MENTORSHIP EXPERIENCES OF COLLEGE LEVEL EDUCATORS: A

PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Rebecca Marquita Sue Arsenault

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the impact that mentorship had on the retention of ten participating educators working at various post-secondary educational institutions. The theory guiding this study was Dansereau's leader-member theory guided as it pertained to the interactions between a dyadic relationship such as the one represented by one-on-one mentorship. The central research question for this study asked about the mentorship experiences of educators in higher education who have been in the field of education for five years or more. This study used transcendental phenomenological to study the essence of the experiences of 10 educators at post-secondary organizations around the United States. This population of participants was a volunteer-based, convenience sample. The setting for the study was completely virtual, and the researcher utilized Microsoft Teams and secure email to transmit and share information. The data collection methods included interviews, questionnaires, and journal prompts. The analytical approach for the data collected focused on bracketing the researcher out of the experiences prior to coding for similarities and prominent themes. The findings of this research suggest that mentorship may have a positive impact on educator retention at the post-secondary level when effective mentorship practices are consistently implemented over time.

Keywords: attrition, dyadic relationship, mentorship, development

Dedication

The journey to Dr. Arsenault has been littered with obstacles and endless lessons. I could not have completed this journey without the support of my loved ones and my biggest supporter of all, The Most High. It is through Him and with Him that I have been able to complete this arduous yet rewarding experience. I dedicate this dissertation to our Lord and Savior, to my mother, my father, my husband, my two sons, and our two loyal dogs. My parents, Horace and Lenora Randolph, have always believed in me. They consistently pushed me to seek personal and professional development, and they taught me the importance of helping others. They are a huge reason that I am here today. Their molding, guidance, and unconditional love have contributed to my passion for developing others. My husband, James, has also supported me on this journey. As a dual military couple, my husband and I do not have an abundance of time in our household. My husband has been an encouraging and supportive partner during this entire process, and I could not have made it to this point without him. To our sons, Finley and Elijah, you provided me with inspiration that I never knew was possible. Your thirst for knowledge and constant curiosity motivated me to reignite my passion for inquiry. Leia and Maynard, you two are a mess. You are a loving, hilarious, wild pair that gave me the oxytocin boosts I needed to travel this route.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

Leader-member Exchange (LMX)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Personnel retention is a longstanding topic of conversation for organizations across the United States (Kelchtermans, 2017; Martin & Douglas, 2018; Newberry & Allsop, 2017). Educational organizations struggling to retain teachers focus on finding strategies to improve retention (Alegado & Soe, 2020; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; O'Sullivan & Conway, 2016; Papay et al., 2017; Whalen et al., 2019). On the other hand, educational institutions with strong retention rates tend to be more focused on sustaining those rates (Dupriez et al., 2016; Harmsen et al., 2018). As research demonstrates, the challenge of teacher retention seems to become more troublesome after the fifth year that an educator is in the field (Alegado & Soe, 2020; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; O'Sullivan & Conway, 2016; Papay et al., 2017; Whalen et al., 2019). Research also presents a narrative that highlights the strain imposed on individual educators, school districts, policy makers, and students when educators choose to leave the field of education between years one and five (Mrstik et al., 2019). Mentorship appears consistently in research as a strategy to combat educator attrition, but there is no standard delivery method that has been deemed as the final solution, and mentorship is not as prominent in higher education in comparison to elementary and secondary education (Alegado & Soe, 2020; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; O'Sullivan & Conway, 2016; Papay et al., 2017; Whalen et al., 2019). To introduce these issues, this chapter will include the following sections: background, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, definitions, and summary.

Background

Retention is a concept that encourages leaders to focus on people first. Regardless of the industry, it is people that affect productivity and social climate (Breci & Martin, 2000). This is

also true for the public-school system. Teacher retention is not a new focus in the field of education, nor is the application of mentorship strategies, especially when speaking of teachers in the first years of their profession (Loewus, 2021). Research about teacher retention dates back to before 1970 (Chapman, 1984). While there is extensive literature that addresses first-year teacher attrition and first-year attrition of professionals in general, many studies focused on quantitative data and lacked extensive data about the root causes behind educator attrition from the second to the fifth year of their profession (Charters, 1970; Mrstik et al., 2019; Narayanan et al., 2019). Regardless of the time frame provided, mentorship appears throughout research as a staple strategy to address educator attrition.

Historical Context

According to a study by Gray and Taie (2015) teacher attrition is a constant concern of school districts due to the volatile nature of educator turnover. They reported that attrition rates were the highest from years one to five of an educator's career. They further indicated that trends of educator attrition seem to align with political, societal, and economical occurrences for over 50 years. The 1950s through the 1970s exhibited continued educator attrition, 11% nationwide, despite the goal of increasing the quality of the teacher corps (Dworkin, 1987; Schlechty & Vance, 1983). These were due to the struggle to produce enough teachers while attempting to embrace desegregation mandates (Dworkin, 1987). Minority educators were much more likely to stay in the field of education than their Caucasian counterparts (Dworkin, 1987). However, a shift came at the end of the 1970s. Many school systems no longer struggled with educator attrition in the United States at the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s because of the decreased number of students attending school (Dworkin, 1987). The ratio of students to educators went from 22.3 to 17.9 from 1970 to 1985 (Gray & Taie, 2015).

The *A Nation at Risk* (1983) report called for higher graduation expectations at all levels, and this increase in graduation expectations acted as a deterrent to some students (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). States began to increase their academic requirements while simultaneously providing educators with more opportunities and increased salaries (Ravitch, 1990). Standardized tests also began to appear and placed more pressure on educators to provide more structured curricula (Ravitch, 1990). This was a change from the 1970s when participation was a large part of the educational experience and the path to graduation (Ravitch, 1990).

In the 1990s, schools introduced technology into the classroom to improve student engagement and spike educator morale by supplying technological resources (Dupriez et al., 2016; Michalec & Newburgh, 2018; Mrstik et al., 2019). Unfortunately, the rate of educators that left the field or moved schools increased (Darling-Hammond, 2017). The 2000s did not hold the expected promise of higher retention rates either. The great recession occurred from 2007 to 2009, leaving educators in a frustrating position. Attrition rates increased for schools that could not afford to keep their faculty on predetermined salary rates (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Higher education institutions raised tuition to make up for less funding, and morale related to the education field dipped (Shores & Steinberg, 2017). The current state of educator retention is bleak due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many educators to hold their classes online while simultaneously caring for their households and trying not to get infected. This caused mental health crises and utter burnout for many. The rate of educators wanting to leave the field increased to roughly 25% as the pandemic droned on for over a year (Shores & Steinberg, 2017).

Social Context

Many studies have applied educational, behavioral, and psychological theories to the study of organizational retention to explain retention factors definitively (Dupriez et al., 2016; Michalec & Newburgh, 2018; Mrstik et al., 2019). Concerning the ones that focus on the field of education, many of these theories deal with the social contexts that influence a teacher's decision to leave teaching (Boreen & Niday, 2000; Crutcher & Naseem, 2016). While the information focusing on teacher attrition is heavily based on novice teachers, one of the most central concepts is that the complexity behind educator retention, regardless of years in service, arises from the realization that societal influences will never be standardized (Boreen & Niday, 2000; Crutcher & Naseem, 2016). The social context-related reasons that educators leave the profession include, but are not limited to feelings of separation, community pressures, interaction struggles in the classroom, interaction struggles with administration, and a lack of trust within educational relationships (Lejonberg et al., 2015; Mrstik et al., 2019). The depths of these context-related reasons cannot be simply defined or explained in a single study, as proven by the various studies (Boreen & Niday, 2000; Crutcher & Naseem, 2016; Hallam et al., 2012; Ingersoll et al., 2014; Kutsyuruba et al., 2019) involving teacher attrition and the coinciding social issues. These divergent social contexts are the ones that lead to a continued need for studies that focus on how to address the social integration tools that can manage the problem of attrition, precisely, effective mentorship (Atkinson, 2016; Boreen & Niday, 2000; Crutcher & Naseem, 2016).

Mentorship has been a staple in education for novice teachers. It appears in many industries, but in the field of education, mentorship is meant to provide professional and personal support for educators (Boreen & Niday, 2000; Eun, 2019; Forseille & Raptis, 2016). Teaching is a challenging career path. Educators are responsible for the mental, physical, and developmental

well-being of the children of others (Boreen & Niday, 2000). This task can feel daunting, especially considering that educators must also become comfortable with their course content, school policies, and policies of the local community (Maloch et al., 2022).

Mentorship and induction programs for novice educators have been shown to reduce educator retention rates by as much as 50% (Maloch et al., 2022). The most successful programs were equipped with experienced educators that were comfortable working with diverse populations (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). While the benefits of mentorship on novice teachers appear to be substantial, the methods of mentorship delivery have yet to be standardized. Mentorship factors can vary exponentially (Hallam et al., 2012; Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). However, research has determined that mentorship experiences that encompass reciprocal relationships, provide feedback, provide opportunities for modeling, and encourage personal development are the most successful (Crutcher & Naseem, 2016). Mentorship is multifaceted. Research reinforces the concept that mentorship is a process and not a standardized method for application (Maloch et al., 2022).

The quest to address personnel attrition is not restricted to the field of education. Information from this study can be applied to other industries, especially those seeking to build or revise personnel development programs. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022), leisure and hospitality services are amongst the worst for retention, with an 85% attrition rate. For the past five years, other industries, such as construction and utilities, have had higher attrition rates, roughly 65%. Education and health services, two of the industries that frequently seek to address attrition publicly, have experienced attrition rates of 25%-40% over the last five years (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

Theoretical Context

This study was influenced by the leader-member exchange theory (LMX) (Dansereau et al., 1975). This theory focuses on a dyadic relationship between mentor and protege (Dansereau et al., 1975). The leader-member exchange theory acknowledges both the authoritative relationship and the meaningful relationship within an exchange that supports quality interactions and reciprocal learning. The authoritative concept exemplifies the occurrences when the protege interacts with the mentor because the mentor has authority. This is much different from interactions fueled by mutual respect, trust, and a shared understanding of the partnership's intent (Bettini et al., 2018; Dansereau et al., 1975; Jerrim & Sims, 2021; Lawrence et al., 2019).

Theoretical research expresses correlations between educator attrition and burnout, personal stress, workload, educator support, and educator capabilities (Bettini et al., 2018; Jerrim & Sims, 2021; Lawrence et al., 2019). Burnout and workload factors are shown to increase the likelihood that an educator will leave the profession prior to reaching five years (Bettini et al., 2018; Dinibutun et al., 2020; Grillo & Kier, 2021; Nassar et al., 2019). Personal stressors combined with a lack of educator support and inadequate educator capabilities also increase attrition rates (Baker et al., 2020; Bakker et al., 2022; Black et al., 2016; Jerrim & Sims, 2021; Lawrence et al., 2019; Nassar et al., 2019). Throughout these studies, researchers have analyzed many variables involved in teacher attrition to include, but not limited to teacher location and economic factors, school location, teacher salary, student economic status, teacher workload, teacher support platforms, types of support platforms, length of support platforms, content of support platforms, teacher education level, level of instruction taught, and teacher capabilities (Allen et al., 2004; Baker et al., 2020; Bakker et al., 2022; Bettini et al., 2018; Black et al., 2016;

Dinibutun et al., 2020; Grillo & Kier, 2021; Jerrim & Sims, 2021; Lawrence et al., 2019; Nassar et al., 2019; Van den Borre et al., 2021)

Studies show that more research is needed on educator attrition because of factors that remain complex, to include educator mental and physical health, the dynamics between personal and professional obligations, and the influence of external policies and personnel (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Nassar et al., 2019; Nguyen, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2019). Individual educators do not share the same values, beliefs, economic status experiences, educational backgrounds, personal experiences, or hardships (Grillo & Kier, 2021; Lawrence et al., 2019; Madison, 2006; Van den Borre et al., 2021). These facts make the root causes of educator attrition, and educator reasons for leaving the profession, complicated (Ainley & Ainley, 2011; Baker et al., 2020; Bakker et al., 2022; Bettini et al., 2018). The quantitative studies that have been done on educator attrition have successfully identified many factors that influence educator attrition, but they fail to explain the root causes of the factors and how to mitigate them (Jerrim & Sims, 2021; Lawrence et al., 2019; Nassar et al., 2019; Van den Borre et al., 2021).

