

THE EFFECTS OF STUDENT EMPOWERMENT THROUGH LEADERSHIP ON  
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND MATH

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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## ABSTRACT

Student academic achievement in Title I schools has been a topic of interest for years. The previous works of Robert Greenleaf's Servant Leadership Theory and Maslow's Theory of Motivation in Title I elementary schools were used as the primary theoretical structures for this study. A quantitative causal-comparative (ex-post facto) study was planned, but a Mann Whitney U-test was used due to a failed assumption. The data collected from individual students' scale scores on the Florida Standards Assessment was used to understand the impact of student empowerment through leadership within Title I elementary schools. While no statistical significance was noted in differences of achievement in English Language Arts between students with leadership training and students with no leadership training, a statistically significant difference was found in math achievement between the same groups of students.

*Keywords:* academic achievement, servant leadership, assessment, Title I

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)

End of course exams (EOC)

English Language Arts (ELA)

Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)

Florida Department of Education (FLDOE)

Florida Standards Assessment (FSA)

The Leader in Me (TLIM)

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)

Science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

Leadership development of young people is vital to our growth as a society. According to Lavery and Hine (2013), society will always require leaders who are collaborative, ethical, transformative, and have a sense of service. The previous works of Robert Greenleaf's Servant Leadership Theory and Maslow's Theory of Motivation in Title I elementary schools were used as the primary theoretical structures. This introduction chapter consists of the background, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, null hypotheses, and definitions.

### **Background**

According to U.S. Census Bureau (2016), nearly one in five children (19.7%) are living in poverty. These under-resourced youth generally perform below grade level on state assessments, have a higher dropout rate, and attend college in depressed rates (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2006). Many of these students attend Title I schools. These schools are classified as Title I due to their high percentage of students receiving free and reduced meals (Ruddy & Prusinski, 2012). Through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), these low-income (Title I) schools have been given substantial federally-funded supports. However, students who attend these schools continue to have lessened achievement across the United States (Hernandez, 2011; Reardon, 2011; Walpole, 2007).

Assuring that all students have access to high quality education has been in the national spotlight dating back to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). As the 2001 reauthorization of this Bill, NCLB was also developed to be a catalyst of success for American schools. NCLB was intended to bring every student who attended public school up to

a challenging standard of academic proficiency by 2014 (Hurder, 2014). As dropout rates increased, NCLB had missed the mark of success. Again in 2015 the United States government committed to high standards and accountability in education for all students by refining expectations with Every Student Succeeds Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). These pieces of legislation hold education as one of our nation's highest priorities.

To ensure accountability, the NCLB mandated public reporting of schools' performance data and prescribed escalating sanctions for schools that fail to meet adequate yearly progress (Hochbein, Mitchell, & Pollio, 2013). School environments were changed as the focus on standardized assessments moved to the forefront of our nation's K-12 schools (Woods-Groves & Hendrickson, 2012). These standardized assessments have served as the vehicle for the United States government to put pressure on all public schools throughout the country to raise student achievement (Ladd, 2017).

Two theoretical constructs guided this research. The first was Maslow's (1943) Theory of Motivation, and the second was Greenleaf's (1970) Theory of Servant Leadership. Maslow focused his theory on the fact that people are motivated to achieve their needs based on five stages of needs: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. People are only able to reach their higher-order needs if their lower-level needs are met (Maslow, 1943). According to Reigeluth and Beatty (2003), the unmet needs that most frequently interfere with children's learning are hunger and emotional distress. Most schools do an excellent job meeting the physical and safety needs of students. However, some of Maslow's higher levels of needs may not be getting fulfilled. Despite a presumably well intended growth mindset, the accountability pressures and potential consequences borne by districts, schools, educators and students are immense. With so much pressure on academics and testing, many schools focus on meeting the

rigors of the standard. These schools often do not concentrate on meeting the upper echelon of student needs, as defined by Maslow (1943; Reback, Rockoff, & Schwartz, 2014). With a disproportionate concentration on state assessed standards, school curricula became monopolized by grade and subject area specifications, leaving insufficient time to integrate systemic development of student needs for foundational character and leadership skills (Covey, 2014).

One type of leadership theory that allows all leaders to develop leadership skills and become empowered is the servant leadership theory. Greenleaf (1977) defined servant leadership as a desire to serve others, ultimately resulting in one's choice to lead others. The primary purpose of a servant leader is to provide the basic necessities and desires of people through taking personal interest (Whetstone, 2002). Servant leaders empower followers, put others before themselves, give others the opportunity to develop their full potential, learn from others, and forsake personal achievement (Allen et al., 2016). Research on servant leadership revealed that Greenleaf's theory may be an effective leadership style for leading and managing younger followers (Balda & Mora, 2011; VanMeter, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2013). According to Turner (2000) servant leadership turns the traditional organizational pyramid upside down. Instead of the leader making all decisions, the servant leader establishes vision and direction, then empowers followers to make decisions about how to reach the goals (Miller, 1995). With the goal of bring all schools up to academic proficiency (Hurder, 2014), schools leaders that follow Greenleaf's (1977) theory of servant leadership create the vision and accountability measures to reach academic proficiency, and then empower all teachers, staff, and students to make decision about how to reach academic proficiency.

Although school success is defined by state mandated tests, servant leaders do not ignore the need to develop all of Maslow's stages. In fact, servant leaders place the good of their

followers over their own self-interests. Educational leaders who follow Greenleaf's (1977) theory focus on follower development; this empowers everyone in the organization (Hale & Fields, 2007). This approach may mean that school leaders spend time on developing the whole child by empowering each one to help in the decision-making process, instead of just worrying about test scores. Narvaez (2006) reinforced Greenleaf's beliefs by emphasizing the importance of teaching virtues and ethics in schools. Also, in a focus group study, Covey (2014) stated that parents wanted their children to grow up to be responsible, caring, compassionate people who respect diversity and know how to do the right thing. Without the development of students' leadership and character skills, students will never have all their needs met. Therefore, students will not reach their full potential. Providing leadership to students directly links to meeting the higher stages of Maslow's hierarchy. When people have the leadership opportunities, their self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-perception can improve (Lieberman, Arndt, & Daggett, 2007; Sherrill, 2004). Although a school's main purpose is educating children, this study shows that developing children with good character and leadership skills may have a bigger effect on academic achievement than just teaching academics alone.

Schools that implement Greenleaf's (1977) Theory of Servant Leadership have curriculum that allows all administrators, teachers, and other staff members to empower each other and the students. With effective leadership beginning with people's self-perception of who they are (Blanchard, 2007), servant leadership curriculum starts with leaders helping student work on themselves. Then, students are empowered to help others and make decisions within the school (Covey, 2014). This type of leadership has been shown to be effective when leading a successful school (Black, 2013; Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson, & Jinks, 2007). This type of educational institution provides a pathway to bridge spans between standardized academics,

positive character development, and leadership skills. With facilitated school-wide incorporation of servant leadership development, students gain leadership skills, which shapes their roles and responsibilities within the learning community. Evidence shows that students who have strong leadership traits and appropriate behavior show more self-confidence, perseverance with problem solving, and achievement of higher grades (Gannouni & Ramboarison-Lalao, 2016). When schools use an approach that gives all students the ability to develop these leadership skills to serve others, the organization, as a whole, may excel.

### **Problem Statement**

With increased and high stakes accountability at center stage, schools continue to pursue expeditious ways to enhance their scores on all standardized assessments. Research indicated a need for addressing the concerns that many Title I schools have about closing the achievement gap on state test scores (Rush & Scherff, 2012; Shannon-Baker, 2012; Yaffe, Coley, & Pliskin, 2009). To meet the needs of Title I schools, much research has been conducted on the correlation between students' academic achievement and the pedagogical leadership practices of the site-based administration (Karadağ, Bektaş, Çoğaltay, & Yalçın, 2015; Marks & Printy, 2003; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Although there are many different types of school leadership, studies have shown that some type of shared leadership between the administration and teachers has a positive impact on school improvement (Carpenter, 2015; Harris, 2008; Natsiopoulou & Giouroukakis, 2010). Furthermore, research on teachers who have given power to their students to help with classroom decisions have higher student achievement (Ghamrawi, 2013; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Musselman, Crittenden, & Lyons, 2014). With many studies on shared power of educational stakeholder, in this study the researcher focused on empowerment of all students. When students are leaders and help make decisions for their

classroom or school, they are able to take ownership of their education (Mitra, 2004). In fact, Biggar, Dick, and Bourque (2015) stated that a cohort of fifth grade students who were empowered through leadership out-performed students who were not empowered in both English and math. Also, Gannouni and Ramboarison-Lalao (2016) found evidence that students who are empowered through leadership are more confident and have more academic success than students who are not empowered. Contrary to previous works on student empowerment, this study looked at students from schools that empower all students to be leaders, instead of looking at students who have excelled to leadership positions and students who have not excelled to leadership positions.

Furthermore, student servant leadership programs have been studied in Universities, Christian colleges, private Christian high schools, and churches (Massey, Sulak, & Iram, 2013; Norris, Sitton, & Baker, 2017; Spears, 2005). However, according to Spears (2005), the United States public education system has failed to develop students who are servant leaders. According to Jeynes (2009), students who enroll in faith-based schools and take more Religious Education Examination subjects score higher on academic achievement tests than students who are not enrolled in faith-based schools. Also, servant leadership is a relatively new theory of leadership and has not been extensively researched (Beck, 2014; Nahavandi, 2015; Sun, 2013).

Maslow's (1943) and Greenleaf's (1970) theories work together to allow the expectation that the independent variable, empowerment, influences the dependent variables of student achievement. This expectation is reasonable because servant leaders empower others to meet the basic needs of their followers (Greenleaf, 1970). When all students are empowered to develop these leadership skills, students have the opportunity to have their needs met. According to Maslow (1943), if students have all their needs met, they will reach their potential. This should

positively affect the academic achievement scores. The problem is the impact on student achievement in the areas of ELA and math at the elementary level through the use of leadership that empowers all students has not been fully examined.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this quantitative causal-comparative (ex-post facto) study is to understand the impact of student empowerment through leadership within Title I elementary schools. The population was 239 fifth grade students from Title I schools that proactively and purposefully empower all students through leadership and 196 fifth grade students from two Title I schools that empower some students through leadership opportunities such as student counsel, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) character lessons, and other voluntary leadership opportunities.

The independent variable, implementation of empowerment through leadership, was generally defined as leadership that allows the process of sharing responsibility, wisdom, and authority further down the organization than previously thought possible (Covey, 2003). Schools that have highly empowered environments spread leadership roles throughout the organization, and tasks are accomplished between multiple leaders (Devos, Tuytens, & Hulpia, 2014).

For this study, there were two levels of the independent variable: use of leadership that purposefully and proactively empowers all students; and use of leadership that empowers some students. The dependent variable was academic achievement as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) in the areas of English Language Arts (ELA) and math during the 2016-2017 school year. The FSA measures students' academic gains and progress on the Florida State Standards (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2017a). Although the FSA covers a variety of typical academic subjects, elementary schools in Florida only use the FSA to test

English language arts and math (FLDOE, 2017a). This study looked to examine the differences between students in Title I elementary schools that empower all student through leadership and students in Title I elementary schools that do not empower all students through leadership, and the effect on academic achievement as measured by scores on the FSA in ELA and math during the 2016-2017 school year.

### **Significance of the Study**

Leadership has been a factor in shaping our world since man was created; however, leadership in the past has often focused on transactional leadership model (Nahavandi, 2015). Nahavandi (2015) stated society is moving away from purely hierarchical leadership to newer leadership theories and models considering psychological and social aspects. This study provides evidence that a newer leadership theory (servant leadership) has a positive impact on an entire organization or school, as all stakeholders move toward a unified goal of school achievement. This study built on the work of Gannouni and Ramboarison-Lalao (2016), who looked into students' academic performance and confidence levels of students in leadership positions compared to students who were not empowered. This study also considered research that was already conducted on the relationship between students who were empowered through leadership and an increase in student achievement (Cook-Sather, 2002; Oldfather, 1995; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Similar research has looked at high school students from high needs schools that were empowered through extracurricular activities, such as sports and band. These students were more likely to meet the reading and math benchmarks (Marchetti, Wilson, & Dunham, 2016). Student empowerment has a positive effect on classroom engagement and enhances academic achievement (McCombs & Miller, 2007; Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, & Turner, 2004; Waters et al., 2003). This research affirmed Maslow's (1943) Theory of Motivation and

Greenleaf's (1970) Theory of Servant Leadership.

