T. L., Long A. C., & Frank S. (2018). Cultivating positive teacher–student relationships: Preliminary evaluation of the establish–maintain–restore (EMR) method. *School Psychology Review*, 47(3), 226–243. <https://doi.org/10.17105/SPR-2017-0025.V47-3>
- Cook, C., Grady, E., Long, A., Renshaw, T., Coddington, R., Fiat, A., & Larson, M. (2017). Evaluating the impact of increasing general education teachers’ ratio of positive-to-negative interactions on students’ classroom behavior. *Journal of Positive Behavior*, 19, 67-77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300716679137>
- Coristine, S., Russo, S., Fitzmorris, R., Beninato, P., & Rivolta, G. (2022). The importance of

- student-teacher relationships. *Classroom Practice in 2022*.
- <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/educ5202/chapter/the-importance-of-student-teacher-relationships/>
- Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications
- Cruickshank, V. (2017). The influence of school leadership on student outcomes. *Open Journal of Social Science*, 5(9), 115–123. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/jss.2017.59009>
- Daily, S. M., Smith, M. L., Lilly, C. L., Davidov, D. M., Mann, M. J., & Kristjansson, A. L. (2020). Using school climate to improve attendance and grades: Understanding the importance of school satisfaction among middle and high school students. *The Journal of School Health*, 90(9), 683-693. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12929>
- Darling-Hammond, L., & DePaoli, J. (2020). Why school climate matters and what can be done to improve it. *State Education Standard*, 20(2), 7-11, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1257654.pdf>
- Datnow, A. (2012). Teacher agency in educational reform: Lessons from social networks research. *American Journal of Education*, 119, 193–201. <https://doi.org/10.1086/667708>.
- Day, C., Gu, Q., & Sammons, P. (2016) The impact of leadership on student outcomes: How successful school leaders use transformational and instructional strategies to make a difference. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 52(2), 221-258.
- Day, C., and Leithwood, K. (2007). *Successful school principalship: International perspectives*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Dellinger, A.B., Bobbett, J.J., Olivier, D.F., & Ellett, C.D. (2008). Measuring teachers' self-

- efficacy beliefs: Development and use of the TEBS-self. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(3), 751-766. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2007.02.010>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2013). *The landscape of qualitative research* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- DeVault, G. (2019). Establishing Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research. LiveAbout. Retrieved from <https://www.liveabout.com/establishing-trustworthiness-in-qualitative-research-2297042>
- Dickens, L., & Watkins, K. (1999). Action research: Rethinking lewin. *Management Learning*, 30(2), 127-140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507699302002>
- Dobia, B., Parada, R., Roffey, S., & Smith, M. (2019). Social and emotional learning: From individual skills to group cohesion. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 36(2), 79–90.
- Duong, M., Pullman, M., Buntain-Ricklefs, J., Lee, K., Benjamin, K., Nguyen, L., & Cook C. (2019). Brief teacher training improves student behavior and student-teacher relationships in middle school. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 34(2), 212-221. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000296>
- Efron, S.E., & Ravid, R. (2020). *Action research in education: A practical guide* (2nd ed.). The Guildford Press, New York.
- Edgerson, D. E., Kritsonis, W. A., & Herrington, D. (2006). The critical role of the teacher-principal relationship in the improvement of student achievement in public schools of the United States. *The Lamar University Electronic Journal of Student Research*, 3, 1–6. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED491985.pdf>
- Elo, S., Kaariainen, M., Kanste, O., Polkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngas, H. (2014). Qualitative

- content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *SAGE Open*, 1-10.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014522633>
- Fredriksen, K. & Rhodes, J. (2004). The role of teacher relationships in the lives of students. *New Direction for Youth Development*, 103, 45-54.
- Glanz, J. (2014). *Action research: An educational leader's guide to school improvement* (3rd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Glesne, C. (2016). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. Pearson.
- Goldie, P., & O'Connor, E. (2021). The gender achievement gap: Do teacher-student relationships matter? *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research*, 26(2), 139-149.
<https://doi.org/10.24839/2325-7342.JN26.2.139>
- Guion, L. A., Diehl, D. C., & McDonald, D. (2011). Triangulation: Establishing the validity of qualitative studies: FCS6014/FY394, rev. 8/2011. Edis, 2011(8), 3.
- Gurr, D. (2017). A model of successful school leadership from the international successful school principalship project. In K. Leithwood, J. Sun, and K. Pollack (Ed.) *How school leaders contribute to student success: The four paths framework* (pp.15–29). Springer.
- Hajloo, N. (2014). Relationships between self-efficacy, self-esteem and procrastination in undergraduate psychology students. *Iranian journal of psychiatry and behavioral sciences*, 8(3), 42.
- Hallinger, P. (2003). Leading educational change: Reflections on the practice of instructional and transformational leadership. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 33(3), 329-351.
- Hallinger, P. & Heck, R. H. (2010). Collaborative leadership and school improvement: Understanding the impact on school capacity and student learning. *School Leadership and Management*, 30(2), 95-110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632431003663214>