Other scholarly research supports the idea that educator attrition continues to be an issue, due to its complexity (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022; Madigan & Kim, 2021). For instance, school systems with fewer economic resources tend to struggle more with teacher attrition, because they typically lack the desired number of support personnel, required educational materials, and necessary financial support (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Farmer, 2020; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022; Madigan & Kim, 2021). Some educators are better prepared than others to deal with working in lower economic areas (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Farmer, 2020; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022; Madigan & Kim, 2021). This makes the more equipped educators more likely to remain in a school district while other educators may leave the school or leave the

profession (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Farmer, 2020; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022; Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Diverse communities, differing school environments, evolving educator expectations, and surrounding social systems continue to create complexity when it comes to best practices for retention. While researchers have diligently and frequently applied Albert Bandura's social learning theory (1977), transformational leadership techniques, Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), and the Mason and Poyatos Matas model of 2015 to employ mentorship as a solution to the problem of educator attrition, and educator development in general, they have not determined definitive delivery measures or solidified program standards for educators in particular (Allen et al., 2004; Baker et al., 2020; Bandura, 1986; Black et al., 2016; Breci & Martin, 2000; Charters, 1970; Noel & Finnochio, 2015). The current research will add to the body of existing literature regarding educator retention by focusing on in-depth experiences that will provide more insight into the influences of educator retention, including the factors that make teachers want to remain in the field of education past the five-year mark (Allen et al., 2004; Baker et al., 2020; Black et al., 2016; Breci & Martin, 2000; Charters, 1970).

Problem Statement

The problem is that educator attrition is an ongoing issue that affects students, school districts, parents, and the community (Allen et al., 2004; Baker et al., 2020; Black et al., 2016; Breci & Martin, 2000; Bryman, 2016; Charters, 1970). Moreover, beginning educators can face challenges associated with behavior problems, feelings of not being integrated, feelings of being overwhelmed, and they question their decision to enter the field of education. These factors may make the intent to stay in the field of education more challenging (Allen et al., 2004; Baker et al., 2020; Black et al., 2016; Breci & Martin, 2000; Charters, 1970). This research seeks to

understand the contributing factors that make educators want to stay in the field, looking closely at perceived mentorship interactions and developmental opportunities experienced by the participants. Effective mentorship has yet to have a standard definition and often crosses into the general territory of professional development, but continuing to study people that have experienced mentorship and growth opportunities that are deemed effective will help researchers to develop a template for the components needed for effective mentorship. Previous research has fallen short on this topic because there are limited resources available that focus qualitatively on the essence of effective mentorship and its influence on the person receiving it (Dupriez et al., 2016; Harris et al., 2019; Lejonberg et al., 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the impact that mentorship experiences has on the retention of educators at the postsecondary level. At this stage in the research, mentorship experiences will be generally defined as those occurrences when a peer, subordinate, or superior devoted time to professional or personal development and support of the educator (National Academies of Sciences & Medicines, 2019). This study also strives to determine commonalities amongst the experiences of the participants. Educator retention will be defined as the ability to sustain educator population (Charmaz, 2014; Harris et al., 2019).

Significance of the Study

The complexity of educator retention requires further investigation due to the limitless factors that determine an educator's desire to stay within the field of education, especially between one and five years of experience. Research has demonstrated that making people feel valued helps with retention and that mentorship is an effective way to support subordinates (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017; Chase, 2005). However, the word "mentorship" does not refer to

a standardized method, and mentorship-based solutions to the problem of educator attrition require additional research (Dupriez et al., 2016; Harris et al., 2019; Lejonberg et al., 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Using a phenomenological approach to explore the mentorship experiences of teachers in higher education that have five or more years in the field of education will add to the body of research by providing an in-depth analysis of the individual scenarios that influence educator retention without restricting the definition of mentorship or influential experiences.

Theoretical Perspective

Approaching this study through LMX will provide a lens of dyadic relationship dynamics that will provide more context for mentorship interactions (Bunin et al., 2020; Clandinin & Connelly, 1989; Maslow, 1954). The foundational concept of reciprocal mentorship and exchanges within the leader-member exchange theory help to fill the gap in research that addresses the perceived benefits of mentorship for both the mentor and the protege (Dansereau et al., 1975). The application of the LMX to this study also provides a perspective that is based on quality social interactions. Using phenomenology allows each participant to express the emotions, attitudes, and behaviors connected with social interactions that they define as beneficial and influential (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gagliardi et al., 2015; Maxwell, 2012).

In an ideal world, the same rings true for transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is implemented to cause a change in individuals and social systems. This is also the overall purpose of mentorship (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Danesh & Huber, 2021). The general outcome, much like with LMX, is to create future leaders through beneficial social interactions (Danesh & Huber, 2021; Mark & Anderson, 1978). Both transformational leadership and LMX

require development within the relationship to be effective. Transformational leadership is meant to develop others into confident leaders (Bakker et al., 2022). Leaders accomplish this by helping subordinates to identify their strengths and weaknesses and then applying these attributes to daily tasks. This method encourages subordinates to be self-aware and comfortable with their skills. This approach also enables subordinates and leaders to be proactive (Bakker et al., 2022). In other words, transformational leadership acts as an assessment and application tool for the leader and the subordinates. Much like LMX, the interactions between the leader and the subordinates are what influence the relationship outcomes (Bakker et al., 2022).

LMX outlines three general stages to address relationship development: stranger, acquaintance, and mature partnership (Danesh & Huber, 2021). During these developmental phases, both the leader and the mentored person are trying to figure out the dynamic of the relationship. As the dynamic changes, levels of influence, respect, and effort are likely to change based on the social interactions between the dyad. These concepts are true in both transformational leadership and LMX. The common drive of both leadership concepts is the quality of social interaction (Danesh & Huber, 2021; Fein & Tziner, 2021). Social interaction continues to be a complex consideration due to the diversity that each person brings to their interactions.

Empirical Perspective

Empirically, this research provides first-hand experiences of educators with unique backgrounds. Choosing participants with different backgrounds and experiences allows the research to explain the views and understanding associated with mentorship and personnel interaction (Harris et al., 2019). The goal of assessing the mentorship experiences involved in this study is to encourage deeper analysis of the experiences of the mentor and the mentees

(Broughton et al., 2019). These first-hand experiences allow me to cross-reference the similarities amongst participant experiences with the accounts of other mentorship and retention studies.

Practical Perspective

The knowledge generated from this study can be applied to leadership development studies, practices, and strategies at all levels of education. One of the primary goals of this study is to find the recurring themes within personal experiences that define mentorship and highlight techniques that build resilience, self-efficacy, a sense of being valued, and overall morale – all things that make educators want to stay in the field (Harris et al., 2019). These findings would be appropriately utilized in fields outside of education as well, seeing as personnel retention is a key component of the missions of many organizations (Vagi et al., 2019). Additionally, the research participants and site can use this information to delve into the efficiency and benefits of mentorship practices.

Research Questions

These research questions are meant to drive inquiry in a way that encourages in-depth analyses of the unique experiences of each participant. The individuality of every educator's experience creates authentic perceptions about being in the field of education. These questions will guide me to find common emotions, outcomes, and themes identified within each educator experience.

Central Research Question

What are the mentorship experiences of educators in higher education who have been in the field of education for five years or more?

Sub-Question One

What mentorship practices do educators in higher education describe as having an impact on retention?

Sub-Question Two

What types of behaviors, emotions, and meanings do educators in higher education express revolving around receiving or providing mentorship?

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Definitions

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1. *Developmental Opportunity*- A developmental opportunity is a block of time when a person or persons can learn something professionally or personally beneficial (Hightower et al., 2021).

2. *Dyad* - A dyad is a relationship that consists of two parts (Bunin et al., 2020).

3. *Educator Attrition* – Educator attrition is a global problem, varying in severity, that relates to shortages of teachers (Scheopner, 2010).

4. *Formal Mentorship* – Mentorship historically focuses on the professional development of personnel through technical and job-related learning opportunities (Broughton et al., 2019).

5. *Job Satisfaction* – Job satisfaction is a positive feeling associated with one's work experience (Peng et al., 2021).

6. *Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory* - Leader-member exchange theory focuses on the importance of relationships, communication, and awareness of biases to optimize interactions between dyads, such as a mentor and a mentee (Bunin et al., 2020).

7. *Mentor-protégé Relationship* – A relationship between someone deemed as the lead for development and someone deemed as the recipient of the development (Black et al., 2016).

8. *Self-efficacy* – Self-efficacy is one's views about their performance and ability to accomplish tasks that affect their life (Bandura & Wessels, 1994).

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the impact that mentorship experiences have on the retention of educators at the college and university level. This study is based on influential educator experiences that have contributed to perseverance in the field of education past the first five years. The intended outcome of this data mining is to identify common themes that may result in a more succinct template and definition for effective mentorship within the field of education, as well as identify commonalities that contribute to educators' desire to remain in the field. Ultimately, mentorship experiences and the reasons that educators leave education will continue to differ, but identifying common themes will allow professionals to better implement mentorship strategies that can improve personnel retention in different industries.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review was conducted to assess the problem of educator attrition, specifically within the first five years of being in the profession, and how perceived mentorship experiences may or may not have influenced educators that chose to stay in the profession. This chapter provides an overview of the current literature related to the topics of mentorship and retention. This chapter also covers the leader-member exchange theory (Dansereau et al., 1975) applied as a lens for the proposed study. Additionally, this section covers the major themes associated with educator retention issues, the roles of mentorship, mentorship models, and the gaps in the literature associated with each of these themes. The literature gaps identified through this review provide reasoning behind the need for the study of the perceived mentorship interactions of educators with five or more years of experience in the field of education and how those perceived mentorship interactions may have influenced their desire to stay in the field.

Theoretical Framework

The leader-member exchange theory (LMX) was chosen for this study because it is deeply rooted in quality interactions between two people, which tends to be the goal of mentorship in general (Bunin et al., 2020). LMX strives to provide a higher expectation of exchanges that focus on mutual respect, opportunities for learning, and other experiences that promote authentic and rewarding interactions (Fein & Tziner, 2021). The concept of LMX is ideal for mentorship experiences. Mentorship should be beneficial, professionally and personally, for the leader and the mentee or employee (Erdogan & Bauer, 2015).

Leader-member Exchange Theory

The leader-member exchange theory describes the evolution and interactions within a dyadic relationship. This theory stems from the vertical dyadic theory and challenges the traditional methods of mentorship, explaining the necessary advancements associated with the way leaders influence their subordinates (Dansereau et al., 1975). Applying this theory to practice demonstrates that LMX takes two overall forms – an influence that is not based on the authority and an influence that is based on authority. The leader-member exchange theory acknowledges that vertical dyad relationships are not standardized (Fein & Tziner, 2021). Relationships between leaders and their individual subordinates differ based on the dynamics of each relationship (Bunin et al., 2020). By recognizing the different dynamics within these relationships, theorists were able to study the dyadic relationship as a construct of leadership and engagement instead of focusing solely on the leader (Erdogan & Bauer, 2015). Additionally, LMX demonstrates the varying definitions of authority and influence.

One essential conflict noted by the analysis of this theory is that differing dyadic relationship are a possible negative impact that is sometimes associated with perceived differential treatment (Bunin et al., 2020). This stems from leaders changing their behavior based on the individual they are dealing with. It is also described as being perceived as favoritism (Fein & Tziner, 2021). Differences in interactions are not always a negative occurrence. When leaders can adapt experiences to each individual, they portray an environment of acceptance and appreciation for their employees. By focusing on relationship interactions, LMX poses many questions about interpersonal and intrapersonal development through mentorship in dyadic relationships with varied delivery styles (Dansereau et al., 1975).

Within the theory of LMX, effective mentorship takes place when both the protégé and the mentor gain something out of the relationship. The protégé is the recipient of professional

and personal development experiences (Knowles, 2015; Latham & Vogt, 2007; Mackh, 2020). The mentor is primarily responsible for providing and fostering opportunities for the protégé to improve in the workplace and in life (Kuper et al., 2008; Squires, 2019). This ideal is more than a transactional relationship. It should also be a transformational relationship for both parties. As the protégé learns content-based information from the mentor, the protégé also gains context of the environment, ways to develop on a personal level, better communication, and so much more. On the other hand, the mentor is expected to learn how to better manage individuals from different backgrounds, learn how to adjust strategies to reach difficult protégés, and gain a better understanding of oneself as a leader.

The leader-member exchange theory pertains to the ideal relationship between a protégé and the mentor. The evolutionary phases of this theory seem to reflect the most beneficial aspects of an archetypal mentorship relationship, because these phases account for the foundational concepts within a dyadic relationship (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Richard et al., 2009). For instance, the time needed to build trust, strategies for the development of all parties involved, and a shared understanding of the evolution of the relationship are all necessary to create a beneficial exchange for both parties (Richard et al., 2009). However, to determine whether or not these concepts are being integrated into mentorship relationships, especially those amongst educators with five years or more of teaching experience, more research about perceived mentorship experiences is needed. Mentorship experiences vary in delivery method, session length, content, and lasting effect (Squires, 2019). Research remains inconclusive about the ideal combination of factors that will produce a lasting effect on educator attrition (Glazer, 2018).