This study expanded this topic of student empowerment by comparing students' academic achievement in ELA and math in Title I elementary schools that proactively and purposefully empower all students with students in Title I schools that proactively and purposefully empower few students through leadership. Instead of looking only at students who choose to be empowered and students who choose to not empower themselves, this study looked at students from schools where empowerment is an expectation and school where students are empowered who choose to be. The results of this causal-comparative study contribute to the field of education as a result of the possibility of cause-and-effect between schools using leadership to empower all students and academic achievement of Title I elementary schools. According to Reardon (2013), the achievement gap between high-income and low-income families born 1950-1979 was about .9 standard deviations away from each other. Based on standardized test scores, this gap increases 40% in the 1990s and 2000s (Reardon, 2013).

Long-term focus on follower development is a key component to servant leadership (Burton & Peachey, 2013). This long-term development for all students may not only help a school close the academic gap but may provide a foundation for sustainability of keeping the gap closed. This research provides evidence to school districts, administrators, and teachers as to which student leadership style, servant or non-servant, makes a statistically significant difference in school achievement. Given the increasing levels of accountability that is put on school districts, individual schools, administrators, teachers, and students, it is imperative that educators continue to seek out strategies to implement higher school achievement levels, creating an environment where students are more successful. This study was used to see if empowerment through servant leadership development for all students will accomplish this goal.

## Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

**RQ1:** Is there a significant difference in English language arts achievement, as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment, between fifth grade students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership training?

**RQ2:** Is there a significant difference in math achievement, as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment, between fifth grade students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership training?

## Null Hypotheses

The null hypothesis for this study was:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference in English language arts achievement, as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment, between fifth grade students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership training.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant difference in math achievement, as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment, between fifth grade students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership training.

## Definitions

1. *Achievement scores*- The percentage of students in a school who have a passing score on the Florida Standards Assessment (FLDOE, 2016a).
2. *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*- Measurement that allows the U.S. Department of Education to view how every public school district is performing academically according to standardized test (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).
3. *Culture* - A group of people with shared values/beliefs (Bandura, 2002).

4. *Florida Standards Assessment (FSA)*- Standardized test given to students in grades 3-11 (FLDOE, 2016a).
5. *Servant leadership* - “The Servant-Leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.” (Greenleaf, 1970, p.7)
6. *Title I* – Title I schools are given this title based on how much of their population receives free and reduced meals. These schools include programs that help socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Ruddy & Prusinski, 2012).

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative causal-comparative (ex-post facto) study was to understand the impact of student empowerment through leadership on student academic achievement within Title I elementary schools. Current literature calls for an increase in student academics in Title I schools (Rush & Scherff, 2012; Shannon-Baker, 2012; Taylor, 2005). In the continued effort to improve learning outcomes of all students, particularly students from underperforming demographics, George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). This law expanded the role of the federal government with kindergarten through grade twelve in the public education system (No Child Left Behind, 2012). Although implementation of NCLB legislation affected all public schools, the impacts and implications for Title I schools was particularly significant. Title I schools are classified as low socio-economic status and disadvantaged schools (Kirby, McCombs, Naftel, & Murray, 2003). The United States Department of Education stated that the purpose of this classification is to “ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (Title I, 2005, p. 1). Despite the additional federal funding and support Title I schools receive, the vast majority continue to have substantial proportions of students who are suffering from low academic achievement and are unprepared to advance to the next grade level (Hung, 2011).

With a continued gap within disadvantaged schools, many of these students may be on a lower tier of Maslow’s Hierarchy. Therefore, significant groups of students in these schools are unable to reach their full potential. The government has passed bills and laws to meet students’

basic needs. Since 1946 the United States has provided these Title I schools with free and reduced lunches for students in need (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2014). It has been documented that the lack of basic needs such as food has a negative effect on students' reading and math skills (Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2005). Although students' most basic needs, biological and physiological, were being met by legislation, students at disadvantaged schools may still lack safe environments at home, a feeling of belonging, and self-esteem. Meeting these needs enables the student to reach the top levels of Maslow's Hierarchy; therefore, the student may never reach their potential if the needs are not met.

Chapter Two will discuss the conceptual and theoretical framework for the current study. This chapter will also provide a review of literature that supports the need for continued research on student empowerment through leadership in schools. The result of such studies will provide comprehensive understanding of the effect of student empowerment through leadership with all students, which has an effect on student academic achievement.

## **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

### **Maslow's Theory of Motivation**

The American psychologist, Abraham Maslow, believed that people are not motivated by rewards or desires. Instead, people are motivated to achieve certain needs (Maslow, 1943). With this concept, the framework of Maslow's Theory of Motivation was created. This concept states that an individual must progress through the lower level (primary needs) to higher level (psychological needs). Maslow defined this process as the hierarchy of needs. During this progression, an individual's behaviors are influenced. In the hierarchy of needs, Maslow stated that individuals must progress sequentially through each level for self-achievement, but that to step up to higher levels, one must master the needs of the current level (Upadhyaya, 2014).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a theory that categorizes human needs and prioritizes these categories into five tiered stages. These stages begin with tier one, physiological needs, the essentials for living, such as: food, water, warmth, and rest. The second tier, safety needs, includes shelter, safety, and security. After basic human needs are met, the next progression of self-achievement must step up to psychological needs. The first of the two is the need for belongingness and love. This category deals with the need for intimate relationships and friends. The fourth tier is self-esteem, or a person's need to feel success or accomplishment. After all of the aforementioned needs are met, people may reach their self-fulfillment needs (Maslow, 1954). This is the pinnacle of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Only at this stage can people reach their fullest potential.

Self-actualization and a person reaching the fullest potential are goals that every individual strives to achieve (Weinberg, 2011). Individuals can have peak experiences when experiencing moments of self-actualization (Maslow, 1959). In addition, Maslow's theory is an essential part of this research proposal and theoretical framework. When examining education, especially at high poverty schools, students and schools must have their basic needs met to reach individual or whole school achievement. Maslow's Theory of Motivation may help us understand why some Title I schools are successful and others struggle. Maslow's theory is also engrained throughout the servant leadership theory.

### **Greenleaf's Theory of Servant Leadership**

Based on his career in private business, Robert Greenleaf developed the servant leadership theory in 1970 in an essay he wrote entitled "*The Servant as Leader.*" Later Greenleaf wrote more essays, articles, and books on servant leadership. According to Greenleaf (1977), the best type of leader is a leader who has a desire to serve others. Servant leaders are

thoughtful to the needs of their followers and empathize with them, cultivate them, and care for them (Northouse, 2007). These leaders are the most effective because they seek to make a difference in people's lives (Keith, 2008; Lynch & Friedman, 2013). According to Greenleaf, Beazley, Beggs, and Spears (2003), there are 10 individual attributes and organizational criteria that result in high performance and distinguished excellence. These 10 characteristics are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community.

Although the term *servant leader* was coined by Greenleaf (1970), there were many examples of servant leaders before this time. For instance, over 2,000 years ago Jesus was the truest example of a servant leader. Jesus put others before Himself. An example of this was when Apostle Paul described: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than your selves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4, NIV). Howell (2001) used Mother Teresa as another example of a servant leader. Mother Teresa devoted her life to serving the poor and the sick in India. During this time, she also inspired others to follow her calling, while raising millions of dollars to help her cause.

The attributes of servant leadership are prevalent in many careers such as education. A key responsibility of servant leaders is stewardship. Teachers focus on service rather than self-interest. These educators commit themselves to long term gains of making a difference in future generations (Wheeler, 2012). Educators focus on meeting the need of all students. Academic success of students and schools are impacted greatly by whether a teacher's or a student's needs are being met (Patterson-Silver Wolf, Dulmus, & Maguin, 2012; Thoonen, Slegers, Oort, Peetsma, & Geijsel, 2011).

As previously stated, the desire of servant leaders is to serve others' needs. When doing this, servant leaders develop an inclusive community that cultivates new leaders by allowing followers the opportunities to use their individual strengths to empower them to lead when possible (Agosto, 2005). In education, teachers are the leaders and students are the followers. At the university level, Fields, Thompson, and Hawkins (2015) found that when schools deliberately empower students through the servant leadership model into students' capstone experience, the students experienced an increased awareness of their responsibility towards others, while honing their skills. This is a true example of the followers becoming the leaders. Jesus modeled servant leadership through empowerment of others. He did not just ask His disciples to listen to His teachings, but actively encouraged and challenged them to follow His ways. In the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus blessed the five loaves and two fish and performed a miracle, but He asked the disciples to distribute the food (Matthew 14:13-21). He led by serving, which led others to serve. Later, Jesus said, "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:13-15, NIV).

Developing leaders who use their skills to empower followers supports both Maslow's Theory of Motivations and Greenleaf's Servant Leadership Theory. Students who are servant leaders and reach the top level of Maslow's hierarchy are able to support and empower others to reach the top level of Maslow's hierarchy. When all students are empowered through implementation of leadership an environment may be created that promotes school wide academic achievement that is significantly better than schools that do not have an environment that empowers all student.

## **Related Literature**

### **Maslow's Theory of Motivation in Title I Schools**

Generational poverty has been a significant issue in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), over 20,229,000 children are living in poverty. Every day this number continues to grow. Every 32 seconds, another child is born into poverty in the United States (Children's Defense Fund, 2010). Often, families of children born into poverty are not able to secure or obtain sufficient food, shelter, warmth or cleanliness. Their basic needs are not met. Without these basic needs being met, these children have a more difficult reaching higher levels of Maslow's Hierarchy (Maslow, 1954). Raphel (2013) supported this by finding a correlation between food insecurities of children and increased behavioral problems. Also, the American Association of School Administrators (2008) noted poverty as being the single greatest factor for limiting student achievement.

Narrowing the achievement gap between low income and middle class, and between racial and ethnic groups has become a national goal for the United States (Berliner, 2009). No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, now known as Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, was created to solve the achievement gap issue. Support is given to students and schools that have high populations of poverty (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). These pieces of legislation provide support to higher needs schools/students and help strengthen their foundation.

Cognitively complex tasks that add rigor in the classroom is an essential goal in education (Marzano & Toth, 2014). Although this is true, if the basic needs of the student are not met, optimal learning will not happen. Therefore, the level of rigor in a classroom means very little when basic needs are not met. Schools must make it a priority to ensure a safe environment for students and teachers before impactful instruction and learning can occur (Thapa, Cohen,

Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Research has also shown that students will have lower academic achievement and higher rates of absenteeism when the student does not feel emotionally or physically safe (Astor, Guerra, & Van Acker, 2010; Gregory et al., 2010).

**Physiological needs.** The physiological needs are the most basic and essential needs for a person to survive (Maslow, 1943). Without these basic needs being met, students will not be able to focus and learn during and outside of school. Although schools do not have total control of what goes on outside school, the school does have the obligation to meet physiological needs when students are in school. To ensure that all students have physiological needs met, free and reduced lunches/breakfast programs have been implemented to disadvantaged or needy students (Martin & Loomis, 2007). Schools also provide adequate lighting, a controlled temperature, and means for students to get water when they are thirsty. Additionally, funding is granted to school districts or students who do not have their physiological needs met outside school or are considered homeless (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

**Safety needs.** The second level of Maslow's hierarchy is one's need to feel safe. This level includes order, security, stability, and freedom from fear (Maslow, 1943). In schools, evidence points to the fact that the conditions of the school affect both teaching and learning (Baker & Bernstein, 2012). In order for a school to be truly safe, proactive measures must be taken. The United States Department of Education (2013) stated that emergency readiness includes prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery. Prevention and protection deals with being proactive and having a plan that will protect every student physically and emotionally.

Although one may think that schools' safety needs are met, it has been documented that 10% of parents who have children attending K-12 public schools in the United States reported

that their child had expressed worry about their safety in school (McCarthy, 2015). Recently, one of the topics that comes up overwhelmingly when looking at safety is bullying.