- Hallinger, P., Piyaman, P., & Viseshsiri, P. (2017). Assessing the effects of learning-centered leadership on teacher professional learning in Thailand. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 67, 464-476. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.07.008>
- Hamre B. K., & Pianta R. C. (2001). Early teacher-child relationships and the trajectory of children's school outcomes through eighth grade. *Child Development*, 72(2), 625–638. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00301>
- Hamre, B., & Pianta, R. (2004). Self-reported depression in nonfamiliar caregivers: Prevalence and associations with caregiver behavior in child-care settings. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 19, 297-318.
- Hamre, B., Pianta, R., Downer, J., DeCoster, J., Mashburn, A., Jones, S., Brown, J., Cappella, E., Atkins, M., Rivers, S., Brackett, M., & Hamagami, A. (2013). Teaching through interactions: Testing a developmental framework of teacher effectiveness in over 4,000 classrooms. *The Elementary School Journal*, 4(1), 461-487. <https://doi.org/10.1086/669616>
- Hancock, D. R., Algozzine, B., & Lim, J. H. (2021). *Doing case study research: A practical guide for beginning researchers*.
- Heilig Vasquez, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2008). Accountability Texas-style: The progress and learning of urban minority students in a high-stakes testing context. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 30(2), 75–110. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373708317689>
- Henry, A. & Thorsen, C. (2018). Teacher-student relationships and L2 Motivation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 102(1), 218-241. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12446>
- Hollingworth, L., Olsen, D., Asikin-Garmager, A., & Winn, K.M. (2018). Initiating

- conversations and opening doors: How principals establish a positive building culture to sustain school improvement efforts. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 46(6), 1014-1034. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143217720461>
- Is, W. I., & Matters, W. I. (2019). Social-emotional learning. *USA: Committee for Children*.
- Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The Prosocial Classroom: Teacher Social and Emotional Competence in Relation to Student and Classroom Outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 79, 491-525. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0034654308325693>
- Johnson, C. N. (2016). The benefits of PDCA. *Quality Progress*, 49(1), 45.
- Kalkan, U., Altinay Aksal, F., Altinay Gazi, Z., Atasoy, R., & Dagli, G. (2020). The relationship between school administrators' leadership styles, school culture, and organizational image. *SAGE Open*, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020902081>
- Karande, S., Bihade, V., & Dalvi, A. (2017). How leadership influences student learning. *DAWN Journal of Contemporary Research in Management*, 4(2), 1-6.
- Kennedy, A.M. & Haydon, T. (2021). Forming and sustaining high-quality student-teacher relationships to reduce minor behavioral incidents. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 56(3), 141–147. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451220942197>
- Kostyo, S. Cardichon, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2018). Making ESSA's equity promise real: state strategies to close the opportunity gap: Building a positive school climate. *Learning Policy Institute*. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/essa-equity-promise>.
- Kwakman, K. (2003). Factors affecting teachers' participation in professional learning activities. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 19, 149-170. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(02\)00101-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(02)00101-4)
- Lai, C. K., Skinner, A. L., Cooley, E., Murrar, S., Brauer, M., Devos, T., Calanchini, J., Xiao, Y.

- J., Pedram, C., Marshburn, C. K., Simon, S., Blanchar, J. C., Joy-Gaba, J. A., Conway, J., Redford, L., Klein, R. A., Roussos, G., Schellhaas, F. M. H., Burns, M., & Nosek, B. A. (2016). Reducing implicit racial preferences: II. Intervention effectiveness across time. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 145(8), 1001–1016.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000179>
- Le Fevre, D. M., & Robinson, V. M. J. (2015). The interpersonal challenges of instructional leadership: Principals' effectiveness in conversations about performance issues. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 51(1), 58–95.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X13518218>
- Lefever, S., & Matthiasdottir, A. (2006). Online data collection in academic research: Advantages and limitations. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 38(4), 574-582.
- Leithwood, K. (2021). A review of evidence about equitable school leadership. *Education Sciences*, 11, 377. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11080377>
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2019). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership and Management*, 40(1), 5-22.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1596077>
- Leithwood, K. & Jantzi, D. (2000). The effects of transformational leadership on organizational conditions and student engagement with school. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 38(2), 112–129. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230010320064>
- Leithwood, K., & Levin, B. (2010). *Understanding how leadership influences student learning*. Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-044894-7.00439-5>
- Leithwood, K., Louis, K.S., Anderson, S. & Wahlstorm, K. (2004). How leadership influences student learning. *Wallace Foundation Learning for Leadership Project Report*.