The study will explore the emotions and behaviors of perceived mentorship exchanges. One of the unique aspects of LMX is that the quality of each interaction is based on the leader

and the member that the leader is working with (Fein & Tziner, 2021). Influential leaders tend to

adjust their methods and communication based on who they speak to (Danesh & Huber, 2021).

This has an impact on the quality of each interaction (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). In other words,

leaders are more likely to speak in a supportive and encouraging way to members that they have

developed a working relationship with. However, newer leader-member relationships may be

more rigid as they sit in the "stranger" phase of LMX. Typically, associations with LMX or

leadership in general focus on formal interactions (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). I seek information

about how all interactions, both formal and informal, within a dyad have influenced the

educators in this study. This study will also highlight the different degrees of influence that

perceived mentorship experiences have had on educators. These degrees of influence are best

described through the authentic experiences shared by the study participants. Using

phenomenology for this inquiry will allow participants to describe the differences in mentorship

and leader interaction quality that they have witnessed.

Related Literature

The literature review reveals overarching themes such as personnel retention, the role of

mentorship, and mentorship content. The teacher retention section analyzes some of the

contributing factors that make educators want to leave the profession before reaching their fifth

year in the field. The role of mentorship section highlights the differing views of the role of

mentorship. The mentorship content section portrays the varying descriptions and perceptions

behind mentorship.

Educator Retention and Attrition

Educator retention and educator attrition are constant topics of discussion throughout the

nation (Horsburgh & Ippolito, 2018; Hummer & Byrne, 2021; Kelchtermans, 2017; Kutsyuruba

et al., 2019). This is no surprise since educator attrition, or struggling with educator retention, negatively affects students, school districts, and the surrounding communities (Furtado et al., 2020; Richard et al., 2009; Sutcher et al., 2016). The issue of retention is an even more significant concern as the world attempts to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, which left many educators overwhelmed with the task of running their homes, taking care of their own children or family members, and trying to conduct classes for children of all ages through internet platforms (Furtado et al., 2020). Running a household can be a challenging feat. Add in the complexity of conducting virtual classes for children during a pandemic and burnout makes an appearance (Ya'Acob & Aziz, 2021). Technology overload, complex virtual platforms, lack of technological confidence, and the struggle to transform course content into something that is digestible through virtual means are all stressors that add to the pre-existing stressors of being an educator (Ya'Acob & Aziz, 2021).

When educators choose to leave the field of education, the impact differs based on the level of education (Boreen & Niday, 2000; Maloch et al., 2022). The loss of educators at any level is troublesome. It is worth looking at retention across all levels of education in the United States, but this study will focus on educators working in higher education. In much of the research about teacher retention, one concept reigns true: teacher attrition occurs for an array of reasons (Boreen & Niday, 2000; Hallam et al., 2012; Maloch et al., 2022). Retirement, lower economic status communities, favoritism, discrimination, pay scale discrepancies, politics, one's upbringing, and so much more influence one's desire and ability to thrive in the education field (Furtado et al., 2020; Papay et al., 2017). Where one elementary school teacher may leave the field due to conflicts within a lower economic society, an educator at the higher education level may leave the profession due to school politics (Maloch et al., 2022; Papay et al., 2017).

Teacher attrition increases workload for remaining teachers, reduces the population of personnel available to attend to student needs, causes administrative stress, and works adversely against the goal of gaining community support (Maloch et al., 2022; Marshall & Rossman, 2015). These occurrences can also increase the feeling of burnout for teachers that choose to stay in the profession (Furtado et al., 2020; Sutcher et al., 2016). Retaining educators is a complex task with many elements that are dependent on societal influences, the individual educator, and the trends of each level of education. Educators are not easily replaced (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019; Sutcher et al., 2016). It takes time for certified educators to be integrated into a school, build student and parent rapport, and feel comfortable with their instructional materials (Furtado et al., 2020; Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). Each teacher lost is a valuable resource lost. School administration, regardless of the level, must find teachers that are qualified for placement in the classroom (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019; Mrstik et al., 2019; Sutcher et al., 2016).

The concept of teacher retention, or preventing teacher attrition, at any educational level has varying factors. Most of these factors cannot be streamlined or standardized to find one leading cause for the loss of personnel in the field of education (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017; Black et al., 2016; Boreen & Niday, 2000; Breci & Martin, 2000; Broughton et al., 2019; Cherkowski & Walker, 2019). However, mentorship consistently appears within the literature as a possible solution to lower attrition within the education field and other professional fields (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017; Black et al., 2016; Boreen & Niday, 2000; Breci & Martin, 2000; Broughton et al., 2019; Cherkowski & Walker, 2019; Crutcher & Howard, 2018; Crutcher & Naseem, 2016; Elliott, 2018; Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Hallam et al., 2012; Hellsten et al., 2009; Hightower et al., 2021; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Johnson et al., 1999; Mackh, 2020; Mallette et al., 2020; Martin & Douglas, 2018; Schlechty & Vance, 1983; Shalka, 2016).

Research supports the idea that mentorship, when properly applied, can provide educators with a sense of support, more confidence in the classroom, and the motivation to improve professionally and personally (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017; Bain et al., 2017; Black et al., 2016; Crutcher & Howard, 2018; Elliott, 2018; Hellsten et al., 2009; Ivey & Dupre, 2020). Although mentorship seems to be a ready-made solution to sustaining or boosting retention, there are endless discrepancies in how mentorship must be conducted to make a true impact on educators (Ivey & Dupre, 2020; Schlechty & Vance, 1983).

Each educator has their own values, beliefs, and struggles that make their teaching experiences different from another educator's experiences (Bardach et al., 2021; Martin & Douglas, 2018; Steiner et al., 2020). Because of these differences, mentorship is unique to each professional relationship. Despite a large amount of research supporting mentorship as a strategy to address teacher retention, there is a gap in the research surrounding how mentorship is conducted (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017; Black et al., 2016; Boreen & Niday, 2000; Breci & Martin, 2000; Broughton et al., 2019; Cherkowski & Walker, 2019; Crutcher & Howard, 2018; Elliott, 2018; Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Hallam et al., 2012; Hellsten et al., 2009; Hightower et al., 2021). Throughout the years, professionals have suggested best practices for mentorship interactions, but they do not work for every demographic (Ashraf, 2019; Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Newburgh, 2019).

Educators working in a challenging socioeconomic environment may require different resources and support than educators working in an upper-class environment (Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Schlechty & Vance, 1983). The teaching and life experiences of these educators will likely differ exponentially. Student needs, school policies, and community expectations will also differ in these varied demographics (Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Newburgh, 2019). The

constant here would be the need to provide mentorship to educators across differing demographic areas (Crutcher & Howard, 2018; Elliott, 2018; Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Hallam et al., 2012; Hellsten et al., 2009; Hightower et al., 2021). However, the discrepancies in the delivery of the mentorship reinforce the need for this research (Alegado & Soe, 2020; Mackh, 2020; Martin & Douglas, 2018; Saylor et al., 2018; Smit et al., 2016).

What is needed is more information about the appearance and foundation of effective mentorship. A phenomenological approach is the best way to gather this information because it allows participants to explain how mentorship occurred for them. This will give the research knowledge of in-depth experiences of people from varying walks of life and allow the researcher to identify recurring themes within the perceived mentorship interactions of the participants. The details of participant experiences, and theme identification, will provide insight into the ideal foundational concepts of effective mentorship, providing information that can be used to address teacher attrition.

Research also highlights additional nuances that play a role in teacher attrition, such as the effect of new educational leadership on teacher morale and the impacts of policy changes on instructional operations (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Garcia et al., 2022; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022). New leadership causes changes throughout a school, and while positive changes are the ideal, they are not always the reality (Darling-Hammond, 2017; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Farmer, 2020; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022; Madigan & Kim, 2021). Sometimes new superintendents or new administrators come in and begin to change processes or policies that some educators had become comfortable with (Guthery & Bailes, 2022; Madigan & Kim, 2021). These changes, depending on how they affect teacher workload or classroom time, could change the morale of the educational institution (Arviv & Navon, 2021; Guthery & Bailes, 2022).

Ultimately, the research concludes that the list of factors that influence teacher attrition is long and complex, and it keeps growing (Arviv & Navon, 2021; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Nassar et al., 2019; Nguyen, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2019).

Job Satisfaction

A lack of job satisfaction has been tied to teacher attrition since the 1970s, and it continues to be a focal point of teacher attrition research (Feng et al., 2019; Mallette et al., 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Job satisfaction is frequently described as an individual's perceptions of negative and positive associations surrounding their work-oriented tasks and interactions (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Erlandson et al., 1993; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Snyder & Fisk, 2016). Teachers may be satisfied with certain aspects of their jobs, including the structure or interactions with colleagues, but they may be unhappy with other parts of their careers, such as workload or policy implementation (Saylor et al., 2018). A review of literature confirms that adding self-efficacy to the analysis allowed researchers to discover how peoples' views of their capabilities affect job satisfaction and their desire to remain in the teaching profession (Bardach et al., 2021; Saylor et al., 2018). Many quantitative studies focused on the ways in which goal structure affected teacher perceptions about job satisfaction, self-efficacy, time satisfaction, and workload, and it found positive correlations between performance goal structure and increased job satisfaction and self-efficacy, but they did not specifically inquire about the ways in which mentorship strategies can influence teachers' desire to stay in the profession (Bardach et al., 2021; Feng et al., 2019; Mackh, 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Vagi et al., 2019).

Workload encompasses the tasks and projects that one must complete each day at work (DeMatthews et al., 2022). In the field of education, many tasks require the input or involvement

of several educators (DeMatthews et al., 2022). When there is a shortage of educators, there are fewer people to share the requirements. This means that workload increases for educators in short-staffed schools (Cherkowski & Walker, 2019; DeMatthews et al., 2022). This contributes to burnout, or the feeling of immense fatigue and overwhelm and that one cannot tolerate any more tasks or responsibilities (Cherkowski & Walker, 2019). A study done by Gallup Panel Workforce (2022) found that of 1,263 kindergarten through twelfth-grade educators, 52% of them felt burned out (Cherkowski & Walker, 2019; Gallup Panel Workforce, 2022).

While mentorship cannot balance educator workload or abolish educator burnout on its own, it can provide an avenue for educators to build their time management skills and support community (Baumgartner, 2020; Bunin et al., 2020; Danesh & Huber, 2021; DeForge et al., 2019; Hummer & Byrne, 2021). Research demonstrates that time management skills help to build resiliency amongst educators (Baumgartner, 2020; Bunin et al., 2020; Danesh & Huber, 2021; DeForge et al., 2019; Geertz, 2008; Hummer & Byrne, 2021). The research also suggest that mentorship can add to educator resiliency by providing a feeling of camaraderie (Baumgartner, 2020; Bunin et al., 2020; DeForge et al., 2019; Hummer & Byrne, 2021). Support and resilience, provided through mentorship, can combat the stress inflicted by educator workload (Loewus, 2021; Mallette et al., 2020; Moran, 2005; Newburgh, 2019).

Self-Efficacy

Researchers also investigated the connections between self-efficacy and teacher retention using correlation studies and case studies. Their findings differed from those of Einar and Sidsel Skaalvik (2017). Glazer (2018), Saylor (2018), and Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2017) found that the majority of educators left for reasons that were not associated with feelings of incompetence. The concerns that caused teachers to leave revolved around whether or not they could tackle the

demands of teaching in the long term (Steiner et al., 2020; Vagi et al., 2019). The noted

challenges included interference with curricula, the overwhelming influence of testing, and job

insecurity (Feng et al., 2019; Mallette et al., 2020; Peng et al., 2021; Redding & Henry, 2018).

Many researchers have deemed the reasons for leaving education as general issues, and found

that more research is needed to determine the complexities surrounding these general issues

(Papay et al., 2017; Pennanen et al., 2016; Shalka, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Smit et al.,

2016; Squires, 2019; Suttie, 2020; Walker & Kutsyuruba, 2019).

Regardless of profession, emotional stress influences personal and professional needs

(Pennanen et al., 2016; Shalka, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Researchers have found that

one of the most important aspects of reducing the stress felt from teaching challenges is

navigating the nuances of the profession. The literature reveals a gap in the literature between

theory and practice (Hightower et al., 2021; Newburgh, 2019; Whalen et al., 2019). Whalen et

al. (2019) found that teachers that were offered emotional and professional support through

mentorship were more likely to remain in the profession past their first year of teaching.