Absenteeism, suicide, and disengagement in academic performance are all linked to bullying (Graham, 2016). According to Kennedy, Russom, and Kevorkian (2012) educators feel strongly about implementing bully prevention strategies and programs proactively and purposefully.

These prevention strategies enlighten students on how to handle future bullying situations. The effectiveness of these programs relates directly to the school climate.

According to Tableman (2004), school climate is the perception of school environment. Schools that have a positive climate have systems in places that allow school stakeholders to feel safe. In fact, a positive school climate has proven to draw students, teachers, administrators, and other staff members to enjoy coming to school each day (Freiberg, 2005). There is a strong correlation between a school's academic performance and climate. As such, the overall school climate is frequently associated with school improvement (Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010). Establishing and maintaining a positive school climate directly relates to the students feeling of safety in schools. Without safety being met in schools, the students are not able to concentrate on academics. Therefore, they are not able to reach the next step of belongingness in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943).

**Belongingness.** The third level of Maslow's hierarchy is the belongingness needs. Belongingness is more than having positive relationships with others. To have an individual's belongingness needs met, the individual must experience feeling of acceptances, which relates to a perception of meaningful life (Lambert et al., 2013). For students to meet this need, schools have many clubs, classes in the arts, and sports teams that provide a feel of belonging to students. Zill (1995) stated that students who do not participate in extracurricular activities are 57% more

likely to drop out, 27% more likely to be arrested, and 49% more likely to use drugs. Zill concluded that extracurricular activities have social behaviors that cannot be duplicated by academic time in schools. Many additional studies have shown that extracurricular activities can provide an environment that increases student achievement and academic performance (Blomfield & Barber, 2011; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Fox, Barr-Anderson, Neumark-Sztainer, & Wall, 2010). The more activities that a school has to offer, the greater chance that students will find a group where they can have their needs of belonging met.

Title I schools are classified as low and disadvantaged schools (Kirb, 2002). Many of the families of students who attend these schools are disadvantaged due to financial constraints, migrant status, or are from another country. These students' need for belonging is more important than ever. Some schools at the elementary, middle, and high school levels have incorporated some type of international day (Covey, 2014). During these days, students and families are invited to come to the school to celebrate their own cultures and learn about another person's culture.

**Self-esteem.** The fourth level in Maslow's hierarchy is self-esteem needs. This level deals with the individual's need for recognition and respect from others (Greene & Burke, 2007). To meet students' self-esteem needs, many schools have concentrated on character education. These programs teach students common values that help create civility such as kindness, generosity, honesty, equality, and respect (McBrien & Brandt, 1997). These programs not only allow students to build their own self-esteem, but also allow these students to help build up the self-esteem of others.

Schools also provide leadership roles for their students. When students become leaders, they receive recognition for their responsibilities and roles in the decision-making process of the

classroom, school, or community. Walker, Sackney, and Hajnal (1996) maintained that educational leadership is mostly associated with that of a formal administrator, even though educational literature and research has recognized educational leadership as a shared responsibility involving all its stakeholders. According to Damini (2014), the ability for principals to follow the lead of the students to solve issues is extremely important. In fact, it is the students' moral right to be involved. When principals do not use shared leadership with students, and ignore students' basic needs, such as the need for autonomy, social/emotional support, and respect, the students cannot help but wonder if their principal actually cares (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007).

**Self-actualization.** The highest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is self-actualization. At this level, students are realizing personal potential, seeking personal growth, and seeking fulfillment (Maslow, 1943). Many schools provide goal making and tracking as an activity for students. However, there is difference between students doing an activity and students being engaged in activity (Marzano & Toth, 2014). Without meeting the needs of prior foundational levels students are not able to be engaged in these activities.

Schools that can get all their students to this level are extremely successful. School accountability is becoming the main factor indicating schools classified as being successful (Fullan, 2011). The development of servant leaders in schools allows students to help others that do not have their lower levels met. This will allow the school to become more successful as a whole.

### **Title I School Leadership**

Title I schools are classified as "disadvantaged" and low-income schools (Kirby et al., 2003). Therefore, school leadership may be more important in these school if they are to close

the achievement gap. Pedagogical practices of school leadership and the effects on student achievement are quite notable (Karadağ, Bektaş, Çoğaltay, & Yalçın, 2015; Marks & Printy, 2003; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Principals with a distinctive leadership style are usually at the helm of their educational site. They strategically deal with issues such as teacher retention, teacher supervision, and student discipline (Coelli & Green, 2012). Each of these factors directly affect student achievement.

Effective administration is measured largely by student academic achievement, had necessitates innovative educational leadership. Mendels (2012) stated, “A major reason for the attention being paid to principals is the emergence of research that has found an empirical link between school leadership and student achievement” (p. 54). There has been a multitude of research around educational leadership and how the administration’s leadership affects student achievement (Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Saarivirta & Kumpulainen, 2016; Sun & Leithwood, 2012). Many other studies have also connected student leadership and the effects on student behavior (Brasof, 2011; Kwon, Pyun, & Kim, 2010; Pruitt, 2016).

In the past school leadership was thought to have a translational leadership style. This leadership style was found to be effective because everyone knew their own role and preformed their own role. Then, rewards or consequences were given based on each individual result. Although this style of leadership has been successful for some schools, many school leaders are beginning to use other types of shared leadership style. Some of these shared leadership styles involve all stakeholders, including students.

When students become leaders and are empowered to make decisions in the classroom or school, they feel more part of the school community. This also creates an environment that creates students’ buy-in. Bulach, Lunenberg, and Otter (2011) stated that empowering students

to use their voice to decide classroom rules, establishes an environment where students are more compelled to try and adhere to classroom procedures. In addressing school-based problems, Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004) suggested that solutions developed with student input yields more successful outcomes. Given the opportunity, students share their perspective with defined concerns coupled with their suggested solutions and rationale. Direct and deliberate student involvement with the school-based decision-making processes are promising practices.

### **Student Empowerment Through Leadership**

Leadership development of young people is vital to our growth as a society. According to Lavery and Hine (2013), society will always require leaders who are collaborative, ethical, transformative, and have a sense of service. Therefore, it is essential that our community provides leadership opportunities to all students beginning at an early age. Leadership skills are also important in that colleges and businesses look to recruit people who possess leadership traits. Many institutes of higher education request information about the applicant regarding being a leader on his/her previous campus (Burton, 2014). These schools seek to recruit students with leadership skills who have the potential to hone their skills even more while in college.

For these schools to identify a student as a leader, the student must have a role. There are many options for a student to develop leadership skills both in school and outside school through extracurricular activities. Sports teams, clubs, academic teams all provide the ability for students to synergize with one another to attain a goal that may be unattainable. Often, students, teachers, and other stakeholders believe that these leadership roles start in high school. Although there are many more opportunities for leadership as students get older, it is important to understand that all students in K-12 schools have the opportunity to develop leadership skills. Students as young as a five-year-old are able to participate in sports, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, and other clubs. Many

elementary schools offer student counsel, math clubs, or other academic clubs that empower students to make change around the schools. Many elementary schools are focusing on character education and creating environments that allow all students the opportunity to lead in some authentic capacity.

The practices of leadership hits on all tiers of Maslow's Hierarchy. Leadership empowers students to effect change in both themselves and others. Many schools have done can food drives to meet physiological needs of others. Other schools have parents and students provide feedback so they can have facilities that are safe. After the essentials of Maslow hierarchy are met, leadership by students increases their own belonging and self-esteem (Covey, 2014). Students who lead are able to buy in to the systems that are in place, because they feel they are an intricate part of it. When a student has a sense of leadership, the individual may increase motivation and engagement in school. This can be true for low and high achieving students (Cox, 2011). Leadership opportunities allow students to grow to their potential. Building strong leaders gives individuals the skills that they may not currently possess. Leadership development programs advance one's self capital and networking skills (Van De Valk, 2008). Networking is an essential skill as it allows for more people to synergize and make a difference with current or future projects.

Leadership in students is essential for every individual student to reach self-actualization. These skills can be used to help both the individual and classmates. Programs or classes that develop leaders may also create an environment that is more conducive to learning. Research stated leadership development programs that empower students positively influence student leadership behavior (Posner, 2009; Posner, 2012).

**Empowerment through servant leadership.** According to Maxwell (1998) A leader is

someone who has a vision, works towards that vision, and shares the vision with others. Before leaders can have their own vision, the leader must learn how to follow. Many may argue that leadership begins with character. Hunter (2004) supported this statement by stating that the first step of learning how to lead is by developing character that is based by moral maturity and a commitment to doing the right thing, even in tough situations. These leaders must first overcome their own ego's desire to be served and focus more on how they can support or serve others. Blanchard and Hodges (2005) contended that a person's heart, if motivated by self-interest will never be a heart of an effective leader.

In the world of competition, this concept of building another person up is a foreign concept to many. Greenleaf (1977) believed that institutions and society does not encourage servant leadership. However, as literature on the topic increases and organizations, such as Chick-Fil-A, engage in servant leadership, these leaders are beginning to shine everywhere (Dittmar, 2006). The development of servant leaders has also been noted in Christian universities, Christian colleges, private Christian high schools, and churches, all of which have provided opportunities for student servant leadership development programs (Spears, 2005). In fact, there is a positive correlation between servant leadership and school climate in Catholic schools (Black, 2013). Research also suggested that the application of servant leadership in educational settings has a positive impact in addressing the development and well-being of individuals (Parris & Peachey, 2013). The United States public education system has not prioritized school climate and culture in education and therefore has fallen short of developing students who are servant leaders (Spears, 2005). With Christian universities, colleges, private Christian high schools, and churches all having success with servant leadership development programs, the next step is to develop successful programs in all types of schools.

For the schools to develop a servant leadership program, the leaders (school staff) must be collegial, collaborative, and collective servant leaders, to every individual student. Faculty who routinely practice servant leadership create a powerful external influence on an institution (Bowman, 2005). When schools, organizations, or individuals are developing servant leaders, it is important to understand that followers (the students) of servant leaders become leaders themselves. Servant leaders empower others, so that the individual can grow to serve others (Wong, 2013). Servant leadership not only deals with teaching and learning, also investing in the moral ethics of schools and society life (Crippen, 2010). According to Greenleaf (1977), people are only servant leaders if their followers being served grow as people. In addition, the individuals being served become wiser, freer, healthier, and more likely to become servants themselves.

**Empowerment through distributed leadership.** Influenced by Wegner's Communities of Practice (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001), the concept of distributed leadership began in the early 2000s; also derived in part from the Distributed Cognition and Activity Theory. The underpinnings or conceptual foundation of the distributive leadership style is the redistribution or shifting of responsibility from all administrative levels to the use of teams, and engendered collective responsibility (Ritchie & Woods, 2007). According to Harris (2008) the model of distributed leadership is used to provide effective leadership to improve schools. Distributed leadership allows capable and willing teachers to become part of the leadership process (Harris, 2008). This type of leadership is powerful due to the fact that all contributors to the decision-making process have roles that allow them to buy-in to the system. Research on distributed leadership shows evidence which points to a positive relationship between distributed leadership, organizational improvement, and student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 2009a; Leithwood &

Mascall, 2008). Harris stated that distributed leadership is used to improve leadership, achievement, and overall organizational structure.

Instead of the principal making all decisions for the school, decisions are made through group discussions. Effective instructional leaders want to inspire others to join them as they work towards agreed upon school goals (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). Distributive leadership focuses on collaboration, shared purpose, responsibility and recognition of leadership irrespective of role or position within an organization (Keppell, O'Dwyer, Lyon, & Childs, 2010).

An abundance of research has been conducted with staff distributed leadership relevant to positive student achievement outcomes (Chang, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2009b; Karadağ, Bektaş, Çoğaltay, & Yalçın, 2015). School based leaders must encourage their team members to step up and make decisions collaboratively, based on expertise or committee. Distributed leadership in schools frequently involves principals, assistant principals, community school directors, teachers, and any other member of the school community (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). In education, distributed leadership does not end with the teachers or community members. In fact, the most important people in our schools, the students, are often in the decision-making process. Over the years, schools have used distributive leadership qualities to enhance students' leadership skills through venues such as student council, sports teams, and other extracurricular activities. This model affords willing and capable students a unique role and opportunity to bring about change in the school's culture and climate. Because many students may not be classified as "willing and capable", in this study the researcher examined if empowering all students, not just those labeled as "willing and capable," has a significant difference in academic achievement.