- New York: NY: Wallace Foundation. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/key-research/Pages/How-Leadership-Influences-Student-Learning.aspx>
- Leithwood, K.A. and Sun, J. (2012). The nature and effects of transformational school leadership: A meta-analytic review of unpublished research. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48, 387–423. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X11436268>
- Lind, J., Poppen, M., & Murray, C. (2017). An intervention to promote positive teacher–student relationships and self-determination among adolescents with emotional disturbance. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 40(3), 186–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143416683936>
- Liu, S. & Hallinger, P. (2018). Principal instructional leadership, teacher self-efficacy, and teacher professional learning in China: Testing a mediated-effects model. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 54(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X18769048>.
- Longobardi, C., Settanni, M., Lin, S., & Angelo-Fabris, M. (2021). Student-teacher relationship quality and prosocial behavior: The mediating role of academic achievement and a positive attitude towards school. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 91(2), 547–562. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12378>
- Longobardi, C., Prino, L. E., Marengo, D., & Settanni, M. (2016). Student-teacher relationships as a protective factor for school adjustment during the transition from middle to high school. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01988>
- Louis, K., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K., & Anderson, S. (2010). Investigating the links to improved student learning: Executive summary of research findings. *The Wallace Foundation*. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge->

center/Documents/Investigating-the-Links-to-Improved-Student-Learning-Executive-Summary.pdf

- MacNeil, A. J., Prater, D. L., & Busch, S. (2009). The effects of school culture and climate on student achievement. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 12(1), 73-84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603120701576241>
- McGrath K. F., & Van Bergen P. (2019). Who, when, why, and to what end? Students at risk of negative student-teacher relationships and their outcomes. *Educational Research Review*, 14, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2014.12.001>
- McNiff, J. (2017). *Action research: All you need to know*. SAGE Publications, London.
- McNiff, J., & Whitehead, J. (2005). *Action research for teachers: A practical guide*. David Fulton Publishers.
- Merriam, S.B. & Tisdell, E.J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Wiley.
- Mertler, C. (2009). *Action research: Teachers as researchers in the classroom*. SAGE Publications.
- Mertler, C., & Charles, C. M. (2008). *Introduction to Educational Research* (7th ed.). Pearson.
- Mette, I. M. (2020). Toxic culture and a wounded leader: A foray into a dysfunctional educational community. *The Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 23(3), 16- 31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555458920931543>
- Murray C., & Pianta R. C. (2007). The importance of teacher-student relationships for adolescents with high incidence disabilities. *Theory Into Practice*, 46(2), 105–112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840701232943>
- Noble, H. & Heale, R. (2019). Triangulation in research, with examples *Evidence-Based*

- Nursing*, 22, 67-68.
- O’Keeffe, P. (2013). A sense of belonging: Improving student retention. *College Student Journal*, 47(4), 605–613.
- Oliver-Hoyo, M., & Allen, D. (2006). The use of triangulation methods in qualitative educational research. *Journal of college science teaching*, 35(4).
- Opfer, V.D. & Pedder, D. (2011). Conceptualizing teacher professional learning. *Review of Educational Research*, 81, 376-407.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pietsch, M. & Tulowitzki, P. (2017). Disentangling school leadership and its ties to instructional practices-an empirical comparison of various leadership styles. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 28(4), 629-649. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2017.1363787>
- Pianta, R.C., Hamre, B., & Stuhlman, M. (2003). Relationships between teachers and children. *Handbook of Psychology*, 199-234. <https://doi.org/10.1002/0471264385.wei0710>
- Poulou, M. S. (2020). Students’ adjustment at school: The role of teachers’ need satisfaction, teacher–student relationships and student well-being. *School Psychology International*, 41(6), 499-521. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034320951911>
- Rafferty, T. J. (2003). School climate and teacher attitudes toward upward communication in secondary schools. *American Secondary Education*, 31(2), 49- 70.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41064486?seq=1>
- Read, K., Aldridge, J., Ala’i, K., Fraser, B., & Fozdar, F. (2015). Creating a climate in which students can flourish: A whole school intercultural approach. *International Journal of Whole Schooling*, 11(2), 29.

- Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2008). *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Reich, J.A. (2021). Power, Positionality, and the Ethic of Care in Qualitative Research. *Qual Sociol*, 44, 575–581. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-021-09500-4>
- Reigeluth, C.M., Myers, R.D., & Lee, D. (2017). The learner-centered paradigm of education. In C. M. Reigeluth, B. J. Beatty, & R. D. Myers (Eds.), *Instructional-design theories and models: The learner-centered paradigm of education* (Volume IV, pp. 5–32). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Rice, M. (2019). Importance of school connectedness. *Pediatrics for Parents*, 25(3), 11-21.
- Rimm-Kaufman, Sara & Sandilos, L. (2019). Improving Students' Relationships with Teachers. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/education/k12/relationships>
- Robinson, V. M. J. (2010). From instructional leadership to leadership capabilities: Empirical findings and methodological challenges. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 9:1, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700760903026748>
- Robinson, V. & Gray, E. (2019). What difference does school leadership make to student outcomes? *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand*, 49:2, 171-187. <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/03036758.2019.1582075>
- Roorda, D., Koomen, H., Spilt, J., & Oort, F. (2011). The influence of affective teacher-student relationships on students' school engagement and achievement: A meta-analytic approach. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(4), 493-529. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654311421793>
- Ross, J. & Bruce, C. (2007). Professional development effects on teacher efficacy: Results of

- randomized field trial. *Journal of Educational Research*, 101(1), 50–60.
<https://doi.org/10.3200/JOER.101.1.50-60>
- Ross, J.A. & Gray, P. (2006). Transformational leadership and teacher commitment to organizational values: The mediating effects of collective teacher efficacy. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 17, 179–199.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09243450600565795>
- Rucinski, C., Brown, J., & Downer, J. (2018). Teacher-child relationships, classroom climate, and children’s social-emotional and academic development. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 110(7), 992-1004. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000240>
- Ryu, J., Wall, J., & Louis, K.S. (2022). Caring leadership: The role principals in producing caring school cultures. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 21(3), 585–602.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2020.1811877>
- Sagor, R. (2000). Guiding school improvement with action research: ASCD.
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/100047/chapters/What-Is-Action-Research%C2%A2.aspx>
- Salisbury, S. (2018). Using attachment enhancing activities based on the principles of theraplay to improve adult-child relationships and reduce a child’s overall stress’ as measured by the strength and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ). *Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties*, 23(4). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2018.1497000>
- Sebastian, J., Allensworth, E., & Huang, H. (2016). The role of teacher leadership in how principals influence classroom instruction and student learning. *American Journal of Education*, 123(1). <https://doi.org/10.1086/688169>
- Sengupta, J. (2021). Action research: Purposes, principals, practice and evaluation. In H.S.

- Biswas, S. Poddar, A. Bhaumik (Ed.) *Advances in Science Education* (pp.22-28). Lincoln Research and Publishing Limited, Australia.
- <https://www.doi.org/10.46977/book.2021.ase>
- Shewhart, W. A., & Deming, W. E. (1986). *Statistical method from the viewpoint of quality control*. Courier Corporation.
- Shields-Lysiak, L., Boyd, M. P., Iorio Jr, J., & Vasquez, C. R. (2020). Classroom greetings: More than a simple hello. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 8(3), 41-56.
- Siwatu, K. & Chesnut, S. (2015). The career development of preservice and in-service teachers: Why teachers' self-efficacy beliefs matter.
- https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259973826_The_career_development_of_preservice_and_inservice_teachers_Why_teachers'_self-efficacy_beliefs_matter
- Smith, P. A., Escobedo, P., & Kearney, W. S. (2020). Principal influence: A catalyst for positive school climate. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, 16(5).
- <https://doi.org/10.22230/ijep.2020v16n5a961>
- Stringer, E.T. & Aragon, A. O. (2020). *Action research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Summers, J. J., Davis, H. A., and Wookfolk Hoy, A. (2017). The effects of teachers' efficacy beliefs on students' perceptions of teacher relationship quality. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 53, 17-25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2016.10.004>.
- Sun, J., & Leithwood, K. (2015). Direction-setting school leadership practices: a meta-analytical review of evidence about their influence. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 26(4), 499–523. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2015.1005106>
- Supovitz, J., Sirinides, P., & May, H. (2010). How principals and peers influence teaching and

- learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(1), 31–56.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670509353043>
- Sutherland K. S., Conroy M. A., McLeod B. D., Kunemund R., & McKnight K. (2019).
 Common practice elements for improving social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes of
 young elementary school students. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*,
 27(2), 76–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1063426618784009>
- Tague, N. R. (2023). *The quality toolbox*. Quality Press.
- Teherani, A., Martimianakis, T., Stenfors-Hayes, T., Wadhwa, A., & Varpio, L. (2015).
 Choosing a qualitative research approach. *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*, 7(4),
 669-670. <https://doi.org/10.4300/JGME-D-15-00414.1>
- The Wallace Foundation (2012). The school principal as leader: Guiding schools to better
 teaching and learning. perspective. expanded edition. *Wallace Foundation*.
[https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/The-School-Principal-
 as-Leader-Guiding-Schools-to-Better-Teaching-and-Learning-2nd-Ed.pdf](https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/The-School-Principal-as-Leader-Guiding-Schools-to-Better-Teaching-and-Learning-2nd-Ed.pdf)
- Tian, J., Zhang, W., Mao, Y. and Gurr, D. (2022). The impact of transformational leadership on
 teachers' job burnout: the mediating role of social-emotional competence and student-
 teacher relationship. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 60:4, 369-385.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-04-2021-0075>
- Thoonen, E.J., Slegers, P.J., Oort, F.T., & Peetsma, T.D. (2012). Building school-wide capacity
 for improvement: The role of leadership, school organizational conditions, and teacher
 factors. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 23(4), 441-460.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2012.678867>
- Trang, K., & Hansen, D. (2021). The roles of teacher expectations and school composition on