However, the literature does not reveal a standardized form of mentorship that can be

implemented or guaranteed to make an impact on educator attrition for educators that are in their

first five years of teaching. Mentorship is generally defined as advising or training someone that

is less experienced or Bain et al., 2017er that the mentor (Pennanen et al., 2016; Shalka, 2016;

Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Although, mentorship has over fifty definitions across varying

industries, and these definitions change based on the audience (Squires, 2019; Whalen et al.,

2019).

Role of Mentorship

Through this phenomenological study, researchers found that mentorship could greatly shape the experiences of novice teachers when the goal was to improve personal and professional well-being (Bardach et al., 2021; Squires, 2019; Whalen et al., 2019). The researchers found that successful mentorship increased perceived job-satisfaction and made people feel like they were better equipped to deal with the challenges of teaching. Successful mentorship was not fully defined but was described as a relationship between mentors and mentees that was based on mutual trust and rooted in both professional and personal development. The methods of establishing personal and professional development amongst participants varied based on the background, life experience, work skills, and preference of each participant (Bardach et al., 2021; Hightower et al., 2021; Whalen et al., 2019).

Personal and professional development should encompass obstacles in and out of the school environment. While it is important to feel personally and professionally satisfied within one's profession, it is equally important to develop methods to develop personal satisfaction outside of the work environment. Researchers (Bunin et al., 2020; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Vagi et al., 2019) found that a large part of combating attrition has to do with the level of happiness an educator experiences once they leave their job for the day. In other words, when teachers are involved in extracurricular activities that support their emotional health and physical health, they are more likely to feel overall life satisfaction and more likely to be content in their profession (Mrstik et al., 2019). Finding emotional and personal enjoyment builds resiliency that can be transferred over to the individual's profession (Bunin et al., 2020; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Vagi et al., 2019). Workload and life stressors can make it difficult for educators to find an outlet outside of class instruction. This is another avenue in which mentorship can act as a

support system (Bardach et al., 2021; Cherkowski & Walker, 2019; Doan et al., 2022; Mackh, 2020).

Mentorship interactions support the development of emotional and personal enjoyment by challenging both the mentor and the mentee to reflect on themselves and those around them (Baumgartner, 2020; Cherkowski & Walker, 2019; Mackh, 2020). Mentorship does not have to focus strictly on content knowledge. One of the aspects of effective mentorship is that it encourages both the mentor and the mentee to better themselves personally and professionally (Baker et al., 2020; Baumgartner, 2020; Ivey & Dupre, 2020). For example, if a mentor encourages their mentees to journal to release feelings of tension, this falls into the realm of personal development but may also help to manage tensions in the professional environment.

The transfer of the benefits of mentorship to personal life and the definition of specific impacts require additional research because the delivery methods for mentorship continue to vary (Alegado & Soe, 2020; Hummer & Byrne, 2021; Maloch et al., 2022; Squires, 2019). Building resiliency and providing personal and professional guidance are ideal outcomes of mentorship. However, researchers still seek to understand how these ideal outcomes correlate with pedagogical practices (Taylor & West, 2019; Whalen et al., 2019). An analysis of the mentorship relationship in terms of pedagogical outcomes influenced by personal and professional guidance revealed that formal mentorship improved teacher outcomes, provided mentors with a sense of purpose, and the supported increased student learning (Alegado & Soe, 2020; Broughton et al., 2019; Forseille & Raptis, 2016). While formal mentorship is continually analyzed for effectiveness integrating professional and personal support and guidance for the long-term continues to be a challenge in the field of education (Hightower et al., 2021; Mackh, 2020; Okolie et al., 2020).

Despite ongoing literature about mentorship, it continues to have various definitions and application methods. Mentorship should be altered to suit the specific organization, but the most effective components of formal mentorship continue to shift as societal and educational demands evolve (Ashraf, 2019; DeForge et al., 2019; Smit et al., 2016). Some researchers have determined that the most effective mentorship arises when protégés are encouraged to apply directed principles with the ultimate goal of empowering both the mentor and the mentee or protégé (Cherkowski & Walker, 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Papay et al., 2017; Smit et al., 2016). Directed principles are based on varied constructs or methods being used by school programs that employ mentorship programs (Harmsen et al., 2018; Klages et al., 2019; Newburgh, 2019). The ultimate goal is for mentorship to play the role of a consistent emotional and professional support system (Lejonberg et al., 2015; Mallette et al., 2020).

Many researchers claim that the best way to reach the goal of creating a consistent support system is through an emphasis on technical skill development (Allen et al., 2004; Bain et al., 2017; Crutcher & Howard, 2018; Doan et al., 2022; Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Glazer, 2018; Hightower et al., 2021; Mallette et al., 2020). The idea is that increased confidence in the ability to do one's job will lead to more satisfaction in and out of the classroom (Bain et al., 2017; Mallette et al., 2020; Squires, 2019). For many professionals, job proficiency creates more time to devote to tasks and reduces the number of stressors that pertain to trying to learn how to do one's job (Bain et al., 2017). Building mentee confidence is a recurring theme in the intended outcomes of effective mentorship (Bain et al., 2017). Confidence, or building self-efficacy, relates to feelings associated with one's job (Schelp et al., 2022).

Self-efficacy, or the belief that one can do something, is a powerful tool when it comes to educator retention (Lauermann & Berger, 2021). However, improving the self-efficacy of others

is an act that takes time, patience, and creativity (Lauermann & Berger, 2021; Marschall, 2022).

Much like differing learning styles, people have different development styles. In other words,

some development techniques work better on some people (Marschall, 2022). Regarding

mentorship, this means that mentors need to devote time to determining how best develop their

individual mentees and how best to assist the mentee in feeling more confident about their

capabilities (Lauermann & Berger, 2021; Marschall, 2022; Woodcock et al., 2022). Much like

the other studied components of mentorship, there is no proven standardized method that is

guaranteed to increase self-efficacy amongst educators (Boeve-de Pauw et al., 2022; Marschall,

2022; Schelp et al., 2022; Woodcock et al., 2022).

Mentor and Protégé Relationships

Mentor-protégé relationship differences are based on many aspects. Individual

backgrounds, economic status, experience, and dispositions on education are indicators of

mentor and protégé compatibility (Black et al., 2016; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Saylor et al.,

2018; Shalka, 2016). However, these contributing factors are dense in nature, and it is impossible

to determine exactly how each will affect interactions between mentors and mentees. This is

another reason that more research is needed in terms of mentorship delivery methods and

context.

Mentorship relationships that were based on professional and personal development

seemed to be more successful at supporting mentees (Dupriez et al., 2016; Elliott, 2018; Feng et

al., 2019; Saylor et al., 2018, 2018). A focus on personal development also helps to address the

need for altering the mentorship relationship for the individual mentee in lieu of creating a

standardized mentorship method (Dupriez et al., 2016; Elliott, 2018; Feng et al., 2019; Saylor et

al., 2018, 2018). Catering mentorship to the individual educator provides a more unique

experience and promotes the development of a long-term mentor-protégé relationship (Dupriez et al., 2016; Elliott, 2018; Feng et al., 2019; Saylor et al., 2018, 2018). While this type of mentorship relationship takes longer to establish, in comparison to a standardized mentorship program, it is more likely to be based on trust and mutual respect, key elements of the leader-member exchange theory (Bunin et al., 2020; Danesh & Huber, 2021; Erdogan & Bauer, 2015; Fein & Tziner, 2021).

Formal mentorship requires more structure, but successful mentorship also requires individualization (Cherkowski & Walker, 2019; Klages et al., 2019; Peiser et al., 2019). In other words, mentorship structures have been proven to be the most effective when the system defines roles and responsibilities for the mentors and those being mentored. Although, it is critical that mentors continue to individualize the content of the mentorship to meet the specific needs of the protégé (Baker et al., 2020; Cherkowski & Walker, 2019). Overly structured mentorship does not necessarily equate to effective mentorship (Klages et al., 2019; Peiser et al., 2019).

Mentoring Models

Mentorship model implementation falls into the boundaries of defining roles and establishing relationship phases (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017; Pennanen et al., 2016). Research shows that creating consistency amongst the defined roles of a mentorship relationship is complex because alterations of the roles are based on the organization trying to provide mentorship (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017; Pennanen et al., 2016). Overall mentorship implementation is influenced by the mentee population and the organizational structure (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017; Pennanen et al., 2016). The level of authenticity of a mentorship program makes it difficult to exercise structured and standard mentorship models across several

organizations (Broughton et al., 2019; Crutcher & Howard, 2018; Elliott, 2018; Mallette et al., 2020).

Several qualitative studies have been conducted to determine which themes, rather than standard models, could be used across different organizations (Bain et al., 2017; Martin & Douglas, 2018; Peiser et al., 2019). The findings conclude that the recurring themes are just as diverse as the mentorship models because of the varying populations that were involved in the studies (Bardach et al., 2021; Bunin et al., 2020; DeForge et al., 2019; Feng et al., 2019, 2019). What is consistent about mentorship models is the constant struggle to determine and involve stakeholders that influence the success of a mentorship program (Cherkowski & Walker, 2019; DeForge et al., 2019; Okolie et al., 2020). For instance, the key stakeholders of a mentorship program are the mentor and the protégé, but the benefits of mentorship affect the students, administrators, and parents as well (Cherkowski & Walker, 2019; DeForge et al., 2019; Okolie et al., 2020). Finding a feasible way to incorporate all stakeholders into a mentorship program continues to be a focus of mentorship research and a needed aspect of mentorship model implementation (Cherkowski & Walker, 2019; DeForge et al., 2019; Okolie et al., 2020).

Mentorship Delivery Methods

Several mentorship studies discuss the importance of delivery methods for educator development programs, but these studies focus heavily on first year teachers, and they are influenced by the demographics of the educators using the delivery systems (Bradshaw et al., 2021; Guillaume et al., 2022; Guthery & Bailes, 2022; Huber et al., 2022; Hulme & Wood, 2022). For instance, some studies support online platforms for mentorship programs. There are several benefits and downfalls to this delivery method. Online platforms may be highly beneficial for teachers in higher economic locations, because those areas tend to have fewer

issues with discipline in the classroom in comparison to teachers working in lower economic environments (Alemdar et al., 2022; Guillaume et al., 2022; Guthery & Bailes, 2022; Hulme & Wood, 2022; Mubuuke et al., 2021). Educators that do not have to focus as much on classroom discipline may be more likely and more equipped to participate in mentorship sessions that have online delivery methods (Chopra & Saint, 2020; Keating et al., 2022). However, educators working in lower economic environments may not have the means or the time to participate in online mentorship programs unless they are provided during the working day (Guthery & Bailes, 2022; Weisberg et al., 2022). The issue here is the feasibility and focus. Educators will devote time and energy into things that will support them or support their classroom efforts (Alemdar et al., 2022; Hulme & Wood, 2022; Nayak et al., 2022; Weisberg et al., 2022).

Face-to-face mentorship is the traditional delivery method of development programs, but it also has benefits and downfalls (Haines et al., 2022; Haqqee et al., 2020; Sweet et al., 2021). In-person mentorship provides a sense of personalization and connection that cannot be adequately recreated through online methods (Guillaume et al., 2022; Huber et al., 2022; Hulme & Wood, 2022; Sweet et al., 2021; Weisberg et al., 2022). Many online platforms have come close, but people have reported many differences between in-person connections and online connections (Haines et al., 2022; Sweet et al., 2021). One of the biggest differences noted is the need to regulate technology use and remedy technological glitches during online platform use (Hundey et al., 2020; Kilduff & Williams, 2022; Weisberg et al., 2022). While in-person mentorship is the traditional and more preferred method for some, it can present obstacles for educators. The best way to support in-person mentorship is to plan it during the work day to ensure that educators can access the support of mentorship without having to miss other activities (Guillaume et al., 2022; Huber et al., 2022; Hundey et al., 2020).

Mixed modality mentorship is also an option, but feasibility must be assessed prior to implementation (Guillaume et al., 2022; Guthery & Bailes, 2022; Huber et al., 2022; Hulme & Wood, 2022). Mixed modality mentorship is the combination of online platforms and in-person mentorship (Alemdar et al., 2022; Huber et al., 2022). In order for mixed modality mentorship to work, the proper online, personnel, equipment, and monetary resources must be available (Hundey et al., 2020; Weisberg et al., 2022). Ultimately, the discussions about mentorship design and delivery require more research to determine methods that can be applied throughout education, and other industries (Chen et al., 2021; Haqqee et al., 2020; Sweet et al., 2021; Vaughan & Garrison, 2005).