**Empowerment through democratic leadership.** Democratic leadership and distributive leadership styles have some parallel and intersecting beliefs. However, the one key difference between the two is that the democratic leadership model promotes the staff's full participation in decision making, action planning and implementation. Unlike distributive leadership, democratic leadership gets all individuals in the organization involved. Creating an environment that holds all stakeholders accountable (Natsiopoulou & Giouroukakis, 2010). For this type of leadership to be effective, the entire staff must create a trusting environment. Without the trust of all individuals, effectiveness and progress will be absent (Grogan, 2013). Although the final decisions do rest in the hands of the appointed leader, the leader leads with transparency and an open mind. This shared leadership empowers every stakeholder by giving every individual a voice and the feeling of ownership through the decision-making process.

This type of leadership development is often found in individual classrooms. Byland (2015) illustrated school's transformative shift from "tough kids to change agents" by simply incorporating leadership opportunities for the school's students. These leadership opportunities incorporated life lessons with guided, practical application of these skills mentoring peers. There are numerous approaches schools utilize to instill and increase student ownership and buy-in. Barnett (2013) empowered students through tasked reworking of the school's mission and vision statements, establishing student ambassadors responsible in providing guided school tours with guests, and even having students assisting with committee interviews of prospective school employees. When stakeholders have authentic buy-in, they are more invested in or committed to improving their school. Bergin and Bergin's (2009) works show that when students and teachers become "attached" to a school, the overall performance of the school improves. Traditionally a school's administration is responsible for setting the tone or climate of "their" school. However,

in an organization with the democratic leadership philosophy, all school stakeholders are accountable for the schools or organizations climate. The one key downfall of democratic leadership may be that all participants in the organization are involved, these participants may not always be actively engaged.

**Empowerment through transactional leadership.** Transactional leadership can be defined as a type of leadership where leaders and followers agree to exchange substances that are valuable to each other (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003). This type of leadership establishes goals by clarifying roles and task requirements for each leader and follower in the organization (Masa'deh, Obeidat, & Tarhini, 2016). An example of this in education is when the leader gets the work done and the follower gets paid for the task. This may be considered as the traditional authoritative leadership style that uses bureaucracy and power to control the organization (Bennett, 2009). This type of leadership inhibits employee (followers) development, creativity, empowerment, and follower growth (Dai, Dai, Kuan-Yang, & Hui-Chun, 2013).

Unlike servant leadership, transactional leadership looks at the end goals of the organization and focus on results instead of followers' perceptions or needs (Dartey-Baah, 2015). Although followers' needs are not focused on, transactional leaders motivate followers by offering a mutually agreeing on a system in which followers are rewarded for satisfactory work and punished for work that is unsatisfactory (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Research conducted by Afshari and Gibson (2016) indicated that transactional leadership may positively influence employee behavior. This type of leadership may be thought of as win-win, as it promotes the self-interest of both the leader and the follower. Although this leadership style may not best suit all individuals, transactional leadership is great for followers who are extrinsically motivated

(Hamstra, Van Yperen, Wisse, & Sassenberg, 2014). In fact, Tremblay, Vandenberghe, and Doucet (2013) found a positive correlation between contingent rewards and employee satisfaction. This may be due to the fact there is some form of transactional leadership in all other leadership styles.

This type of leadership can be found in most classrooms. With this type of leadership there is often a written agreement that both the leader (teacher) and the follower (student) must follow. In education we often call this agreement a syllabus. After reading this agreement, one will know what the leader will teach and what the followers will need to do to be successful in class (Wong, 2009). Through this type of agreement, the teacher provides a service for the student by presenting information. The student then receives benefits or consequences for his/her participation in class.

When looking at similarities and differences, in the past many theorists assumed that transformation and transaction leadership styles were at opposite ends of the spectrum (Bass & Riggio, 2006). However, in more recent studies, theorists have been said to believe that these two models actually complement one another when used simultaneously (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Bass and Riggio (2006) stated that it is necessary for a leader to use these styles at different times depending on what the circumstance is.

**Empowerment through transformational leadership.** Robert Burns created the theory of transformational leadership in 1978. According to Burns (1978), transformational leaders ask their followers to put the good of the group, organization, or society before their own self-interest. A transformational leader also asks followers to look at long-term needs, instead of immediate needs, and to become more aware of what is most important (Burns, 1978). This leadership style requires all stakeholders in the organization to commit to a shared vision and

goal (Bass & Riggio, 2006). When all people are working together to accomplish the same goal, all systems in the organization are able to be aligned. According to Avolio and Bass (2004) this shared vision that is provided through transformational leadership helps build trust, respect, and a wish to synergize together to attain the same future goals of the organization.

After understanding the definition of transformational leadership, one may think that this term could be used interchangeably with servant leadership. Although there are many similarities between both leadership theories, the main focus or goals of these leadership styles are totally different. Transformational leaders have their followers commit to the betterment of the organization, and servant leaders build their followers' commitment toward the betterment of the individual (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Servant leaders see their followers as individuals who matter as a person first, and then as a contributing member of a successful organization (Greenleaf, 1977). Transformational leaders look at the bigger picture, instead of each individual person. Many studies have been conducted that state positive outcomes of transformational leadership (Bodla & Nawaz, 2010; Long, Yusof, Kowang, & Heng, 2014; Riaz & Haider, 2010). In fact, organizations that follow this type of leadership have been cited to motivate followers to exceed the expectations that are set before them (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

In schools, especially colleges, there is a multitude of transformational leadership development programs for students and staff. Programs help students build skills that can bring positive change in local, national, and international context (Ingleton, 2013). These programs may empower students to reach their full potential and enhance both skills and values in students (Dugan, 2011; Haber, 2011). However, pressure of state testing has allowed all teachers, staff, students, and other stakeholders to strive for the same goal, or school grade. One might wonder if leaders are looking only at the big picture if some students may be getting "lost" in this type of

environment.

### **Student Empowerment and Academics**

For an organization or educational institution to do anything that is meaningful and sustainable, systems must be in place. Many schools have systems in place that require the empowerment of students. Some examples of these systems may include leadership roles, goal tracking, student-led learning, student input, and student-led conferences. All of these systems, if implemented purposely may have a direct effect on academic achievement in both math and English language arts.

Leadership roles held by students has shown to create a positive school environment, promote emotional growth, and positively influence other students (Pedersen, Yager, & Yager, 2012). These leadership roles, when placed in the educational setting, create a culture that allows students to feel a responsibility for their school climate.

Education has previously been a place where teachers present information and students receive the information. Many educators are moving from this teacher-centered to a classroom that has more student-led learning. This type of learning in the classroom allows for self-guided, self-regulated, and student-driven learning (Bydges, Dubrowski, & Regehr, 2010). Creating an environment where students are more engaged in their own learning is the driving force for this philosophy of teaching. Cornelius-White (2009) concluded that student-led learning allows students to have a greater level of motivation that has a high relationship with better achievement from student.

Students who are empowered have ownership of their academics. They set academic goals and are able to track their goals over time. In a studied conducted by O'Neal (2004), the use of leadership roles increased the students' reading scores. Many of these students may have

long-term goals, but it is important to have a cadence of accountability. This allows the students to track their progress towards a goal and see how close they are to approaching that goal.

Gessley (2006) studied second and third grade students' oral reading and fluency. Gessley began with the teachers tracking the students, without the students' knowledge of the teacher research.

The study then had the students self-track through graphs their own progress. The results of that study showed that students who track their data may have a positive impact on oral reading rates.

Locke and Latham (1990) also looked into implementation of goal setting. They stated that goal-setting was critical for students' success. Additionally, they found an increase in achievement when goals were specific and challenging to each student compared to "do your best" goals.

Other studies have shown positive results in writing when students are empowered through the use of students tracking their own data (Kasper-Ferguson & Moxley, 2002). Students may be empowered to change themselves and others in a variety of ways. This study looked at a leadership program that empowers students in many of the ways discussed in this section.

### **The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People – With a New Habit Recently Added**

Stephen Covey (2014) depicted a large hurdle faced by many, if not most, organizations to operate in a manner which values every member's innate worth and potential for greatness. Unique talents and passions of individual members are frequently untapped in the collective potential contributions to the organizations goals. This hurdle or obstacle depicts the main premises for student empowerment. When leaders believe there is greatness in themselves, the leaders are able to support the weakness of the individuals, while empowering them to use their strengths to help others. Serving other's needs, empowers those individuals, and developing leaders who become servants themselves are key components to servant leaders (Greenleaf, 1977). Over the years many businesses have bought into Covey's beliefs, using his programs to

help their businesses reach the next level. The framework of this program is based on the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People:

Habit 1- Be Proactive

Habit 2- Begin with The End in Mind

Habit 3- Put First Things First

Habit 4- Think Win-Win

Habit 5- Seek First to Understand Than Be Understood

Habit 6- Synergize

Habit 7- Sharpen the Saw

These seven habits are put into three categories. Covey's (1998) first category deals with oneself, these are referred to as Private Victories and include Habits 1, 2, and 3. Habits 4, 5, and 6 are classified as Public Victories. Habit 7 is based on renewal. All habits build upon one another and are intertwined (Covey, 1998). The premise of these categories is that success and effectiveness start on the inside and build outward allowing people to work on themselves individually before they contribute and affect others, becoming servant leaders.

**Habit 1- Be Proactive.** Being proactive is the first private victory that one must accomplish when living the seven habits. This habit's main focus is that people are in charge and responsible for their own individual behavior. Covey (2014) looked at the differences between proactive and reactive people. One of the main differences is that proactive peoples' behavior is a product of their own conscious choice that is based on values. Reactive people tend to behave according to their conditions, and their decisions are based on feelings. A proactive mindset allows individuals to realize that they cannot control everything. Although people's

circle of concerns and circle of influence overlap, proactive people concentrate on their circle of influence most of the time (Covey, 2014).

**Habit 2- Begin with the End in Mind.** Habit 2 is to begin with the end in mind. One of the most important elements to this habit is the development of a personal mission statement. This will help people create a plan in which they can achieve their goal. When an individual or group set goals, they are essentially beginning with the end in mind (Covey, 2014). This habit also deals with one's ability to imagine what the end result is going to be. This habit's foundational principle is that everything is done twice. The first time something is done through visualization, and the second time is actual physical follow-through (Covey, 2014). This concept, often referred to as metacognition, has shown signs of using visualization positively, affecting student achievement in mathematics (Kellough & Jarolimek, 2008; Özsoy & Ataman, 2009; Tok, 2013).

**Habit 3- Put First Things First.** Focusing on priorities is essential for all leaders. Habit 3 helps leaders concentrate their attention and energy on what is important. Essentially this habit promotes the importance of planning (Covey, 2014). According to Covey (2013), the main focus of Habit 3 is to focus energy away from crisis management and working towards deadlines. Instead the focus is on organizing, delegating, and proactively avoiding problems. Leaders who put first things first are able to prioritize decisions based on the plan that was developed in Habit 2, allowing all stakeholders in the organization to focus on the most important goals.

**Habit 4- Think Win-Win.** Habit 4 is the first habit that deals with public victories, or victories that help others and not just oneself. This habit gets its name from Covey's (1989) paradigms of relationship negotiation: win-lose, lose-win, lose-lose, compromise, win-win, or no deal. Typically, in negotiating, both parties give up something to get something. Often, both

parties come to some type of compromise or agreement. The concept of thinking win-win is often confused with a compromise. In compromise either no one gets what they want, or one person gets more than the other. A true win-win is a third alternative to a compromise.

According to Covey (2014) a Win-Win is a decision made that benefits all parties. This allows all parties to feel good about the decision and creates immediate buy-in.

**Habit 5- Seek First to Understand Than Be Understood.** According to Covey (2014) most leaders listen in order to respond. This habit represents a huge paradigm shift for most people. Seeking first to understand, then to be understood allows a leader put themselves in someone else's shoes. Covey's fifth habit forms the foundation of servant leadership. To develop this habit, a leader must become an empathetic listener. Becoming an empathetic listener requires the listener to put all personal judgement and ego aside so the listener can reflect on what was heard for a deeper understanding. Only after one truly understands where others are coming from, can an individual make an informed decision that will have an impact on all involved stakeholders.