- teacher-child relationship quality. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 72(2), 152-167.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487120902404>
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & McMaster, P. (2009). Sources of self-efficacy: Four professional development formats and their relationship to self-efficacy and implementation of a new teaching strategy. *The Elementary School Journal*, 110(2), 228–245. <https://doi.org/10.1086/605771>
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17, 783–805. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(01\)00036-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(01)00036-1)
- Vaismoradi, M., Jones, J., Turunen, H., & Snelgrove, S. (2016). Theme development in qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/jnep.v6n5p100>
- Van Craeveveldt, S., Verschueren, K., Vancraeyveldt, C., Wouters, S., & Colpin, H. (2018). The role of preschool teacher-child interactions in academic adjustment: An intervention study with Playing-2-gether. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 87(3), 345-364.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12153>
- Van Loan C. L., & Garwood J. D. (2020). Facilitating high-quality relationships for students with emotional and behavioral disorders in crisis. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 55(4), 253–256. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451219855740>
- Van Loan C. L., & Marlowe M. (2013). Understanding and fostering teacher–student relationships to prevent behavior problems. In Smith S. W., Yell M. L. (Eds.), *A teacher’s guide to preventing behavior problems in the elementary classroom* (pp. 60–80). Pearson.

- Wang, M., & Degol, J. L. (2015). School climate: A review of the construct, measurement, and impact on student outcomes. *Educational Psychology Review*, 28(2), 315-352. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-015-9319-1>
- Weissberg R. P., Durlak J. A., Domitrovich C. E., & Gullotta T. P. (2015). Social and emotional learning: Past, present, and future. In Durlak J. A., Domitrovich C. E., Weissberg R. P., & Gullotta T. P. (Eds.), *Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice*, 3–19. New York, NY: Guilford.
- Wheatley, K. F. (2002). Teacher Persistence: A Crucial Disposition, with Implications for Teacher Education. *Essays in Education*, 3(1).
<https://openriver.winona.edu/eie/vol3/iss1/1>
- Yang, M., Chen, Z., Rhodes, J., & Orooji, M. (2018). A longitudinal study on risk factors of grade retention among elementary school students using a multilevel analysis: Focusing on material hardship and lack of school engagement. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 88(25), 97-133. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431617735651>
- Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Sage publications.
- Yu, M. V. B., Johnson, H. E., Deutsch, N. L., & Varga, S. M. (2018). “She calls me by my last name”: Exploring adolescent perceptions of positive teacher-student relationships. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 33(3), 332-362. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558416684958>
- Zee, M. & Koomen, H. (2020). Engaging children in the upper elementary grades: Unique

contributions of teacher self-efficacy, autonomy support, and student-teacher relationships. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 34(4), 477-495. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2019.1701589>

Zimmerman, B. J., & Martinez-Pons, M. (1990). Student differences in self-regulated learning: Relating grade, sex, and giftedness to self-efficacy and strategy use. *Journal of educational Psychology*, 82(1), 51.

APPENDIX A

Empirical Findings Table

Majors Studies	Findings
Self Efficacy	
Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. <i>Psychological Review</i> , 84(2),191–215. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191	Self-efficacy derives from Bandura's social-cognitive theory of behavioral change. Self-efficacy beliefs are generally defined as the belief in one's ability to initiate and maintain the courses of action needed to produce an anticipated outcome. Self-efficacy beliefs, specific to a task or an area of knowledge or performance, shape the behaviors and strategies that help one pursue their goal.
Bandura, A. (1986). The explanatory and predictive scope of self-efficacy theory. <i>Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology</i> , 4(3), 359-373. https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.1986.4.3.359	For teachers, teacher self-efficacy beliefs not only provide the motivation necessary to initiate a course of action but also provide a critical filter for how individuals interpret and attribute environmental information about the success of their attempts.
Action Research	
Coghlan, D. (2019). <i>Doing action research in your own organization</i> (5 th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.	Implementing action research brings about organizational change, develops self-help competencies in organizational members, and adds to scientific knowledge.
McNiff, J. (2017). <i>Action research: All you need to know</i> . SAGE Publications, London.	Action research aims to improve practices and offer descriptions and explanations for what one does when one acts. Educational action research is widely seen as a methodology for real-world social change. Practitioners using an action research approach aim to generate their personal and collective theories about how their learning has improved practices and inform new practices for themselves and others.