Mentorship Content

The content of an ideal mentorship program encompasses a balance of information that can be applied to both personal and professional development (Allen et al., 2004; Bain et al., 2017; Crutcher & Howard, 2018; Doan et al., 2022; Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Glazer, 2018; Hightower et al., 2021; Mallette et al., 2020). Personal development is defined as strategies and tools that can be used to address obstacles in one's personal life (Freeman & Kochan, 2019). Professional development may encompass some of the same strategies as those involved in personal development, but they are also focused on techniques and methods that can be used in order to enhance one's professional performance (Bain et al., 2017). Creating a balance between personal and professional development within the mentorship relationship is important because ideally, mentors will seek to support and develop their mentees in all facets of their lives (Allen et al., 2004; Bain et al., 2017; Crutcher & Howard, 2018; Doan et al., 2022; Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Glazer, 2018; Hightower et al., 2021; Mallette et al., 2020).

Another influential piece of a mentorship program is the type of delivery of the mentorship – informal or formal (Allen et al., 2004; Bain et al., 2017; Doan et al., 2022; Glazer, 2018; Mallette et al., 2020). Informal mentorship has varying definitions, and it changes depending on the person providing the definition (Doan et al., 2022). This is further support for this study. For instance, one person may view informal mentorship as a structured mentorship program that allows mentors and mentees to swap partners, thus creating a more fluid environment. However, another person may describe informal mentorship as a motivating conversation shared between two colleagues in passing. The key component in each situation is the benefit of the interaction. That is what adds the element of mentorship.

On the other hand, formal mentorship may include a program with strictly assigned mentors and mentees. It may also include defined roles that do not change or more boundaries. The individuals involved in the program and the organization creating the program are part of the deciding factors that deem a program formal mentorship (Allen et al., 2004; Bain et al., 2017; Crutcher & Howard, 2018; Doan et al., 2022; Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Glazer, 2018; Hightower et al., 2021; Mallette et al., 2020). The other deciding factors are the perceptions of the participants (Allen et al., 2004; Bain et al., 2017; Crutcher & Howard, 2018; Doan et al., 2022; Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Glazer, 2018; Hightower et al., 2021; Mallette et al., 2020). Formal mentorship should seek to establish content that supports the psychological needs of educators and create quality interactions as presented by the leader-member exchange theory (Dansereau et al., 1975). As previously stated, achieving this through standardized mentorship programs is not feasible due to organizational diversity, but creating an outline that seeks to address the aspects of connection, autonomy, competence, and quality interactions is. These concepts are part of the recurring themes within mentorship research (Allen et al., 2004; Bain et

al., 2017; Crutcher & Howard, 2018; Doan et al., 2022; Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Glazer, 2018;

Hightower et al., 2021; Mallette et al., 2020). They appear as effective components of

mentorship programs as defined mostly by people who have been mentors (Allen et al., 2004;

Bain et al., 2017; Crutcher & Howard, 2018; Doan et al., 2022; Freeman & Kochan, 2019;

Glazer, 2018; Hightower et al., 2021; Mallette et al., 2020). Integrating these components into

most mentorship programs would be an ongoing process. The best way to do this is through

phases such as mentor preparation, protégé recruitment, communication implementation plans,

community relationship building, and long-term programming (Baumgartner, 2020). The

establishment of these phases would support the implementation of previously mentioned

effective components of mentorship.

Connection

The social connection aspect of mentorship is one of the most beneficial yet most

difficult pieces to assess in a mentorship relationship (Allen et al., 2004; Bain et al., 2017;

Crutcher & Howard, 2018; Doan et al., 2022; Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Glazer, 2018;

Hightower et al., 2021; Mallette et al., 2020). Mentorship looks different among organizations

and even amongst dyads within the same organization (Elliott, 2018; Gul et al., 2019; Klages et

al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018). Additionally, individuals have their own definitions of

connection. This is not surprising since people have individual ways of learning and perceiving

information (Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Glazer, 2018; Hightower et al., 2021; Mallette et al.,

2020). Establishing a social connection takes time and diligence for both parties (Deci & Ryan,

2000). The leader-member exchange theory refers to this phase as the stranger phase (Dansereau

et al., 1975). This phase describes the importance of two people becoming comfortable enough

to create trust between them (Dansereau et al., 1975). This connection should be fostered for the long-term, hence the importance of establishing a foundation of trust and mutual respect.

Many studies report mentorship programs that last for a year or less and cater mostly to pre-service teachers and first year educators (Klages et al., 2019; Mackh, 2020; Martin & Douglas, 2018). However, more recent research explains the benefits of ongoing mentorship in education and in industries outside of education (Bain et al., 2017; Crutcher & Howard, 2018; Doan et al., 2022; Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Glazer, 2018; Hightower et al., 2021; Mallette et al., 2020). This research demonstrates the benefits for individuals and the organization (Allen et al., 2004; Bain et al., 2017; Crutcher & Howard, 2018; Doan et al., 2022; Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Glazer, 2018; Hightower et al., 2021; Mallette et al., 2020). The core idea is to provide ongoing support and amplify feelings of connection within the organization (Gregory & Wiles, 2018; Peiser et al., 2019).

While there are LMX studies that focus on the leader perspective, most focus on the employee perspective, leaving several gaps in the understanding of the dynamics within the dyad (Bunin et al., 2020; Danesh & Huber, 2021; Erdogan & Bauer, 2015; Fein & Tziner, 2021; Furtado et al., 2020). Studies involving LMX lack in-depth information about the dyadic relationship in each of its stages (Bunin et al., 2020; Danesh & Huber, 2021; Erdogan & Bauer, 2015; Fein & Tziner, 2021; Furtado et al., 2020). Many studies focus on the final stage, where the leader and member are more comfortable with one another (Bunin et al., 2020; Danesh & Huber, 2021; Erdogan & Bauer, 2015; Fein & Tziner, 2021; Furtado et al., 2020). However, the most trying portion of the relationship is the "stranger" phase when the dyad is just forming, and the leader and member are trying to learn how to effectively communicate with one another

(Erdogan & Bauer, 2015). Building relationships, especially professional dyads, requires time, effort, attention, and patience (Bunin et al., 2020).

Autonomy

Autonomy is viewed as the ability to function independently (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Glazer, 2018; Patrick et al., 2007). Regarding mentorship relationships, autonomy is one's capacity to present oneself as a valued member of the dyad (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Glazer, 2018; Patrick et al., 2007). Deci and Ryan (2000) explain this concept as a desire to mesh with a group and to be seen as a useful member of that group. Part of the challenge of developing autonomy through mentorship is that all participating parties must bring something of use to the relationship. What may seem useful to one person may not be beneficial to someone else. The concept of creating autonomy within oneself in order to be an effective member of a dyad goes back to the phase of building trust and mutual respect and understanding within the mentorship relationship (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Glazer, 2018; Patrick et al., 2007; Taderera et al., 2016).

To address this challenge, research proposes discussing the mentorship phases that help the individual transition from reliance on others to confident collaboration and ultimately autonomy (Baker et al., 2020; Klages et al., 2019; Mackh, 2020). The leader-member exchange theory is intended to build quality relationships within the dyad (Deci & Ryan, 2000; O'Sullivan & Conway, 2016; Patrick et al., 2007). However, the quality of the relationship is dependent on each member's autonomy and on the differentiation from relationship to relationship (Deci & Ryan, 2000; O'Sullivan & Conway, 2016; Patrick et al., 2007). In other words, mentorship is mean to be highly individualized and revolve around the traditional one-on-one interactions (Baker et al., 2020; Klages et al., 2019; Mackh, 2020; Stulick, 2020). Both parties of the dyad influence the quality of each interaction.

Competence

Educator perception of competence can vary based on experiences in the classroom once confirmed in the teaching profession (Deci & Ryan, 2000; O'Sullivan & Conway, 2016; Patrick et al., 2007). Competence may refer to knowledge of one's teaching materials, but it can also refer to disciplinary competence and the ability to command one's classroom (Deci & Ryan, 2000; O'Sullivan & Conway, 2016; Patrick et al., 2007). These experiences and perceptions will change as teachers progress in their careers. Experiences will also shift with the evolution of society and its diverse population of students, other teachers, and administrators within the school districts (Deci & Ryan, 2000; O'Sullivan & Conway, 2016; Patrick et al., 2007). Research demonstrates a focus on perceived confidence amongst newly qualified teachers and how it affects classroom performance and job satisfaction, but there are gaps in the literature regarding the connection between educator competence, mentorship, and educator retention (Deci & Ryan, 2000; O'Sullivan & Conway, 2016; Patrick et al., 2007).

Some bodies of literature claim that course-related mentorship is the key to maintaining educator competence (Crutcher & Naseem, 2016; Feng et al., 2019). Researchers connected success within the specific teaching discipline to subject-specific mentorship (Feng et al., 2019; O'Sullivan & Conway, 2016). Despite the reports of increased self-efficacy from focusing on technical skills, the research lacks elaboration about the impact of high self-efficacy on educator retention (Deci & Ryan, 2000; O'Sullivan & Conway, 2016; Patrick et al., 2007). More research is needed to determine the themes behind effective mentorship, mentorship delivery methods, and how individual mentorship experiences affect educator competence and ultimately support educator retention (Deci & Ryan, 2000; O'Sullivan & Conway, 2016; Patrick et al., 2007).

Interactions

The biggest gap of information surrounding studies utilizing LMX theory as a grounding point emerged because of the changing structure of organizations. When LMX was developed in the 1970s, most organizations had predictable hierarchies and steady professional relationship occurrences (Erdogan & Bauer, 2015). Organizations are now more diverse and flexible. More techniques based on collective effort concepts have produced more partnerships and peer relationships in lieu of the traditional leadership hierarchy (Danesh & Huber, 2021). Learning more about LMX within the dynamics of current organizations will help to fill the gap of information around the leader-member dyad of the present as it pertains to mentorship. This intent includes how LMX interactions affect the social exchanges of coworkers and those within a leader-member dyad (Erdogan & Bauer, 2015).

The efficiency of LMX is based on the quality of interactions between the leader and the member or protégé (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). This means that not all interactions are formal. Rather, high-quality interactions appear when members of the dyad establish enough trust and respect to allow developmental experiences to occur. Previous studies that employed LMX used traits such as loyalty, respect, and contribution to determine the level of relationship efficiency within a dyad (Bunin et al., 2020; Danesh & Huber, 2021; Erdogan & Bauer, 2015; Fein & Tziner, 2021; Furtado et al., 2020). The leader-member exchange theory is also frequently assessed from the point of view of the employee (Bunin et al., 2020; Danesh & Huber, 2021; Erdogan & Bauer, 2015; Fein & Tziner, 2021; Furtado et al., 2020). Studies that used the employee perspective have shown that attitudes, behaviors, and views of the employee, in regard to the leader, develop based on the leader's role within the organization, their reputation, and how they treat the employee (Erdogan & Bauer, 2015).

The leader-member exchange theory (Dansereau et al., 1975) describes interactions through evolutionary phases or a lifecycle associated with mentorship. This type of evolutionary mentorship relationship has yet to be assessed for the field of education and teachers in their second through fifth year of teaching (Broughton et al., 2019; DeForge et al., 2019; Dupriez et al., 2016; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Shalka, 2016; Smit et al., 2016; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). However, the importance of establishing ongoing interactions amongst mentorship dyads has been evaluated and found to be paramount in the success of building organizational relationships (Broughton et al., 2019; Elliott, 2018; Smit et al., 2016). Researchers have explored the interactions between faculty members within a peer mentorship program and found that leader-subordinate mentorship and peer mentorship both provided beneficial outcomes to participants (Broughton et al., 2019; DeForge et al., 2019; Dupriez et al., 2016; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Shalka, 2016; Smit et al., 2016). This supports the need for more research to determine key themes that define effective mentorship. I tis apparent that varied populations and complex perceptions influence the research outcomes for mentorship as whole, displaying the need for more individualized research that takes place over time.

Research found that there are lasting benefits of mentorship regardless of educator instructional level (Broughton et al., 2019; DeForge et al., 2019; Dupriez et al., 2016; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Shalka, 2016; Smit et al., 2016). For instance, peer mentorship supported faculty retention and student retention since the students felt more adequately empowered and faculty members felt a stronger sense of community (Broughton et al., 2019; Elliott, 2018; Smit et al., 2016). The concepts of empowerment and a sense of community support the idea that authentic and meaningful mentorship interactions are the foundation of effective mentorship (Broughton et al., 2019; DeForge et al., 2019; Dupriez et al., 2016; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Shalka, 2016; Smit

et al., 2016). Researchers relate this concept to pedagogy and explain that understanding one's values is key to creating quality interactions amongst mentors, mentees, peers, and students (Freeman & Kochan, 2019; Newburgh, 2019; Steiner et al., 2020). In other words, realizing personal values and incorporating those into interactions influence the educator's environment on all levels (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Martin & Douglas, 2018; Newburgh, 2019; Richard et al., 2009).