**Habit 6- Synergize.** Many people believe that Habit 6 focuses on working together collaboratively. Although collaborative structures need to be in place for this habit to be in place, collaboration is not the only measure to truly synergizing. During collaborative structures there are times when people, or groups of people will comprise. Covey stated, "Synergy is not the same as compromise. In compromise, one equals one and a half at best" (Covey, 2014, p. 283). Covey (1998) stated synergistic teams look at each individual's strengths so that the whole organization is able to become greater than the sum of its parts. Johnson, Johnson, and Stanne (2000) conducted a meta-analysis and found that all eight cooperative learning structures that were studied had significant positive impacts on student achievement. This type of mindset

allows every individual to be open to the influence of others. Synergizing will allow the organization to get far better results than if one person took on a task individually.

**Habit 7- Sharpen the Saw.** When the seven habits were first implemented or published the final habit was “sharpening the saw.” This habit stresses taking care of the mind, body, and soul (Covey, 2014). According to Covey (1998) the foundational principle of this habit is renewal. The main focus on this habit is that balance in life, makes a person the most effective. In recent years science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) has been a focus in education. Many school systems are adding an “A” to STEM creating the acronym STEAM. This “A” stand for the arts. Schools and districts that are pushing the STEAM concept believe that the whole student is important to develop.

**Habit 8-Find Your Voice.** Recently, an eighth habit was created and encompasses all habits. This habit is the catalyst for the program and creates an environment that empowers every student to be a leader. This habit is to find your voice and inspire others to find theirs. People often prefer leaders as people who have found their voice and are able to speak to others about change. However, this is only the first step to this habit. According to Covey (2014), to expand ones’ influence, one must provide others the opportunity to find their own voice. Habit 8 fully exemplifies Greenleaf’s Servant Leadership Theory by not only creating a culture where all leaders are empowered to make change, but also making an environment where the leaders help others become empowered.

### **The Leader in Me**

One of the programs that has developed from the Seven Habits of Highly Effective is The Leader in Me (TLIM). Covey (2014) stated that TLIM is a whole-school transformational process that is foundationally rooted in the belief that every student has greatness and can be a

leader. In an era of accountability prioritizing academic excellence, fundamentals of emotional and social competencies suffer TLIM helps build the whole student. TLIM provides systemic instruction, promoting constructive development, and empowerment for every stakeholder. This program is reported to provide a culture that produces transformational results that include increased achievement in academics, reduced disciplinary incidents, and increased empowerment and engagement among teachers and parents (FranklinCovey, 2011). This program creates an educational environment that has a common language and puts a unified system in place, allowing all school stakeholders to reach a common goal.

Implementation of this approach applies the principles of servant leadership with all students. Instead of students working against each other to accomplish their own goals, students work together to help each other. According to Covey (1998) it is silly to believe you can build yourself up by tearing someone else down. In this system, all students use their own greatness to build themselves, and others around them. TLIM uses the seven habits of highly effective people to build students from the inside-out (Covey, 2014), allowing the students to work on themselves, then working with other to make everyone better. This approach starts with habits that help transform students from dependence to independence. During this time students are given the power to make themselves a better person. They are able to feel self-worth. Being proactive, beginning with the end and mind, and putting first things first are all habits the focus on the paradigm of *I*. These habits help build skills in time management, planning, goal-setting, and other skills that help move a student from dependent to independent. During this paradigm of growth for the student, teachers and administrators all individual stakeholders are able to see how they can be responsible and self-reliant, and they can choose their own decisions. It is not Leader in Me schools' final goal to create an environment where all students are independent.

Initially, schools do build all students to be independent, as this is the foundation of Leader in Me schools' long-term goal. However, Leader in Me schools' final goal is to make students interdependent (Covey, 2014). After all, together people have the ability to accomplish far more than any individual can accomplish alone. To accomplish this goal of interdependency for every student, Habits 4 to 6 are introduced and worked on through the year. During this time there is a huge paradigm shift from the paradigm of *I* to the paradigm of *we*. Think Win-Win, Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood, and Synergize help students develop teamwork, cooperation, and communicational skills (Covey, 2014).

Habit 7 Sharpen the Saw is often students' favorite habit, as it is usually associated with fun activities or games. This habit deals with balance in life. In schools this balance is why we do not "teach to a test". In schools, standards do drive the instruction, but students in TLIM schools spend time on activities that are not directly aligned with a state test. Students in TLIM schools not only have time for related arts, but they are also empowered through leadership teams. All students are involved in a leadership team that the student has applied for. They then help this team provide some kind of give-back throughout the year. Although Habit 7 may not be directly related to academics, this habit helps build skills that students may not typically receive during most academic times. These skills may help students be more focused during times of intense instruction.

Although the habits do build on each other, it is important to realize that habits do not have to be fully developed to work on a higher habit. If this were the case some, students may not have the chance to start working on interdependence skills for years. Some students may have to continue to work on some of the lower habits while they are developing their higher habits.

TLIM schools recognizes all students as leaders. These schools consistently refer to leadership as a student right, as opposed to a privilege that can be earned or taken away (Covey, 2014). In the implementation of this approach, every student is given leadership roles. These leadership roles provide opportunities for cognitive and organizational autonomy. The outcomes yield sustainable changes with increased student engagement and motivation (Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, & Turner, 2004). Students in TLIM schools also take ownership of their academics with student-led learning, data tracking, goal setting, and much more.

This servant leadership model creates an inclusive, brain compatible learning environment. The absence of threat nurtures development of critical thinking, problem solving and community with a shared vision. TLIM allows students to build themselves first, then provide others support with needed support. This type of leadership taps into the greatness of every student, parent, teacher, administrator, and other stakeholder to help support every individual student's needs. Although, TLIM does not directly relate to any academic English language arts or math standard, the program does build habits or behaviors that allow all students to build strategic for academic and nonacademic success. This type of leadership that empowers all students, even students who have weakness essentially helps the entire institution fulfill their goals.

### **Lighthouse School**

When entering any program, there should be a goal that the school or organization strives to attain. Although most schools goal is to achieve higher academics, or the ability to develop the entire child. The goal of all TLIM schools is to reach lighthouse status. As schools become TLIM schools, nine specific areas are developed to ensure success for all stakeholders. Schools work diligently to develop a lighthouse team, staff collaboration, community engagement, a

leadership environment, leadership instruction and curriculum, student leadership, leadership events, goal setting and tracking, and measurable results. Currently there are 3,511 TLIM schools throughout the world. Of these schools only 355 have become lighthouse schools. This shows that only the top 10% of schools that begin this rigorous process are able to achieve the highest level. These schools have reached the pinnacle of TLIM (Covey, 2014). All lighthouse schools light the way for other schools to follow. To reach this status, the school must be in The Leader in Me process for three years and all nine measures must be met. This achievement not only encourages implementation, but also awards effectiveness of the seven habits throughout the school.

### **Summary**

The literature review provided evidence that much research has been conducted in the area of leadership within schools, especially in the area of student leadership and student leadership development. This study looked at servant leadership because it empowers all students to not only use their own voices to create change, but also student leaders to ignite more student leaders. This eventually empowers all students to lead at some capacity within the school. Although servant leadership characteristics have been around for thousands of years, the need for more research is necessary to understand how the effects of servant leaders help individuals reach the highest level of Maslow's Hierarchy (self-actualization) and can affect a whole organization reaching their goal. Current literature calls for more research to address whether servant leadership development programs can affect academic achievement in Title I schools.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Overview

The purpose of this quantitative causal-comparative (ex-post facto) study was to understand the impact of student empowerment through leadership training within Title I elementary schools. This methodology section consists of the research design, research questions, and null hypotheses. Chapter Three then continues with a description of the setting, participants, instrumentation, procedures, and data analysis.

### Design

The research design for this study was quantitative causal-comparative (ex post facto) design. This methodology was used to identify the cause and effect relationships based on whether the independent variable is present or absent, and then determine whether or not the groups are different based on the dependent variable (Creswell, 2013; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Warner, 2013). In addition, Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorensen (2006) stated a causal-comparative design investigates between two variables. This type of research was necessary for this study because there was no treatment administered to the groups by the researcher. Also, there was not any manipulation of variables, making this a non-experimental design (Gall et al., 2007, Warner, 2013). Moreover, this research observed archived data, which is a characteristic of an ex post facto design (Gall et al., 2007). All of these reasons make a causal-comparative study the proper design selection.

The independent variable for this study is empowerment of students through leadership. Covey (2013) defined empowerment as the process of sharing responsibility, wisdom, and authority further down the organization than previously thought possible. The independent variable has two levels: use of leadership that proactively and purposely empowers all students;

and use of leadership curricula that empowers some students. The dependent variable for this study was student academic achievement in English language arts and math, as measured through the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA). Neither the independent variable, empowerment, nor the dependent variable, student academic achievement, was manipulated in any way.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this study were:

**RQ1:** Is there a significant difference in English language arts achievement, as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment, between fifth grade students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership training?

**RQ2:** Is there a significant difference in math achievement, as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment, between fifth grade students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership training?

### **Null Hypotheses**

The null hypotheses for this study were:

**H<sub>0</sub>1:** There is no significant difference in English language arts achievement, as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment, between fifth grade students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership training.

**H<sub>0</sub>2:** There is no significant difference in math achievement, as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment, between fifth grade students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership training.

### **Participants and Setting**

The population for the study was drawn from a convenience sample of Title I elementary

school students in a southern school district of a southern state. This study took place at the beginning of the spring semester of the 2016-2017 school year. The participants for this study were drawn from a convenience sample of students from four Title I elementary schools, two of which proactively and purposely pursue empowerment all students through leadership training, and two that had leadership traits imbedded through the curriculum but empowered few students. These four elementary schools have over 90% economically needy students. Also, over 90% of the students who attend these schools are minority. For this study the researcher compared students from the fifth grade, which allowed the effects of the program over a period of time to be seen.

The first level was students from schools that empower all students, as classified by the Leader in Me website (FranklinCovey, 2011). According to Covey (2014), The Leader in Me is a whole-school transformation model that empowers all students with the leadership and life skills they need to reach their potential. These schools believe that influence is not limited to formal leadership roles within an organization and believe that all members of the organization have the potential to influence changes or decisions (Jackson & Marriott, 2012). Schools or organizations that empower all stakeholders through leadership focus on the needs of all followers to build their skills (Greenleaf, 1977). This also allows for everyone involved to enhance the skills of others (Wong, 2013). These key components may allow every individual student in the school to reach their full potential and enhance both skills and values in students and staff (Dugan, 2011; Haber, 2011).

The second level of independent variable was students from schools that did not proactively and purposely empower all students through leadership. These schools had leadership traits embedded through their Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS)

curriculum, but purposefully and proactively empowered few students. Some examples of students who were empowered in these schools included the students on student council, sports teams, and academic clubs. These schools are classified as a type of distributed leadership. A school that uses distributed student leadership empowers students who are capable and willing to be leaders (Harris, 2008). This type of leadership has shown organizational improvement, leadership, and student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 2009a; Harris, 2008; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). However, students who are not classified as “capable and willing” are left out. This could be an overwhelming majority of students in the school.

According to Reeves (2008), when students are empowered, they take ownership of their learning. This leads students to perform better academically on standardized tests (Reeves, 2008). In this study the researcher sought to see if there is a significant difference on school-wide academics between schools providing empowerment to all students and more traditional schools that empower some students. Both levels of the independent variable had over 200 participants in fifth grade, which according to Gall et al. (2007) is greater than the minimum required to achieve a medium effect size with a significance level of  $p < .05$ .

During the spring semester of 2018, the researcher collected the data from the spring of 2017, which was stored on the school district’s website. For this study the FSA in English language arts (ELA) and math were used. Students in each of the participating schools took the FSA, which is the statewide standardized test for all public schools in Florida. Academic achievement scores are given to every student and show a scale score for each subject (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2017a).

### **Instrumentation**

The FSA was used as the instrument to measure the dependent variable for this study.