Majors Studies	Findings
Student Learning	
Karande, S., Bihade, V., & Dalvi, A. (2017). How leadership influences student learning. <i>DAWN Journal of Contemporary Research in Management</i> , 4(2), 1-6.	Successful leadership can play a highly significant and frequently underestimated role in improving student learning. Effective leadership plays a vital role in the teaching and learning process; therefore, widespread interest has been introduced to improve leadership, which is a critical element in the success of any teaching institution. Effective leadership in teaching works towards improving learning and teaching and makes a difference in improving student learning.
Pietsch, M. & Tulowitzki, P. (2017). Disentangling school leadership and its ties to instructional practices-an empirical comparison of various leadership styles. <i>School Effectiveness and School Improvement</i> , 28(4), 629-649. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2017.1363787	This study investigated the direct and indirect ties between various leadership styles and teachers' instructional practices. The findings revealed that school leaders' leadership practices generally affect teachers' instructional practices directly and indirectly.
Teachers	
Gurr, D. (2017). A model of successful school leadership from the international successful school principalship project. In K. Leithwood, J. Sun, and K. Pollack (Ed.) <i>How school leaders contribute to student success: The four paths framework</i> (pp.15–29). Springer.	Successful school leaders are focused on the development of adults in a school community. School leaders focus on the interest and ability to build the capacity of teaching and non-teaching staff to be better at what they do. School leadership emphasizes the role of school leaders in building the capacity of teachers and other adults in the school, what someone brings to the role of school leader, and utilization by school leaders of various views of leadership.
Sebastian, J., Allensworth, E., & Huang, H. (2016). The role of teacher leadership in how principals influence classroom instruction and student learning. <i>American Journal of Education</i> , 123(1). https://doi.org/10.1086/688169	School leaders can play an essential role in building and supporting teachers by delegating authority and empowering teachers in ways that allow them to influence critical organizational decisions and processes.

Majors Studies	Findings
Student-Teacher Relationships	
Cook C. R., Coco S., Zhang Y., Fiat A. E., Duong M. T., Renshaw T. L., Long A. C., & Frank S. (2018). Cultivating positive teacher–student relationships: Preliminary evaluation of the establish–maintain–restore (EMR) method. <i>School Psychology Review</i>, 47(3), 226-243. https://doi.org/10.17105/SPR-2017-0025.V47-3	School leaders and teachers can engage in intentional practices to promote the development of positive relationships with all students. Although building positive student-teacher relationships has proven beneficial for teachers and students, research is only beginning to delve into the ways in which educators can intentionally work towards building positive student-teacher relationships. Few programs prepare educators to adequately establish, maintain, and restore positive student-teacher relationships in an academic setting.
Coristine, S., Russo, S., Fitzmorris, R., Beninato, P., & Rivolta, G. (2022). The importance of student-teacher relationships. <i>Classroom Practice in 2022</i>. https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/educ5202/chapter/the-importance-of-student-teacher-relationships/	Student-teacher relationships can be highly essential in an effective classroom. Student-teacher relationships are meaningful for students in their short-term and long-term education. Positive relationships may decrease behavioral problems and promote academic success. Positive student-teacher relationships can develop more vital social and emotional skills. Students with a positive student-teacher relationship demonstrate more robust performance in the classroom, improve mental health, assist students in developing self-worth, and incorporate mutual respect in the classroom environment.

APPENDIX B

Survey Protocols

Student-Teacher Relationships Self-Assessment: A Teacher Survey

This survey is designed to help gain a better understanding of how teachers view their practices about student-teacher relationships. Please indicate your opinions about each of the statements below by indicating whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will not be identified by name.

Parameters	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I provide support for all students				
I have a positive attitude daily				
I care about students' academic and social well-being.				
I am sensitive to all students.				
I view all students as an important part of the classroom.				
I motivate students to give their best effort.				
I make positive comments about the student's ability to learn.				
I use various cultural activities in my lessons, like experimentation, case studies, live examples, etc.				
I guide students in a positive direction for their personal growth.				
I encourage student feedback.				
I acknowledge student effort through recognition and praise.				
I use examples of students' background experiences, beliefs, and knowledge.				
I provide high and clear expectations for academic performance.				
I let students take risks in classroom learning activities.				
I take the time to assist individual students who need help.				
I motivate students through inspiring teaching.				
I set expectations that are high, clear, and fair for all students.				

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocols

Interview Questions (*Action Research Design Team*)

1. How do teachers demonstrate that they recognize and accept their individual and collective responsibility for all students reaching mastery?
2. How do school administrators model the importance of continued professional learning for teachers?
3. What impact has been made on school culture or practices by school leadership's modeling the importance of continued professional learning for teachers?
4. What is the role of school leadership in helping keep the staff up to date with relevant research?
5. How do school leaders draw on the expertise and experience within the teachers to enhance teacher efficacy and capacity?