Mentorship in Higher Education

An analysis of mentorship research reveals that the literature lacks information about mentorship for educators in higher education (Gazza, 2004; Lynam, 2020; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013). The literature that does exist focuses on the population of novice educators (Gazza, 2004; Lynam, 2020; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013). Mentorship in higher education rarely focuses on faculty members that have more than five years of experience at the university level (Gazza, 2004; Lynam, 2020; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013). In fact, much like mentorship programs for educators at other levels, the research focus is on new faculty members or on the students (Lunsford et al., 2017; MacPhail et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Zellers et al., 2008). The literature supports the idea that when faculty members are better developed and supported, they are more effective at mentoring and supporting the students (MacPhail et al., 2019; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013; Zellers et al., 2008). The literature provides specific examples and strategies on how to support and develop Bain et al., 2017 adults are seeking education at a higher institution, but it lacks information about how to do the same for educators that are no longer seen as novice (Gazza, 2004; Lynam, 2020; MacPhail et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018).

The five-year mark of being an educator represents many milestones. For some educators, it is the point in time when they feel like they have established an effective rhythm

where they can assess student assignments, prepare for lectures, and address other faculty requirements without feeling completely overwhelmed (Gazza, 2004; Lynam, 2020; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013). However, for other educators, the five-year mark in their career might be the point in time when they are burned out, tired of juggling their career and personal lives, and ready for a career change (Gazza, 2004; Lynam, 2020; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013). In other words, the five-year mark can be a pivotal time in an educator's career – a time in which an educator could benefit from the community and support that mentorship can generate (Lunsford et al., 2017; MacPhail et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Zellers et al., 2008).

Literature also shows that the gaps in higher education mentorship research are not consistent across the world (Gazza, 2004; Lunsford et al., 2017; Lynam, 2020; MacPhail et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013; Zellers et al., 2008). Several studies on the mentorship needs of educators at the higher education level have been conducted in England, Ireland, Norway, Scotland, the Netherlands, and other countries outside of the United States (Lunsford et al., 2017; MacPhail et al., 2019; Zellers et al., 2008). Researchers claim that these studies were conducted because of the realization that educators must often address their needs for personal and professional development after obtaining a teaching position (Lynam, 2020; Zellers et al., 2008). Studies conducted in the United States also support the idea that educators should address their personal and professional needs to be more effective in their careers, but the research conducted in the United States does not tend to tie these needs to mentorship for the educators at higher education institutions (Gazza, 2004; Lynam, 2020; Mazerolle et al., 2018). More research on mentorship in higher education in the United States is needed to decipher the complex relationship between educator attrition and mentorship.

Although the research concerning educators in higher education in the United States is scarce, the research that does exist shows reoccurring themes (Lunsford et al., 2017; MacPhail et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013). Educators at higher learning institutions tend to have numerous mentors, mostly informal mentors, and each one typically adds to the mentee's experience in a different way (Lunsford et al., 2017; MacPhail et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013). These mentors tend to be superiors and peers, span across disciplines, and provide external and internal support (MacPhail et al., 2019; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013; Zellers et al., 2008). The internal support focuses on organization familiarization while the external support emphasizes general professional development (Gazza, 2004; Lunsford et al., 2017; MacPhail et al., 2019).

Much like with other levels of education, mentorship in higher education is used as a socialization tactic (Gazza, 2004; Lunsford et al., 2017; MacPhail et al., 2019). Research shows that mentors usually supported educators that were on track to tenure or newly tenured, but most faculty members desire a long-term (MacPhail et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Zellers et al., 2008). Research also demonstrated that mentorship delivery in higher education varied based on the organization, much like mentorship at other educational levels (Lunsford et al., 2017; MacPhail et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013). Some organizations have attempted to approach mentorship by using focus groups and peer mentorship or learning communities as well as one-on-one mentorship while others are more focused on trying virtual platforms (Lunsford et al., 2017; MacPhail et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013; Zellers et al., 2008). The lack of literature hinders the ability to support one method over another (Lunsford et al., 2017; MacPhail et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Nguyen, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2019; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013).

Also, mentorship for educators in higher education contains some of the foundational concepts of mentorship K-12 educators and students (Lunsford et al., 2017; MacPhail et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013; Zellers et al., 2008). Similar to students, educators begin their teaching experiences and developmental experiences at different stages (Lunsford et al., 2017; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013; Zellers et al., 2008). This means that mentorship should be adjusted to fit the individual and not created to be a blanket solution (Lunsford et al., 2017; MacPhail et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013; Zellers et al., 2008). Mentors should seek to assess the needs of their mentees and then work on their development from that identified stage (Gazza, 2004; Lunsford et al., 2017; MacPhail et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013; Zellers et al., 2008). Furthermore, the culture and diversity of the organization influences the effectiveness of mentorship (Gazza, 2004; Lunsford et al., 2017; MacPhail et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013; Zellers et al., 2008). While it is important to welcome diversity and learn from those with different backgrounds, it is often motivating for some people to see leaders and educators that remind them of themselves (Gazza, 2004; Lunsford et al., 2017; MacPhail et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2018; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013; Zellers et al., 2008).

Summary

Formal mentorship in the field of education has been studied frequently and has consistently proven to be a beneficial implementation for programs across various fields, but much of the literature focuses on pre-service teachers, first-year teachers, or teacher-student mentorship (Brok et al., 2017; Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Feng et al., 2019; Klages et al., 2019). There are articles that detail faculty-to-faculty mentorship, which is the intended audience for study, but these accounts make up a small amount of the literature, focus heavily on proving

quantitative concepts, and do lack many of the details about how exactly people are being mentored (Freeman & Kochan, 2019). Additionally, much of the research focuses on the general outcomes of mentorship such as proven benefits of mentorship such as improved self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Mallette et al., 2020; Newburgh, 2019). There are gaps in the research about which mentorship experiences supported educator decision to stay within the field, especially educators past their first year of teaching.

The literature also defines successful mentorship as strategy-based interaction, but this concept requires more context that entails how strategy changes based on the protégé and the educational environment or community. This concept also lacks information about interactions based on purely personal development. Another gap in the research revolves around the varying models for formal mentorship, especially in schools where there are not many mentors available or there is no training for mentors. Furthermore, the implementation of mentor training seems to be something that is not fully developed through the literature. This qualitative study to gain more in-depth insight about mentorship experiences through the lenses of the leader-member exchange theory (Dansereau et al., 1975) will provide more information about participant training methods, benefit application strategies, and themes that make mentorship successful enough to decrease an early educator's desire to leave the profession.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the impact that mentorship experiences has on the retention of educators at the postsecondary level. Researchers have analyzed educator retention from many different angles, to include perceived root causes and possible solutions, but each level of research reveals another layer of complexity for the issue of educator retention (Dupriez et al., 2016; Michalec & Newburgh, 2018; Mrstik et al., 2019; *Public School Teacher Attrition*, 2015). Mentorship has been suggested as a consistent solution to struggles with teacher retention, but each solution defines mentorship in a different manner, categorizes it as a formal occurrence, fails to integrate the experiences of the individual educator, or is restricted to mentorship for novice educators (Alegado & Soe, 2020; Patton, 2014). The focus of this study is educators that have five years or more of education experience. The sections of chapter three include research design, research questions, setting and participants, researcher positionality, procedures, data collection plan, trustworthiness, and a summary.

Research Design

A qualitative approach was necessary for this research because the intent was to better understand the personal experiences of participating educators. Furthermore, qualitative research allowed for the identification of recurring themes and connections amongst the individual experiences. Phenomenology was the specific design chosen for this research, because of the intent to better understand the essence of the mentorship experiences of each participant. Phenomenology also offered the opportunity to gain in-depth details about the specific experiences of people that are in the same profession but share different background experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995).

Past research has alluded to the idea that mentorship is a paramount tool in educator retention (Sutcher et al., 2016). However, many of these studies focused on correlation research which provided the quantitative connection, but it lacked the description of how the participants were mentored. Additionally, the bodies of research dealing with both teacher retention and mentorship had several gaps when it came to defining effective mentorship (Broughton et al., 2019). Most research focused on the mentorship that first-year teachers received, but retention affected educators in their first through fifth years, demonstrating a need for ongoing mentorship and a need to understand what people viewed as mentorship and what beliefs, feelings, and influences are associated with it (Lejonberg et al., 2015).

Philosopher Edmund Husserl was the modern founder of phenomenology (Moran, 2005). He developed his views on transcendental phenomenology, mainly based on a desire to move past what is understood about concrete objects (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology was the best specific design for this study, because it focuses on identifying the need for research, separating one's own experiences from those of the participants, and then identifying textural and structural themes and descriptions to better understand the experiences of the research participants (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2016).

Research Questions

These research questions were meant to encourage unbiased analyses of the lived experiences of each participant. They were formulated in a way that guided the researcher to think deeply about how every mentorship experience in education could influence the decisions of an educator. While these questions acted as a guide, they were also broad enough to allow the researcher to truly grasp the essence of the experiences of the participants. The researcher

included questions about emotions and behaviors to assist with the theme categorization process

and to provide more depth to each experience.

Central Research Question

What are the mentorship experiences of educators in higher education who have been in

the field of education for five years or more?

Sub-Question One

What mentorship practices do educators in higher education describe as having an impact

on retention?

Sub-Question Two

What types of behaviors, emotions, and meanings do educators in higher education

express revolving around receiving or providing mentorship?

Setting and Participants

The setting and participants for this research were chosen through convenience.

Distribution emails and social media invites were used to gather participants from institutions of

higher education across the United States. Despite this fact, the nature of the research allowed

the participants to present their unique experiences. The setting and participants focused on post-

secondary level educators with five years or more experience to address literature gaps in

attrition and mentorship research.

Setting

The setting of this research was completely virtual. While participants came from

different organizations of higher education, all data collection was conducted through online or

remote platforms. Providing a virtual setting opened this study to a more diverse population of

educators. The 10 participants came from seven different organizations from across the United

States.

Participants

The participants in this study were 10 educators at the post-secondary level. The participants included three females and 7 males (McCann et al., 2015; Moustakas, 1994; Reissman, 2008). Nine participants were Caucasian, and one was African American. The ages of the participants ranged from 33 years of age to 65 years of age. Each educator chosen currently instructs at the post-secondary level and has completed five years or more of teaching experience.

Recruitment Plan

Participants were gathered using email invitations sent through secure email and social media. The informal social media invite was posted to Facebook, and participants responded through both Facebook and Instagram. These recruitment methods proved to provide more diversity than what was originally expected. Five participants reside in Missouri, two reside in Wisconsin, one resides in California, one resides in Boston, and one resides in Texas. Obtaining educators from different regions provided a more diverse analysis of the essence of the experiences of educators that have remained in the profession for five years or longer (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McNamara et al., 2021). Each volunteer participant was informed about the procedures of the study and what information was used during the study through an informed consent form (See Appendix A) (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Researcher Positionality

My views aligned most closely with transformative frameworks and social constructivism (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2002; Yin, 2018). The transformative framework was based on the concept of bettering society through knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles &

Huberman, 1994). The social constructivism framework revolved around understanding the complex picture or complex scenarios within one's life (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Both frameworks drove my views as a researcher by highlighting the overall intricacies of human interaction, especially in terms of mentorship and development. I was motivated to conduct this study because of the realization that retention is an issue in both of my career fields – the military and education. Furthermore, both fields chose mentorship and development strategies as one of the prime methods to address attrition. However, literature from both career fields lack information about how to define effective mentorship and whether that mentorship truly influences personnel retention. I have always been a supporter of professional and personal development as a means of improving society as a whole. I have been involved with both formal and informal mentorship.

However, the formal mentorship opportunities were only effective when I was proactive and established them myself. Formal organizational mentorship programs that I participated in acted more as a stipulation and proof of developmental support in lieu of an actual mentorship experience. In other words, my informal mentorship experiences and self-established formal mentorship experiences were more effective than the organizational mentorship programs that I participated in. These experiences have led me to wonder what other organizations are lacking efficiency and legitimate development within their mentorship programs if they have them (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Interpretive Framework

The motivation to understand mentorship on complex levels is viewed through the lens of social constructivism (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The experiences of each individual are shaped by their authentic experiences and interactions with others. The same is true for mentorship

experiences and influences that would cause them to stay in the same place for an extended period of time. Although participants work in the same atmosphere, they may have had vastly different experiences, based on the interactions they participated in over the years. It is each interaction that influences how each participant perceives mentorship and the influence of that mentorship.