This assessment was first implemented in the 2014-2015 school year and has been conducted the past three years. The FSA is the third generation of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Through the years, Florida standardized tests have been used as instruments in numerous studies (Behar-Horenstein, Hudson-Vassell, Hudson-Vassell, & Garvan, 2015; Bennett, Calderone, Dedrick, & Gunn, 2015; Perscher et al., 2017; Stanley & Stanley, 2011). According to Stanley and Stanley (2011), the use of the Reading-Level Indicator can predict the risk of students not passing the FCAT in reading. Hunter (2017) looked at school leadership to see if student achievement, according to the FCAT, would be affected. Also, Behar-Horenstein et al. (2015) used the FCAT math as the instrument to see if socio-demographic status could predict achievement scores.

The FCAT started in 1998 and was implemented to ensure higher standards and increase student achievement (FLDOE, 2016b). FCAT was a criterion-referenced assessment, and was used in Math, Reading, Science, and Writing. This test measured all students' progress towards meeting the Sunshine State Standards. The second implementation of FCAT, FCAT 2.0, was implemented during the 2010-2011 school year. The FCAT 2.0 was similar; however, FCAT 2.0 was aligned to the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards instead of the Sunshine State Standards (FLDOE, 2016b).

During the 2014-2015 school year, Florida again reassessed and changed the standards that needed to be evaluated. The purpose of the FSA is to measure students' achievement in the current Florida Standards (FLDOE, 2017a). In addition, the FSA promotes data-driven instruction that supports the educational process (FLDOE, 2016b). FSA is the Florida standardized test given to all students in third through eleventh grades in the areas of English language arts, math, and end of course exams (EOC) (FLDOE, 2016c). Students' proficiency on

the FSA was measured by levels (1-5), a level 3 or higher was considered to be proficient. Student scale scores offer a more specific means of measurement of exactly how a student preformed on the Florida Standards Assessment. According to the FLDOE (2016c), the following ranges of scores are in each level for fifth grade (see Tables 1 & 2). For this study, the mean student scale score on the FSA in reading and math was used to compare the two groups.

Table 1

*ELA Ranges of Scores on FSA*

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
257-303	304-320	321-335	336-351	352-385

Table 2

*Math Ranges of Scores on FSA*

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
256-305	306-319	320-333	334-349	350-388

The FSA does not publish the precise number of questions on the assessment; however, a range number of questions is given for each subject and grade level (FLDOE, 2016c). The number of questions varies based on how many experimental questions are placed on the test. According to FLDOE (2016c) there are six to 10 experimental test questions and these questions do not count toward the overall scoring of the test. Each section of the test is split up into two 80-minute sections that are given on consecutive days.

The FLDOE contracted American Institutes for Research (AIR) to create, administer, score, and report the results of the Florida Standards Assessment (AIR, 2015). AIR also made sure that there was evidence of validity. The four evidence pieces that the FLDOE reported on were content validity, internal structure validity, comparability of paper-and-pencil to online test,

and test fairness.

For the FSA to achieve content validity, the developers created a template that entailed the number of test items for each grade-level, subject, and reporting standard that was being tested. The template allowed the FSA to be consistent in the length of test (both duration and number of tested items), content areas being covered, acceptable range of test item difficulty for each individual grade level, number of field test items (experimental items), and descriptions of test types. Not only did the blue-print go into detail about what standards were being tested, but it also described the type of questions asked for each standard. The types of questions that were asked are multiple-choice, written response, and technology-enhance items. Each year after the FSA data is collected, the number of questions in each reporting category is evaluated and the FSA is reconstructed from results found with the field items. These field items are questions on the FSA that students answer but that are not scored. All grade levels and sections of the FSA (ELA and math) have reported the FSA measurement of reliability. Validity of the FSA was measured by a second-order factor model and by observing correlations between sub scores (FLDOE, 2016a).

According to Alpine Testing Solutions (2015), the FSA is considered to be a valid assessment. After a review of the FSA, Alpine Testing Solutions stated that the evaluation of test items, field testing, test blueprint construction, test administration, scaling equating and scoring, and specific psychometric validity questions were all generally consistent with expected practices. To measure these standards AIR used Brennan's Educational Measurement, 4th ed., Downing and Haladyna's Handbook for Test Development, and Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing as guidelines for the evaluation (Alpine Testing Solutions, 2015).

The FSA is also considered to be reliable. Because the FSA was given in a single

administration, internal consistency was used to support the reliability of the test scores. Internal consistency examines individuals who respond one way to a test item and who tend to respond the same to other items on the test (Gall et al., 2007). Multiple studies have used this concept to conclude the FSA test was reliable (Cronbach, 1951; Feldt & Brennan, 1989; Feldt & Qualls, 1996).

To attain internal consistent reliability, all testing atmospheres are required to be the same. Test administrators are required to read a script verbatim. Testing rooms are to have nothing on the walls, and a security training that is exactly the same for all test administrators is taken. Administrators must sign a statement that says that they understand and will adhere to all testing procedures (FLDOE, 2016b). According to the FLDOE (2016c), the reliability coefficients for the 2016 FSA for fifth grade for ELA and math are as follows (see Tables 3 & 4).

Table 3

*ELA Reliability Coefficients for the 2016 5th Grade FSA*

Grade	Form	Cronbach Alpha	Stratified Alpha	Feldt-Raju
5	Online	.91	.91	.89
5	Accommodation of paper	.88	.88	.85

Table 4

*Math Reliability Coefficients for the 2016 5th Grade FSA*

Grade	Form	Cronbach Alpha	Stratified Alpha	Feldt-Raju
5	Online	.95	.95	.93
5	Accommodation of paper	.94	.94	.90

## Procedures

The data in this study was collected only one time. After obtaining permission from the Liberty University IRB (see Appendix A). The researcher contacted the office of data and accountability of the school district to gain permission to use student data (Appendix B). This researcher looked at level of the independent variable, and the student scale score on the FSA was used for ELA and math during the 2016-2017 school year. To secure FSA data for each student, and to ensure the privacy of the students, the following procedures and guidelines were met. No district, school, student names, or identification numbers were used. The research data request was sent to the data and accountability director. After his approval the request was then sent to a school executive board who also approved the research request. After approval, all data was easily accessible through the district's data warehouse website. The data was downloaded and saved to an external hard drive.

Starting the data collection, Two Title I elementary schools that empowered all students through leadership in the district were classified as schools that were implementing The Leader in Me (TLIM) curriculum into their school. These schools were found on the TLIM website (FranklineCovey, 2011). Elementary schools that were not implementing TLIM were classified as Title I schools that were not empowering all students. To find schools similar to the two schools that empower all students, the data warehouse website was used to identify Title I schools that had similar percentages of economically needy and of minority students. The two schools identified as schools that empower all students had very similar demographics. Both schools had over 90% of their students classified as economically needy, and 90% of their students were migrant.

To find students from schools that did not empower all students, the researcher used

stratified random sampling. This eliminated researcher biases. According to Gall et al. (2007), stratified random sampling is used when subgroups with certain characteristics are formed, and then a random sample of individuals from each subgroup is taken. Both schools that were empowering all students also had 95% of their students classified as disadvantaged students. In order to find like groups, Title I schools that had less than 90% of their student population were taken out. This brought the number of similar Title I schools in the district down to 10. Two other schools were taken off the list because their percentage of minority students was significantly different from the two schools already identified. This left a total of eight schools that had similar demographics to the two schools that proactively and purposefully empower all students. The research used a formula in Microsoft Excel that randomly selected two of these schools.

After the four schools for this study were identified, the researcher separated all upper grades students from these schools into two groups on a Microsoft Excel sheet: students from schools that proactively and purposefully empower students through leadership; or students from school where all students are not empowered through leadership. At this point any student who was not in the studied school for two years was taken out of the sample. A total of 508 students in total were placed into one of the two categories. Out of these 508 students, 271 were in schools that proactively and purposefully empowered all students, and 237 students were in schools that empowered some students.

For this study TLIM was used to classify school that empowered all students. Schools that did not use TLIM, were classified as schools that used distributive student leadership. The variable that makes this TLIM special is the empowerment of all students to be leaders. Therefore, the independent variable level of empowering all students in this study could be

replicated by any curriculum that empowers all students.

### **Data Analysis**

The independent samples *t*-test was used to determine if the null hypotheses were accepted or rejected. A *t*-test was used to analyze the mean scores of the individual fifth grade students at schools that proactively and purposely empowered all students through leadership and the individual fifth grade students in schools who do not empower all students through leadership. The independent samples *t*-test was the appropriate test to use when analyzing the mean scores of between groups, when looking to determine if the independent variable has a significant effect on the dependent variable (Gall et al., 2007; Warner, 2013). The independent samples *t*-test requires several assumptions be held tenable before a statistical analysis may be conducted. The first assumption of a *t*-test is the dependent variable should be measured on an interval or ratio. The dependent variable for this study is Interval, therefore, this assumption was met. The second assumption is there are no significant outliers in the two groups of the independent variable in terms of the dependent variable. This assumption was tested through the use of a box and whisker plot. To test the assumption of normality Kolmogorov-Smirnov was used, because there were more than 50 participants providing data for the analysis (Green & Salkind, 2014). The Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variance was used to meet the assumption of equal variance. If the value of the Levene test is statistically significant, there is evidence of the equality of variance assumption being violated (Warner, 2013). The final assumption that was met was the assumption of random sampling from the population. To meet this, the data was placed into Microsoft Excel and a formula for random selection was written. All  $\alpha$  levels were at the 0.05 level. This is considered to be the typical level of significance in educational research (Gall et al., 2007; Warner, 2013), and Cohen's *d* was used to interpret the

effect size (Gall et al., 2007).

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### Overview

This research was conducted to determine whether the empowerment of all elementary students in an educational setting increases academic achievement more so than empowering a limited number of students. Two research questions were posed and their hypotheses were tested through the use of the *t*-test. This chapter reviews the research questions, provides descriptive statistics for the sample, discusses data screening and assumption testing, and explains the results of the statistical analyses.

### Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

**RQ1:** Is there a significant difference in English language arts achievement, as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment, between fifth grade students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership training?

**RQ2:** Is there a significant difference in math achievement, as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment, between fifth grade students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership training?

### Null Hypotheses

The null hypotheses for this study were:

**H<sub>0</sub>1:** There is no significant difference in English language arts achievement, as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment, between fifth grade students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership training.

**H<sub>0</sub>2:** There is no significant difference in math achievement, as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment, between fifth grade students under empowerment-leadership training and

those not under empowerment-leadership training.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

Archival records from the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) in English language arts (ELA) and math from the 2016-2017 fifth grade classes were used for this study. Four Title I schools in a southeastern United States school district were analyzed to determine if there was a difference in student scale scores from schools that proactively and purposefully empowered all students through leadership and schools that empowered some students through leadership.

A total of 490 students from the four schools included in the study took the fifth grade ELA section of the FSA (see Table 5). Of these students, 227 were considered to be from schools that empowered some students, and 263 were from schools that empowered all students. The implementation of empowerment through leadership is generally defined as leadership that allows the process of sharing responsibility, wisdom, and authority further down the organization than previously thought possible (Covey, 2003). Schools that empower all students spread leadership roles throughout the organization, and tasks are accomplished among all leaders. Schools that empower some students use distributed leadership. This type of leadership allows capable and willing teachers to become empowered to be part of the leadership process (Harris, 2008).

In math, a total of 508 took the FSA. Out of these students, 271 were classified as students from a school that empowered all students through leadership, and 237 were classified as students from a school empowering some students through leadership.

Table 5

*Composition by Group According to Schools' Level of Empowerment*

	English Language Arts	Math	Total
All Empowered	263	271	534
Some Empowered	227	237	464
Total	490	508	998

Scores for the FSA had the potential to range from a low score of 257 to a high score of 385 in ELA. Math scores had a potential to range from a low score of 256 to a high score of 388. The mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and the standard error for the mean for the FSA are provided in Table 6.

Table 6

*Descriptive Statistics for Florida Standards Assessment Scores According to Schools' Level of Empowerment*

Group	N	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
All Empowered English Language Arts	263	308.49	309	307	21.49	1.325
Some Empowered English Language Arts	227	311.19	312	304	20.80	1.380
All Empowered Math	271	324.24	326	325	21.20	1.481
Some Empowered Math	237	317.35	320	319	22.80	1.288

## Results

### Data Screening

The data screening was conducted on the independent variable (students from schools that proactively and purposely empowered all students through leadership and students from schools that empowered some students through leadership) in relation to the dependent variable (academic achievement) for inconsistencies, outliers, and normality. This study looked at the 2017 Florida Standards Assessment in the areas of English language arts and math. An Excel document that contained this data was obtained from district personnel after all student identifiers were stripped.