Interview Questions (*Action Research Implementation Team*)

1. What is your name, grade level/subject you teach, and years of experience?
2. How do school leaders model the importance of student-teacher relationships?
3. What impact has been made on school culture or practices by school leadership modeling the importance of student-teacher relationships?
4. How do school leaders draw on the expertise and experience within the staff to enhance teacher self-efficacy and capacity?
5. After a new social and emotional learning strategy is introduced and practiced, what are the expectations for consistent implementation? What processes are used if teachers or paraprofessionals need something additional to support SEL strategies?

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Are there identified student-teacher relationship-building practices recommended or mandated in our school? If so, what are they?
2. How often are these strategies used in your classroom/in the classrooms you have observed?

3. What professional learning opportunities are available at our school to help all teachers improve student-teacher relationships?
4. Have you recently been involved in professional learning opportunities focused on high-impact, research-informed strategies? If so, how did it impact your instruction or classroom culture?

APPENDIX D

Observation Protocols

Social and Emotional Learning Strategies Observation Form

Teacher's Name: _____

Date/Time: _____

The teacher observation form assesses the teacher's performance in implementing SEL strategies (Relationship Skills: Communicating clearly and resolving conflict, offering and receiving help, and positive endings- saying goodbye. It consists of specific statements about the teacher's ability to implement SEL strategies effectively.

The teacher provides a well-managed, safe, and orderly environment conducive to learning and encourages respect for all. The teacher fosters a warm, attractive, inviting, and supportive classroom environment using Social/Emotional Learning strategies.

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
The teacher continually engages students in a collaborative and self-directed learning environment, where they are encouraged to take risks and take ownership of their learning behavior.	The teacher consistently provides a positive and safe learning environment and encourages respect for all.	The teacher inconsistently provides a positive and safe learning environment and encourages respect for all.	The teacher inadequately addresses student behavior, displays a negative attitude toward students, ignores students' safety, or does not otherwise provide a positive and safe learning environment or encourage respect for all.

The teacher demonstrates an understanding of social and emotional learning strategies and students' needs by providing relevant learning experiences. The teacher demonstrates accurate, deep, and current knowledge of social and emotional learning strategies.

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
The teacher continually demonstrates knowledge of SEL strategies and guides others in knowing SEL strategies.	The teacher consistently demonstrates an understanding of SEL strategies and the needs of students by providing relevant learning experiences.	The teacher inconsistently demonstrates an understanding of SEL strategies and student needs or lacks fluidity in using the knowledge in practice.	The teacher inadequately demonstrates an understanding of SEL strategies and student needs or does not use the knowledge in practice.

The teacher effectively communicates social and emotional learning expectations with students in ways that enhance student learning. The teacher uses verbal and nonverbal communication techniques to foster positive interactions and promote learning in the classroom and school environment.

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
The teacher continually uses communication	The teacher communicates effectively	The teacher inconsistently communicates with	The teacher inadequately communicates with

techniques in various situations to proactively inform and collaborate with students to decrease student behavior infractions.	and consistently with students in ways that enhance student learning and decrease student behavior infractions.	students or in ways that only partially enhance student learning and decrease student behavior infractions.	students by not acknowledging concerns, responding to inquiries, or encouraging involvement.
--	---	---	--

The teacher promotes social and emotional learning strategies by using research-based strategies relevant to the content to engage students in active learning and facilitate their acquisition of key knowledge and skills.

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
The teacher continually demonstrates expertise and leads others to determine and develop various SEL strategies that are valid and appropriate for the content and student population. The teacher also guides students in monitoring and reflecting on their progress.	The teacher consistently and systematically chooses a variety of valid and appropriate SEL strategies and instruments for the content and student population.	The teacher inconsistently chooses a variety of SEL strategies that are sometimes inappropriate for the content or student population.	The teacher chooses an inadequate variety of SEL strategies, or the instruments are inappropriate for the content or student population.

Panther PRIDE Observation Form

Teacher's Name: _____

Date/Time: _____

The teacher observation form assesses the teacher's performance in implementing Panther PRIDE, the school-wide positive behavior plan. It consists of specific statements about the teacher's ability to implement the Panther PRIDE effectively.

The teacher provides a well-managed and safe environment conducive to learning, encourages respect for all, and fosters an inviting and supportive classroom environment.

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
The teacher continually engages students in a positive and safe learning environment, encouraging them to take risks and take ownership of their learning behavior.	The teacher consistently provides positive and safe learning that encourages respect for all.	The teacher inconsistently provides a positive and safe learning environment that encourages respect for all.	The teacher inadequately addresses student behavior, displays a negative attitude toward students, ignores students' safety, or does not otherwise provide a positive and safe learning environment or encourage respect for all.