Philosophical Assumptions

There are three philosophical assumptions that will be addressed in this dissertation. Ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions will be used to express my beliefs as a researcher. Each assumption represents my views and interpretations of research and analytical information. Presenting my philosophical assumptions will allow me to highlight possible biases regarding this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mubuuke et al., 2021).

Ontological Assumption

There is only one universal reality, and it is the reality that God created. However, there are infinite ways for humans to perceive interactions within God's reality. People will perceive life and experiences in their own way based on their own mental pictures and past interactions that shape their views and morals. It is critical to include participant and researcher background experiences and interactions when gathering information for this study (Suttie, 2020).

Epistemological Assumption

This study relied upon the knowledge of each participant. Their knowledge of educator expectations, mentorship, and retention created the information gathered in this study. I gathered information from the participants through methods that allowed me to transcribe participant input verbatim, allowing the participants to be the experts of their own experiences. Additionally, participants checked their own transcriptions for accuracy and to ensure that their input was

received accurately. Knowledge was defined by the information that participants shared with the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data collection included interview answers, journal prompts, and questionnaire responses.

Axiological Assumption

I believe that positive and productive human interaction is one of the most beneficial aspects of educator retention. Formal mentorship and informal mentorship both fall into the category of beneficial in terms of making people feel valued (Suttie, 2020). People should be valued for what they currently provide to the world and for the potential that they have. These things develop through both professional and personal development, which mentorship offers. There are many human interactions that occur that are developmental, but whether or not they should be deemed mentorship is dependent on the individuals within the interaction (Mrstik et al., 2019). I was a high school educator for seven years before leaving the field for full-time military service. I am also an instructor for the military, but since leaving the public education system, I have wondered what could have swayed my desire to leave the field of education in the public sector.

Researcher's Role

I previously worked as an educator at both the high school and the university level. I am not employed by any of the organizations that my participants work at. I do not have any authority over any of the participants. Additionally, the participants do not have any authority over me. The participants and I are not peers, and we do not influence each other in any professional or personal way outside of this study. I will act as a human instrument for this study. I will gather information in raw form, as it is presented by participants, prior to theme analysis. Although I have experienced mentorship in many forms and come from a very diverse

background, the possible biases associated with these facts will be mitigated by participant

checks to ensure accuracy and the absence of assumptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

<div align="center">**Procedures**</div>

The procedures chosen for this study were meant to gather raw information from

participants and maximize opportunities for participants to share authentic experiences.

Phenomenological procedures in general provided me with context directly from the participants

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). To be effective in this type of information collection, I started by

gaining approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University to conduct my

study. Once I gained IRB approval for my study, I worked with the Dean of Education at a local

university in Southern Missouri to gather voluntary participants. This was done through an email

sent by the Dean that contained an invitation to my study, the informed consent form to

participate in my study (Annex B), and my contact information. Since the participant pool was

devastatingly low, I did an additional invitation to participate in my study through a Facebook

post on my personal Facebook page. I ended up with ten willing participants. I had each

participant complete the informed consent form prior to the beginning of any data collection

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once I received signed informed consent forms from each participant, I

provided each participant with the data collection methods and the coinciding instructions. The

three data collection methods were interviews, journals, and questionnaires.

Each interview was conducted through Microsoft Teams and last between 30 minutes and

one hour. Each interview was transcribed using Otter.Ai. I left each transcript in its raw state and

sent the interview recording and the raw transcription to each participant for a member check

once the interview was completed. I also reminded participants that I would maintain their

documents on a secure computer if they wanted to see copies in the future. I also told each

participant that their personally identifiable information would be omitted from all research information to ensure that their privacy is protected. Once the interviews were completed, each participant was left to complete the journal entries and the questionnaire on their own.

As participants completed journal entries and questionnaires, they emailed to me through secure email. Once I had all of the data collection methods from all participants, I began the data analysis process. I first began by reading each piece of data and creating open codes for each answer from each participant's piece of data. I kept this initial list in an excel document so that I could easily reference it and so that I could see how often overarching topics were being mentioned. I was able to see the redundancy of topics by organizing the excel document in alphabetical order. This simple measure allowed me to see where I had typed the same message or open code more than once. Once I did this for each piece of data, I began to condense the repetitive list into more specific codes or overarching themes. I also did this manually so that I did not miss any pieces of information. Doing this allowed me to arrive at the axial coding process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I also conducted this process manually within an excel document. Once the axial coding process was complete, I used a qualitative data analysis tool called MAXQDA to assess the redundancy of the codes derived from the axial coding process.

I scrubbed each data collection method for any personally identifiable information and then uploaded it to MAXQDA. I then entered the axial code list that I had created. My goal with this was to see how often each concept appeared in the data. MAXQDA used the codes I enter to produce numbers that represented the repetition of the codes within the data. I then took this data, added it to the original excel spreadsheet and proceeded with the selective coding process, which solidified by themes and sub-themes based on their prominence within the data collected from participants. This study achieved triangulation by using interviews, journal entries, and

questionnaires to create a comprehensive body of data for analysis and improved concept

understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection Plan

Data collection began with individual interviews. Individual interviews allowed each

participant to explain their authentic experiences throughout their careers, including ones that

have influenced their desire to stay in the education field (Adler, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018;

Little & Green, 2022). These individual interviews also allowed participants to explain additional

factors involved in their decision to stay in the education field. Individual interviews were

chosen first to permit the researcher to gain the most context about the experiences of each

participant. Journal prompts were used as a secondary means of analysis. The journal entries

were analyzed to find common themes and messages. The final data collection approach was a

questionnaire that was used to gauge participant behaviors and emotions surrounding perceived

mentorship experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Individual Interviews

One-on-one interviews between each participant and the researcher provided an

environment for the participant to share experiences without the influence of other participants.

Participants were contacted through phone or email to organize a time for the interviews. While

this data collection method addressed all of the research questions, it was meant to focus on the

central question of the study. The central question asks about the teaching experiences of each

participant. These interviews were conducted virtually using Microsoft Teams. Virtual

interviews were used to maximize participation and avoid researcher or participant scheduling

conflicts or other obstacles that prevent a face-to-face meeting. Interview data was recorded,

transcribed, and reviewed for accuracy and completion using Otter AI. The questions below are

guided questions for a semi-structured interview. In order to truly understand the essence of participant experience, it is important not to be restricted to these questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position. CRQ

2. What expectations did you have for your teaching career? CRQ

3. Describe your mentorship experiences throughout your career. SQ1

4. How did developmental or mentorship experiences affect you? CRQ

5. What behaviors, expectations, and emotions do you associate with mentorship? SQ1

6. What experiences, beliefs, or values have made you stay in the field of education? CRQ

7. In your opinion, what is the structure, if any, of an effective developmental opportunity? SQ2

The purpose of each of these questions was to provide guided topic inquiry without hindering the ability of the participants to share their unique experiences. In order to ensure that each question asked supported the intent of the research, I connected each interview question to a research question. The code behind each question identifies the research question associated with that question. The purpose of the first question was to have the participants explain their background and career in education. The purpose of the second question was to find out what expectations participants had for their teaching careers. The purpose of the third question was for the participants to describe their mentorship experiences throughout their careers. The purpose of the fourth question was for participants to explain how developmental or mentorship experiences have affected them. The purpose of the fifth question was for participants to explain what

behaviors and emotions they associate with mentorship. The purpose of the sixth question was

for participants to explain what experiences, believes, or values have influenced their decisions

to stay in education. The purpose of the seventh question was for participants to express their

opinions about effective developmental opportunities. These questions were constructed with

that goal in mind. These questions will also be reviewed by experts in the field of education.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Interview data was recorded, transcribed, and reviewed for commonalities between

emotions tied to experiences as well as theme repetition (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas,

1994; Ponterotto, 2010; Vacchi, 2012). Prior to analysis, each participant was provided with time

to review their transcript for accuracy and completion (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994;

Ponterotto, 2010). Theme generation involves deep analysis of participant input in order to

identify similarities in the provided information (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). For

the implementation of transcendental phenomenology, I bracketed out my own experiences prior

to identifying significant statements, reoccurring themes, and quotes from participant

experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Ponterotto, 2010). Theme generation was

done through manual coding prior to the use of qualitative data analysis software to count the

repetitive themes defined during the manual coding process.

I used input from interviews to create preliminary theme categories associated with

personal experiences. I used analog coding methods and tracking methods prior to using any

technological method (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Ponterotto, 2010). I used

textural and structural descriptions to identify recurring themes. Additional questions arose as I

interviewed each participant, and all additions were recorded and transcribed (Creswell & Poth,

2018; Moustakas, 1994; Ponterotto, 2010). For the purposes of gaining a true understanding of

the essence of mentorship and participant experiences, it was critical that I remain attentive and fluid and recognize the importance of understanding participant conversation cues (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Ponterotto, 2010). Bracketing out my personal biases and views was critical for this and all phases of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Ponterotto, 2010).

Journal Prompts

Journal prompts were the secondary form of data collection. These prompts allowed me to develop context to answer sub-question number two (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Janesick, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). Each participant was asked to complete a total of four journal prompts. Participants were given four weeks to complete the journal prompts. The goal with this scheduling was to be cognizant of the schedules of others and provide adequate time for completion (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Janesick, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). This allowed participants to reflect on their experiences, revise their thoughts if necessary, and completely control the narrative (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Janesick, 1999; Moustakas, 1994).

Journal Prompts

Journal Prompt #1: Explain your most memorable personal mentorship experience. SQ2

Journal Prompt #2: Explain what motivated you to seek or prohibited you from seeking mentorship opportunities for yourself. SQ1

Journal Prompt #3: Explain an opportunity you had to mentor someone else (peer, superior, subordinate, student). SQ2

Journal Prompt #4: In your own words, describe the difference between formal and informal mentorship and explain which one is more beneficial. Please include examples. CRQ

Journal Prompts Data Analysis Plan

Journal prompts allowed me to develop textural and structural descriptions in support of the overall contextual picture of mentorship and general teaching experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Janesick, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). I used the preliminary themes generated through the one-on-one interviews to create a list of common experiences or descriptions to cross-reference with the journal entries (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Janesick, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). Once I finished analyzing the textural descriptions, I used the codes to create themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Janesick, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). The experiences documented in the journal entry data were manually coded prior to using qualitative data analysis software to count the occasions when the coded data appeared in order to generate themes. Journal prompts also helped to reinforce or identify structural descriptions dealing with how participants defined their mentorship experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Janesick, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). The ultimate goal of the journal prompts was to gain additional experience-oriented information about participant associations with mentorship and retention strategies.

Open-ended Questionnaire*s*

The questionnaire for this study was used to add a final layer to the questioning and reflection process of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). While questionnaires are not typically used in phenomenology, this option added value to data mining by allowing participants to be uninhibited while following their own thought paths and responding to each question (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This questionnaire was provided to each participant using a Microsoft Word document sent through email. The goal with the questionnaire was to allow the participants to answer in an open-ended fashion as well as with simple answers (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This allowed me to develop more context in terms of emotions and views attached to mentorship and retention specifically and will

address sub-questions one and two.

Questionnaire Questions

1. What are some strategies to improve educator retention? CRQ

2. Explain how mentorship would or would not be a useful tool for educator retention. SQ1

3. How would you implement effective mentorship? SQ1

4. What are the intended outcomes of effective mentorship? SQ2

5. What would effective mentorship have to include in order to be a standard tool for educator retention? CRQ

Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan

This questionnaire was used as a final layer of data collection to identify codes and generate themes associated specifically with defining what effective mentorship means to all participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The goal with this data collection method, much like with the other two data collection methods, was to build textural and structural descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). These were used to extract the essence of mentorship based on participant experiences. I coded each questionnaire and used open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to narrow down the themes of the collective data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This was done manually prior to adding the codes to the qualitative data analysis program for the assessment of code redundancy and ultimately, code generation.

Data Analysis

Once data was collected using all three data collection approaches, I began the process of horizontalizing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Ponterotto, 2010). This

process asks the researcher to analyze data by paying attention to every horizon or layer of information that has been provided (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Ponterotto, 2010). This means that I conducted thorough readings of all interviews, journal prompts, and questionnaires and used the provided information to generate overarching themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Under each theme, I clustered descriptions provided by participants. From these clusters, I generated sub-themes and extracted the overall essence of the experience of mentorship as it pertains to educator retention (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Ponterotto, 2010). This took time and diligence to make sure that no bit of key information was missed. The process gave me a list of valid themes and sub-themes that have shown up in participant data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Ponterotto, 2010). These themes provided insight to how educators believe that mentorship impacts educator retention (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Ponterotto, 2010).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established through member checks and clarification of researcher bias (Adler, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Little & Green, 2022). Member checks provided each participant the opportunity to ensure that all of their input was captured accurately (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Clarification of researcher bias requires the researcher to share experiences and biases associated with the study (Adler, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Little & Green, 2022). This helped to build trust between the participant and the researcher and demonstrate integrity (Adler, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Little & Green, 2022).