### Assumption Testing

An independent samples *t*-test was planned to determine if the null hypotheses were accepted or rejected. Before attempting the independent samples *t*-test, several assumptions needed to be held tenable (Green & Salkind, 2014; Warner, 2013). These assumptions were that the sample should be measured on an interval or ration, there are no outliers, the assumption of normality, the assumption of equal variance. While examining the boxplots, no extreme outliers were discovered. See Figures 1 and 2 for box and whisker plots.

T

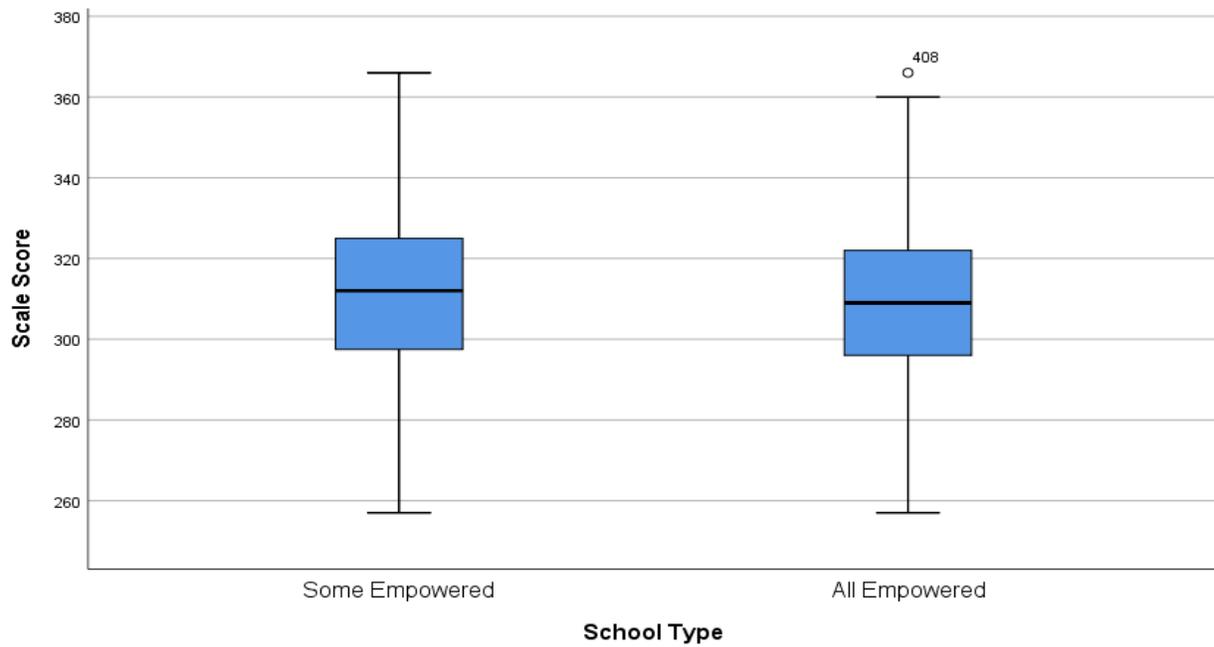


Figure 1. Box plot based on average scores for English Language Arts achievement

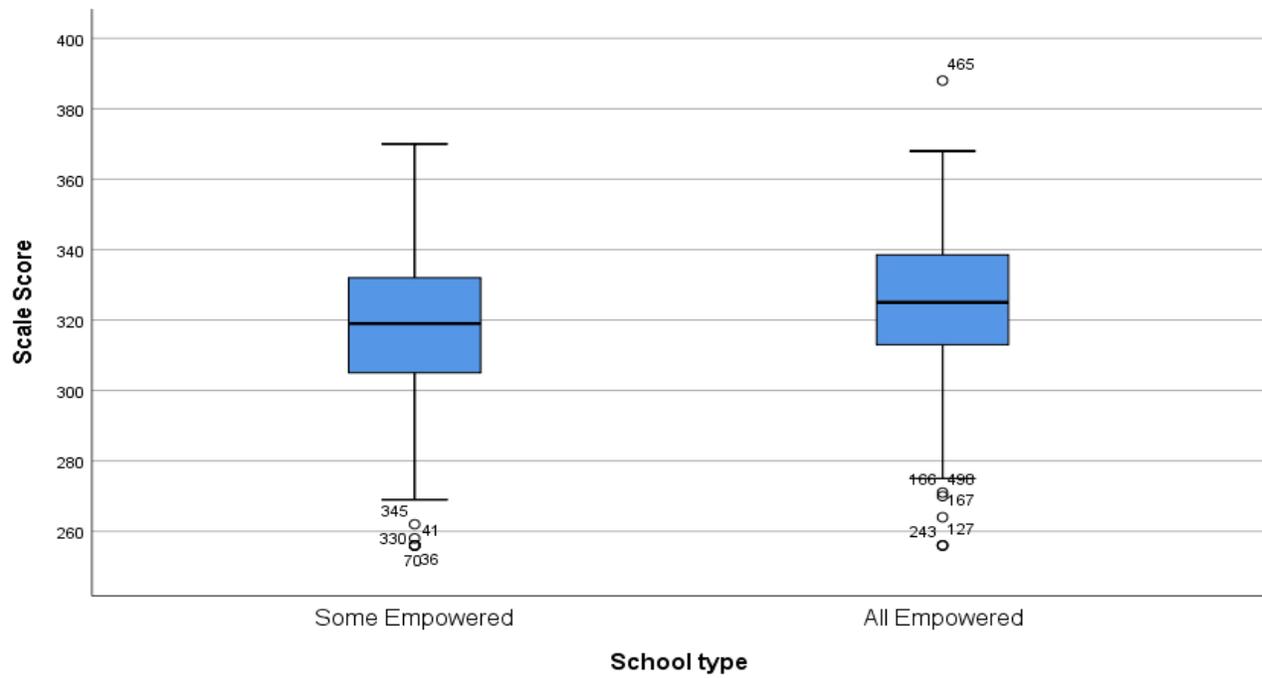


Figure 2. Box plot based on average scores for Math achievement

Normality of distribution was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The

significance for each group of the academic subject area of ELA and math are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

*Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov*

School type	N	Significance
All Empowered English Language Arts	263	.200
Some Empowered English Language Arts	227	.039
All Empowered Math	271	.000
Some Empowered Math	237	.041

Since the  $p$  value of all except the English scores from students from schools where some students are empowered was below .05, the data was shown to not be normally distributed (Green & Salkind, 2014; Warner, 2013). The assumption of normality of distribution was not held tenable for the math data for either group, or for the ELA data for the empowerment group. This meant that the  $t$ -test would potentially yield invalid results. Additionally, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied for both English language arts  $F(490) = .001$ ,  $p = .978$  and math  $F(508) = .955$ ,  $p = .329$  by the Levene's test of equality of variances.

These results led the researcher to use a Mann-Whitney U test do to the non-normal nature of the collected data. The Mann-Whitney U test is a non-parametric test, which can be used as an alternative to an independent samples  $t$ -test when the assumptions are not met (Green & Salkind, 2011).

To conduct a non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test the following assumptions needed to be met: a dependent variable that is measured at the continuous or ordinal level, and one

independent variable that consists of two categorical groups (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The samples must have independence of observations, distribution of scores for both groups of the independent variable (Gall et al., 2007). The assumption of a continuous variable was met as the dependent variable of academic achievement, both for math and ELA, was measured on a continuous scale. The assumption of categorical groups was met as the study has one independent variable that consists of the two groups: those students from schools where all students are proactively and purposefully empowered, and those students from schools where some students are empowered. The assumption of independent observations was met as each of participant scores were in only one group. The data was found to have different distributions during the above Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

### **Null Hypothesis 1**

The first null hypothesis stated, “There is no significant difference in English language arts achievement, as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment, between fifth grade students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership training.”

The non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was utilized to determine if the null hypothesis could be accepted or rejected. In educational research the standard level of significance of  $p < .05$  was used to determine whether to reject or fail to reject the null hypothesis (Green & Salkind, 2014; Warner, 2013). The analysis revealed that distributions of the academic achievement in ELA for students from schools that proactively and purposefully empowered all students (mean rank = 308.49) were not statistically significantly higher than for students from schools that empowered some students (mean rank = 311.19),  $U = 27,888.5$ ,  $z = -1.256$ ,  $p = .209$ , The first null hypothesis was accepted.

### **Null Hypothesis 2**

The second null hypothesis stated, “There is no significant difference in math achievement, as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment, between fifth grade students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership training.”

The non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was utilized to determine if the null hypothesis could be accepted or rejected. In educational research the standard level of significance of  $p < .05$  was used to determine whether to reject or fail to reject the null hypothesis (Green & Salkind, 2014; Warner, 2013). The analysis revealed that distributions of the academic achievement in math for students from schools that proactively and purposefully empowered all students (mean rank = 324.24) were found to be statistically significantly higher than those for students from schools that empowered some students (mean rank = 317.35),  $U = 37,811$ ,  $z = 3.452$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $n^2 = .024$ . The effect size was medium. The second null hypothesis was rejected.

### **Summary**

The researcher utilized a nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test to test the null hypotheses. This non-parametric test was used due to the violation of the assumption of normality for both math groups and for the English language arts data for the empowerment group. The analysis revealed that the students from schools which proactively and purposefully empowered through leadership did not have a statistically significant difference in academic achievement in ELA than students from schools that empowered some students through leadership. However, in math, there was a statistically significant difference in academic achievement between students who were from schools that proactively and purposefully empowered all students through leadership and students from schools that empowered some students through leadership. The final chapter of this study will take the findings from this chapter and draw conclusions from the research.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS**

### **Overview**

This chapter will discuss the results of this study. The researcher compared students from schools where all students are empowered through leadership with students from schools where only select students were empowered through leadership. Both research questions will be presented and reviewed individually in the discussion portion of this chapter. Finally, this chapter will cover the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this quantitative causal-comparative (*ex-post facto*) study was to understand the impact of student empowerment through leadership training within Title I elementary schools. Fifth grade students from four schools of two different empowerment models, students from schools that proactively and purposely empowered all students to lead, and students from schools that empowered some students to lead, were selected for this study. The students from these schools took the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) in the areas of English language arts (ELA) and math in the Spring of 2017. This study discussed two research questions. Below are the results to these research questions, as well as, a comparison to related literature.

### **Null Hypothesis 1**

Is there a statistically significant difference regarding academic achievement in the area of English language arts between students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership training? This study hypothesized that “There is no significant difference in English language arts achievement, as measured by the FSA, between fifth grade students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership

training.” In order to compare the two groups, the researcher planned to use *t*-tests. However, failed assumptions led the researcher to use the Mann Whitney U-test. The results of the Mann Whitney U-test revealed no statistically significant differences between the two groups,  $U=27,888.5$ ,  $z = -1.256$ ,  $p = .209$ . Therefore, under the conditions in this study, empowerment-leadership training did not increase academic achievement in ELA. While the results of this study did not show a statistically significant difference between the groups in academic achievement in English Language Arts, other studies have shown a difference between empowered student leaders and others students who did not possess leadership positions in school, or through extra-curricular activities (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Covey, 2014; Gessley, 2006; Hallinger & Heck, 2009b; Kasper-Ferguson & Moxley, 2002; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; O’Neal, 2004). Furthermore, research indicates that student leadership empowerment training improves not only students’ achievement, it also affects school climate and student behavior (Hatch & Andersen, 2014; Ross & Laurenzano, 2012; FranklinCovey Center for Advanced Research, 2010, 2011; Westgate Research, 2014). These factors may also impact the student achievement (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009; Moore, 2009; Willis & Varner, 2010).