The teacher demonstrates an understanding of Panther PRIDE and the needs of students by providing relevant learning experiences. The teacher demonstrates accurate, deep, and current knowledge of Panther PRIDE.

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
The teacher continually demonstrates knowledge of Panther PRIDE and guides others to know of it.	The teacher consistently demonstrates an understanding of Panther PRIDE and the needs of students by providing relevant learning experiences.	The teacher inconsistently demonstrates an understanding of Panther PRIDE and student needs or lacks fluidity in using the knowledge in practice.	The teacher inadequately demonstrates an understanding of Panther PRIDE and student needs or does not use the knowledge in practice.

The teacher effectively communicates Panther PRIDE expectations with students in ways that enhance student learning. The teacher uses verbal and nonverbal communication techniques to foster positive interactions and promote learning in the classroom and school environment.

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
The teacher continually uses communication techniques in various situations to proactively inform and collaborate with students about Panther PRIDE to decrease student behavior infractions.	The teacher communicates effectively and consistently with students using Panther PRIDE in ways that enhance student learning and decrease student behavior infractions.	The teacher inconsistently communicates with students or in ways that only partially enhance student learning and decrease student behavior infractions using Panther PRIDE.	The teacher inadequately communicates with students by not acknowledging concerns, responding to inquiries, or encouraging involvement.

Using Panther PRIDE, the teacher systematically gathers, analyzes, and uses relevant data to measure student behavior progress, inform implementation, and provide timely and constructive feedback to students.

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
The teacher continually demonstrates expertise in using data to measure student behavior progress and leads others in effectively using data to inform decisions using Panther PRIDE.	The teacher consistently and systematically gathers, analyzes, and uses relevant data to measure student behavior progress, inform implementation, and provide timely and constructive feedback to students using Panther PRIDE.	The teacher inconsistently gathers, analyzes, or uses relevant data to measure student behavior progress, inconsistently uses data to inform implementation, or inconsistently provides timely feedback or constructive feedback using Panther PRIDE.	The teacher does not gather, analyze, or use relevant data to measure student behavior progress, inform implementation, or provide constructive or timely feedback using Panther PRIDE.

Morning Meeting Observation Form

Teacher's Name: _____

Date/Time: _____

The teacher observation form assesses the teacher's implementation of Morning Meetings. The form consists of each part of the Morning Meeting framework with specific statements about the teacher's ability to facilitate the meeting effectively.

Greeting

The teacher facilitates a greeting with students using a variety of strategies.

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
The teacher continually facilitates a greeting with students being greeted and greets at least one other person.	The teacher consistently facilitates a greeting with students being greeted and greets at least one other person.	The teacher inconsistently facilitates a greeting with students being greeted and greets at least one other person.	The teacher inadequately facilitates a greeting with students being greeted and/or greets at least one other person.

Sharing

The teacher encourages students to share information about important events or thoughts, feelings, and ideas.

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
The teacher continually encourages students to share information about essential or current life events or their thoughts, feelings, and ideas.	The teacher consistently encourages students to share information about important events or their thoughts, feelings, and ideas.	The teacher inconsistently encourages students to share information about important events in their lives or their thoughts, feelings, and ideas.	The teacher inadequately encourages students to share information about important events in their lives or their thoughts, feelings, and ideas.

Group Activity

The teacher engages students in a brief, lively activity that fosters group cohesion and helps them practice social and academic skills.

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
The teacher continually engages students in an activity that encourages cooperation and/or community spirit and helps students develop social and academic skills.	The teacher consistently engages students in an activity that encourages cooperation and/or community spirit and helps students develop social and academic skills.	The teacher inconsistently engages students in an activity that encourages student cooperation and/or community spirit and helps students' social and academic skills.	The teacher inadequately engages students in an activity that encourages student cooperation and/or community spirit and helps students' social and academic skills.

Morning Message

The teacher chooses and displays a short message that encourages students to practice academic skills and uses vocabulary and academic content familiar to students by reading and discussing the brief message. The message is crafted to help students focus on the work they will do in school that day.

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
---------	---------	---------	---------

The teacher continually chooses and displays a short message that encourages students to practice academic skills and uses vocabulary and academic content familiar to students by reading and discussing the brief message.	The teacher consistently chooses and displays a short message that encourages students to practice academic skills and uses vocabulary and academic content familiar to students by reading and discussing the brief message.	The teacher inconsistently chooses and displays a short message that encourages students to practice academic skills and uses vocabulary and academic content familiar to students by reading and discussing the brief message.	The teacher inadequately chooses and displays a short message that encourages students to practice academic skills and uses vocabulary and academic content familiar to students by reading and discussing the brief message.
--	---	---	---