This research question can neither support nor refute Maslow’s (1943) Theory of Motivation. Maslow’s theory spoke to the fact that people are motivated to achieve their needs based on five stages of needs: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. People are only able to reach their higher-order needs if their lower-level needs are met. Title I schools have been given substantial federally-funded supports to meet physiological and safety needs for students (Hung, 2011). However, students who attend these schools continue to have lessened achievement across the United States (Hernandez, 2011; Reardon, 2011; Walpole, 2007). This may be due to not having their social, esteem, and self-actualization met. Studies

have shown that people that are in positive leadership environments can positively affect these top tiers of Maslow (1943) Theory of Motivation (King, 2002; Hale, 2001; Mheta, & Pillay, 2011; Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2009). Under the condition in this study, the researcher cannot conclude whether students who are from schools where all students are empowered through leadership training or students who are from schools that only empower some students perform any better academically in ELA.

This research question can neither support nor refute Greenleaf's (1977) Theory of Servant Leadership. Research conducted on servant leadership may suggest that Greenleaf's (1977) theory can be an effective leadership style for leading and managing younger followers (Balda & Mora, 2011; VanMeter, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2013). According to Turner (2000) servant leadership turns a traditional organizational pyramid upside down. Instead of the leader making all the decisions, the servant leader establishes vision and direction and then empowers followers to make decisions about how to reach the goals (Miller, 1995). This type of leadership can empower organizations to increase performance (Chen, Eisenberger, Johnson, Sucharski, & Aselage, 2009; Van Yperen, & Hagedoorn, 2003). When students are empowered through leadership training, they may be better able to support the needs of other students. This theory may support Greenleaf theory of motivation. Since servant leaders meet the needs of others, students from schools that train all students to be servant leaders may be able to have all students reach a higher tier of Maslow's hierarchy. Under the condition in this study, the researcher cannot conclude whether students from school that support all students empowered through leadership training or students who are from schools that only empower some students perform any better academically in ELA.

Although this study did not result in statically significant findings between the two empowerment groups, more research may be needed to fully understand in proactively and purposely empowering students through leadership opportunities can have an effect on student academic achievement in the arear of English language arts.

### **Null Hypothesis 2**

Is there a statistical difference regarding academic achievement in the area of math between students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership training? This study hypothesized that “There is no significant difference in Math achievement, as measured by the FSA, between fifth grade students under empowerment-leadership training and those not under empowerment-leadership training.” In order to compare the two groups, the researcher planned to use *t*-tests. However, failed assumptions lead the researcher to use the Mann Whitney U-test. The results of the Mann Whitney U-test revealed a statically significant difference between the two groups,  $U = 37,811$ ,  $z = 3.452$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $n^2 = .024$ . The effect size was medium. Therefore, under the conditions in this study, students in schools where empowerment-leadership training is present appear to have higher math achievement that students in schools without this type of leadership emphasis. This study builds on the work of (Biggar, Dick, & Bourque, 2015; Cook-Sather, 2002; Covey, 2014; Gannouni & Ramboarison-Lalao, 2016; Marchetti, Wilson, & Dunham, 2016; Oldfather, 1995; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). This work states that the empowerment of students through leadership training may statistically improve students’ academics in math. Furthermore, research indicates that student leadership empowerment training improves not only students’ achievement, it also affects school climate and student behavior (Hatch & Andersen, 2014; Ross & Laurenzano, 2012; FranklinCovey Center for Advanced Research, 2010, 2011; Westgate Research, 2014).

These factors may also impact the student achievement (MacNeil et al., 2009; Moore, 2009; Willis & Varner, 2010).

This research question can support Maslow's (1943) Theory of Human Motivation. Maslow's (1943) theory spoke to the fact that people are motivated to achieve their needs based on five stages of needs: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. People are only able to reach their higher-order needs if their lower-level needs are met. Title I schools have been given substantial federally-funded supports to meet physiological and safety needs for students (Hung, 2011). However, students who attend these schools continue to have lessened achievement across the United States (Hernandez, 2011; Reardon, 2011; Walpole, 2007). This may be due to not having their social, esteem, and self-actualization met. Studies have shown that people that are in positive leadership environments can positively affect these top tiers of Maslow (1943) Theory of Motivation (King, 2002; Hale, 2001; Mheta, & Pillay, 2011; Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2009). Under the condition in this study, the researcher concludes that there may be a statistical difference between math academic achievement between students from schools empowering all students through leadership training or students who are from schools that only empower select students.

This research question can support Greenleaf's (1977) Theory of Servant Leadership. Research conducted on servant leadership may suggest that Greenleaf's (1977) theory can be an effective leadership style for leading and managing younger followers (Balda & Mora, 2011; VanMeter et al., 2013). According to Turner (2000), servant leadership turns a traditional organizational pyramid upside down. Instead of the leader making all the decisions, the servant leader establishes vision and direction, then empowers followers to make decisions about how to reach the goals (Miller, 1995). This type of leadership can empower organizations to increase

performance (Chen, Eisenberger, Johnson, Sucharski, & Aselage, 2009; Van Yperen, & Hagedoorn, 2003). When students are empowered through leadership training, they may be better able to support other students. This theory may support Greenleaf theory of motivation. Since servant leaders meet the needs of others, students from schools that train all students to be servant leaders may be able to have all students reach a higher tier of Maslow's hierarchy. Under the condition in this study, the researcher cannot conclude whether students from school that support all students empowered through leadership training or students who are from schools that only empower some students perform any better academically in math.

Under the condition in this study, the researcher conclude that there is a statistical difference in math between students who are from schools that support all students empowered through leadership training and students who are from schools that only empower some students.

### **Implications**

Although Title I schools have ongoing support, the students attending these schools tend to have lessened academic achievement throughout the United States (Hernandez, 2011; Reardon, 2011; Walpole, 2007). With this widespread epidemic, these schools need to look at all options to help make the whole student better academically, socially, and emotionally. One solution to this issue may be empowering students to lead. Supporting teachers and students with a system that empowers leadership may provide an environment that supports all students socially, emotionally, and academically (Covey, 2014). This research took the works of Cook-Sather (2002), Gannouni and Ramboarison-Lalao (2016), Oldfather (1995), and Rudduck and Flutter (2000) that compared students who chose to be empowered to leadership positions versus students who chose not to be empowered. This type of leadership may be considered as a type of distributed leadership, where students who are willing and capable rise as the leaders of the

organization (Keppell, O'Dwyer, Lyon, & Childs, 2010). The researcher used this launching point and added to the research by looking to see if there was a statistical significance between students who were placed in a setting where all students were empowered through leadership training and students from schools that did not have the opportunity for all students to be empowered. Although student empowerment through leadership training did not show a statistical significance in ELA, there was a statistical significance in math. The findings in this study provide a starting point for future research to fill literacy gaps in these areas.

### **Limitations**

This study had several limiting factors. First, the sample used in this study was drawn from a restricted population. Because the participants in the study were located close to the location where the researcher lives and the data on academic achievement had previously been collected, the sample is considered a convenience sample (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). This convenience sampling allowed the district in which the researcher works to provide data on a number of students in schools throughout the district. The limitation of convenience sampling is that the samples are prone to non-response bias and do not allow for error-free appraisal of beliefs, attitudes, and experiences of participants (Gall et al., 2007).

Although students from like schools were compared in this study, only four different schools were used (two schools that empowered all students through leadership training and two schools that did not empower all students through leadership training). These schools were located in the same geographic area, reside in the same school district, and have very similar demographics creating a study. With so many of the data points being closely related in so many ways, the results may be limited in generalizability. The results from this study may not apply to students with different demographics, different school leadership, or students from other grade

levels. Also, this study may be limited to schools that follow the same curriculum. Student empowerment through leadership may have a different outcome on schools that assess academic achievement differently than with the Florida Standards Assessment.

A third limitation may be the two schools that empowered all students were at different stages of empowering students. One school had empowerment systems in place for a number of years, where the other empowerment school was only in its second year of implementation. Schools that have had systems in place for a number of years may be more likely to implement the variable of empowerment more efficiently and effectively than a school that is in the first few years implementation.

Although there are some limitations to this study, the results are too important to ignore or overlook. This study has helped to fill the gap in the literature. The limitations of this study provide a place for others to continue to fill the gap in literature.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research could have implication for administrators, teachers, parents, and students for years to come. All school stakeholders are constantly looking for ways to make the students at their school successful academically. After completing and reflecting on this study, several recommendations could be used to enhance this research.

The first recommendation would be to have a larger sample size which would provide data (academic achievement scores) to increase the generalizability of the findings. A bigger sample may also make the data have less outliers and be more normally distributed. Also, with a larger sample size, more schools would be able to be used, which would allow for future studies to have more varied geographical locations, especially considering that student empowerment through leadership trainings are being conducted all over the world.

Another recommendation that would further this research is to look at student gain scores instead of academic achievement. Academic achievement, as related to students passing test is important. However, it would also be interesting to see if there was a difference in the two independent variable groups when looking at student gains.

Furthermore, for this study the academic achievement areas of English language arts and math were investigated. Future studies may want to look into other areas of academics, such as science, technology, social studies, or other areas. Different areas of study may be impacted more or less than others when empowering individuals.

Future studies should consider conducting a similar study using another grade level, or different lengths of time that a student has been empowered to lead. For this study, the students could have been in the empowerment group for as little as two years. Students who have had more time to develop leadership skills may have a different outcome than the one provided in this study.

Finally, future studies could conduct a similar study to this one using the same two independent variables and the same independent variable, but changing the instrument used to compare these two groups. For this research, the Florida Standards Assessment was used. However, there are a number of instruments that would take this research to a national level, especially at the high school level, where students take national assessments such as the ACT and SAT.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this quantitative causal-comparative (ex-post facto) study was to understand the impact of student empowerment through leadership training within Title I elementary schools. With other studies comparing the academic achievement of students who

are empowered to students who are not empowered (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Biggar et al., 2015; Cook-Sather, 2002; Covey, 2014; Gannouni & Ramboarison-Lalao, 2016; Gessley, 2006; Hallinger & Heck, 2009b; Kasper-Ferguson & Moxley, 2002; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; O'Neal, 2004), this study was necessary in filling the gap in literature. The evidence provided by this study shows that empowerment through leadership training in schools may increase academic achievement, especially in math.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 13, 2018

Nathan Poteet

IRB Exemption 3316.061318: The Effects of Student Empowerment Through Leadership on Academic Achievement in English Language Arts and Math

Dear Nathan Poteet,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(4), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(4) Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,



G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP  
*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*  
The Graduate School

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## Appendix B: School District Permission

OFFICE OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND DATA MANAGEMENT

April 23, 2018

Re: Research Request 4C6901

Dear Mr. Poteet:

The above referenced request has been approved by the [REDACTED] Research and Data Committee. It is now your obligation to conduct the study as outlined in the proposal and the [REDACTED] [guidelines for Conducting Research](#).

Your approval is also subject to the following guidelines as designated by the committee:

- (a) Information is collected anonymously, and no personally identifiable information is obtained from or reported on any individual student, person, group, or organization.  
If your research involves the collection of data from students, you must provide details of your study, (survey questions to be asked, etc.) and get signed permission from their parents/guardians.
- (b) If the district is to be identified in any manner in the final report of an approved study, prior permission must be secured.
- (c) The cooperating organization or individual will furnish a copy of the final results to the district.
- (d) All personnel involved (staff, teachers, administrators, etc.) know it is voluntary to participate and identity information is kept confidential.
- (e) Research conducted on accepted proposals must be actively underway within one (1) year of the date of acceptance. Researchers must request an extension for approved research proposals that are not initiated and actively underway by this time.
- (f) Approval means the researcher may collect data as specified in the original proposal.  
This notification is not approval to provide data, promise of services, nor is it permission to use district data. Should the researcher pursue data beyond the parameters of the research proposal, all access to district resources will be denied to the researcher and any organization he/she presently represents.
- (g) Approval does not include any services from the district including access to district databases (unless it is public information available through the district's public information office.)
- (h) Personnel from the Department of Accountability and Data Management will not provide research services.
- (i) The researcher must notify the committee about any changes made to the original proposal.  
The committee reserves the right to rescind its approval if the modifications do not satisfy any of the conditions detailed above.

Please contact the Office of Accountability and Data Management should you have any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

[REDACTED]  
Coordinator  
Research Committee

EDUCATION TRAITS  
Citizenship Cooperation Honesty Kindness Patriotism Perseverance  
Respect Responsibility Self-Control Tolerance