Credibility

Establishing credibility was possible through my ability to properly analyze the literature in chapter two as well as the participant experiences (Adler, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Little

& Green, 2022). Credible sources for chapter two consists of articles from the last five years. This compilation primarily contains a compilation of primary sources that illustrate a gap in the research (Adler, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Little & Green, 2022). For participant information analysis, participants were given several opportunities to review their input in order to ensure the accuracy and thoroughness of all provided information (Adler, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gazza, 2004; Little & Green, 2022). Member-checks provided a sense of trust and confirmation to ensure that participant information is portrayed correctly (Adler, 2022; Gazza, 2004). Triangulation was also implemented using the interviews, journals, and questionnaires to ensure that the context around the data is completely developed (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gazza, 2004).

Transferability

The themes associated with mentorship that are identified through this study can be applied to other industries that also employ mentorship (Anney, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gazza, 2004; Kuper et al., 2008). The detailed procedures and data analysis techniques can be used to identify effective mentorship in other industries so they can be used to address attrition issues that may affect other organizations (Anney, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Themes identified in association with effective mentorship were cross-referenced with themes frequently used to describe mentorship and retention within other fields (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gazza, 2004). The nature of this study allows participants to call upon their background experiences to explain how they have been molded into the educators they are (Anney, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gazza, 2004; Kuper et al., 2008). Taking varied backgrounds into account and analyzing the themes that arise from the desire to analyze mentorship essence provided a body of

information that can be applied to any organization concerned with retention (Anney, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gazza, 2004; Kuper et al., 2008).

Dependability

All processes and products of this study were reviewed by experts in the field to ensure dependability (Anney, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, I was thorough in the specific data analysis processes in order to ensure that all parts of this study can be replicated (Anney, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Dependability was achieved by following the guidelines of the Liberty University inquiry audit (Anney, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, descriptions of procedures were assessed for clarity and applicability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gazza, 2004).

Confirmability

Audit trails and triangulation were used in order to demonstrate confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Drisko, 1997). In order to gain useful information from this study, I removed any bias or motivation associated with the outcomes of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Drisko, 1997). The bracketing that was part of the individual meetings were also a part of the data synthesis portion to reinforce the importance of allowing the participants to guide the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; LeVasseur, 2003).

Ethical Considerations

I gained site and participant permissions through formal requests to the leadership of University B. I also received informed consent from all participants and disclosed the full process of the study. I informed participants that participation is strictly voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time. I assured confidentiality of participants by scrubbing all identifiable information from all data collection methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994;

Ponterotto, 2010). Additionally, any information that contains personally identifiable information will be destroyed after three years. Until then, all information will be stored in locked containers that only the researcher can access. There are no apparent physical risks to participants or the researcher. The risks associated with this study include risks of biased information, missing information, and relationship imbalances (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Ponterotto, 2010). The risks of bias information and missing information will be mitigated by using triangulation and member-checks (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Ponterotto, 2010). Each participant was able to review and confirm all data gathered about their personal experiences. The risk of relationship imbalance was not present in this study, because I am not the leader, coworker or subordinate of any of the participants within the study.

Permissions

Permission for this study was granted through Liberty University. Each participant also received permission from their organization to participate in this study. I followed the protocol involved with the Liberty University Internal Review Board (IRB) request letters and processes (See Appendix B) to disseminate participant invitations. This was done to ensure fair and safe treatment of all participants. I also gained informed consent from participants to use their input for this study (See Appendix A) (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Other Participant Protections

The only protection that was required for participants in this study was the protection of personal information. All data collection methods were executed virtually, removing the need for physical protections for participants. The identities of participants were kept anonymous to protect their privacy. This study did not entail any biological or human derived samples of any kind, and no further protections were required.

Summary

This chapter has discussed research design, research questions, settings and participants, researcher positionality, procedures, data collection plan, and trustworthiness. The research design of transcendental phenomenology has allowed me to analyze the essence of the perception of effective mentorship as it pertains to educator retention. Data collection methods included interviews, journals, and a questionnaire in order to gain full context of the experiences of the participants. Data analysis revolved around theme identification with the intent of being able to apply identified themes to other industries outside of education.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to better understand the impact that mentorship experiences have on the retention of educators at the postsecondary level. This chapter will present findings associated with this study. This chapter includes participant descriptions presented in narrative form, an analysis of the data, research findings, and the answers to the defined research questions.

Participants

Seven of the participants for this study were gathered primarily using Facebook. Three participants were volunteers within my training organization. None of the participants from my organization work for me or are influenced by me in any way. Regarding the Facebook participants, I posted a request on my Facebook wall asking for participation from anyone that met the criteria of my study. Over twenty people from Facebook and my organization volunteered to participate initially. However, only 10 people completed the requirements of this study. Gathering participants through a Facebook request was different than what I had originally planned. I originally planned to use participants from a university where I previously worked. Unfortunately, the population of educators at that university was unresponsive. This ended up working out well for my study since the participants that I gathered through Facebook were more diverse in their demographics and their experiences. Following are the descriptions of each participant. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of each participant.

Rachelle

Rachelle is a Caucasian woman, in her 40s, working at a university in the Midwest. She is a wife and mother. She holds a doctorate in education. She has been in the field of education

for over 10 years. She was driven to pursue the field of education from a young age. Outside of being an educator at the higher education level, she has also held director positions for middle school and elementary educational organizations. Her specialty is special education and assisting university students with gaining the accommodations that they need to be successful.

Thomas

Thomas is a Caucasian male in his early 40s. He has over 15 years of experience instructing in institutions of higher learning, both government and public sectors. He is a husband and a father to two children. He decided he wanted to become a teacher after serving in the military for a few years. He holds an undergraduate degree in chemistry, master's degrees in history and education, a second master's in English, and he is now pursuing his doctorate in organizational leadership. He has taught at the university level in person and online. He began teaching in a public high school prior to teaching at the university level. His career has taken him around the nation, but he now resides in the Northeastern United States.

Houston

Houston is a Caucasian male in his early 50s with over 18 years of instruction experience. He is a husband and a father. He holds a bachelor's degree in English, a master's in English literature, and doctorate in education. He currently teaches at a university in the Southern United States. Houston continues to teach English at the university level. Prior to working at the university level, he served as a middle school teacher, a high school teacher, and a curriculum manager.

David

David is a Caucasian male in his late 40s. He instructs in the Midwest. He is a husband and a father. He holds an undergraduate degree in anthropology, a master's degree in leadership,

and numerous apprenticeship certificates through his organization. He has over 15 years of experience working in leadership and instructor positions at organizations of higher education. He teaches adults of all ages, and he specializes in engineering. He found a desire for teaching while placed in leadership positions early in his career. He was worked with both government and public entities during his time as an educator.

Dane

Dane is an African American male in his early 40s. He is a husband and a father. He knew from an early age that he wanted to serve in the field of education. He holds bachelors' degrees in both nonprofit management and public administration and policy. He also has a master's degree in nonprofit philanthropy and development, as well as postgraduate credits in education. Dane has over 10 years of experience as an educator in higher education. He currently teaches volunteer management, fundraising, and strategic leadership at a university in the Midwest.

Kirk

Kirk is a Caucasian male, in his early 30s, that instructs at a government-owned organization of higher education. He is married with two children. He has an undergraduate degree in civil engineering and a master's in environmental management. He is also pursuing a second master's in chaplaincy. He has 10 years of experience in leadership development and over seven years of experience with instruction of adults of all ages. Most of his career has been spent in the Midwest, but he has instructed in two states and two countries. He specializes in teaching courses rooted in chemical, biological, nuclear, and radiological warfare. His teachings also emphasize the art of leadership, tactics, professional development, and personal

development. Outside of his position in higher education, he also acts as the Director of the Young Men's Ministry at his church.

Kate

Kate is a Caucasian female in her early forties. She is married with two children. She teaches at a university in southern Missouri although she began her career in Texas. She has been teaching for 22 years with 14 of those years being at the postsecondary level. She specializes in teacher education. Her teaching and her ongoing research revolve around teacher development and mentorship. She has always had a desire to teach and even spent time as an assistant principal, extending her knowledge about the field of education.

Cindy

Cindy is a Caucasian female in her late thirties. She is married with three children. She lives in southern Missouri and teaches at an online university. She has been teaching for 21 years, with 15 of those years being at the postsecondary level. Her current focus is on teacher education, and she works in the Department of Education at her university. She has been working with online learning since 2007, and she also homeschools her children.

Tobin

Tobin is a Caucasian male in his late thirties. He is married and has four children. He lives in southern Missouri and instructs at a private sector, postsecondary organization. He specializes in engineering and quality assurance. He has been instructing for seven years, with all seven years being at the postsecondary level. He primarily works with training institutes, specializing in job skills and adult learning.

Keith

Keith is a Caucasian male in his early forties. He is married with three children. He lives in southern Missouri and has been an instructor in California, Missouri, and New Jersey. He specializes in emergency management and engineering. He has been instructing for over 10 year and currently instructs in southern Missouri. He mainly works with institutions of higher learning with an emphasis on trade work and adult learning.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Educator Participant	Years Taught	Highest Degree Earned	Content Area	Grade Level
Rachelle	10	Doctorate	Special Education	Postsecondary
Thomas	15	Master's	English Literature	Postsecondary
Houston	18	Doctorate	English Literature	Postsecondary
David	15	Master's	Engineering	Postsecondary
Dane	10	Master's	Nonprofit Management	Postsecondary
Kirk	7	Master's	Leadership, STEM	Postsecondary
Kate	22	Doctorate	Teacher Education	Postsecondary
Cindy	21	Doctorate	Teacher Education	Postsecondary
Tobin	7	Master's	Engineering	Postsecondary
Keith	10	Master's	Emergency Management	Postsecondary

Results

The following section includes the results of the study organized by themes and supported by in vivo quotes from participant interviews, journal entries, and questionnaires.

These themes were generated through coding the experiences provided by participants. The researcher used open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to determine the themes based on participant experiences. These themes are a representation of the most prominent concepts within the experiences of the participants. There are three overarching themes: setting clear expectations, defining effective mentorship, and working within the mentorship dyad. Each of these themes has three sub-themes. Table 2 provides an overview of each theme and the coinciding sub-themes. The sections that follow explain each theme and provide examples of how the themes appeared in the data provided by the participants.

Table 2

Themes & Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes		
Setting Clear Expectations	Relationship Cultivation and Maintenance	Value Setting	Establishing Trust
Defining Effective Mentorship	Structured System	Ongoing Feedback	Personal and Professional Development
Working Within the Mentorship Dyad	Mentor Behavior	Mentee Behavior	Interactions

Setting Clear Expectations

A relationship between two people can be complex to navigate due to differing views, goals, and expectations (Fein & Tziner, 2021). This is especially true of a mentorship relationship. A mentorship relationship is typically defined as a professional relationship where one or both parties learn new skills, reinforce current skills, and grow personally and professionally (Fein & Tziner, 2021). However, this requires both parties to understand the expectations of the relationship (Fein & Tziner, 2021). In his interview, Winston shared, "It's important that people understand why they are here. Set guidelines for the relationship before

coaching even begins." Ten out of ten participants mentioned the importance of clear expectations in a mentorship relationship throughout the three data collection methods.

Within the theme of clear expectations, three sub-themes demonstrated prevalence throughout each data collection method: relationships, values, and trust. Participants mentioned relationships throughout all data collection methods a total of 743 times, revealing the prevalence of a connection between relationship building and mentorship. The concept of values, both valuing others and demonstrating shared values, appear in the data 694 times, painting an image of importance in relation to the mentorship process. Trust is mentioned 573 times in participant transcripts, journals, and questionnaires.

Relationship Cultivation and Maintenance

Relationship cultivation and maintenance are mentioned extensively throughout the participants' interviews, journal entries, and questionnaires. Eight of ten participants spoke fervently about the importance of establishing a solid working relationship during the mentorship process. Participants collectively explained that this is an ongoing task required of effective mentorship in lieu of a one-time necessity. Participants also described the relationship building process as something that requires taking time to learn the whole person and not just the professional. "It is interesting how many mentorship partnerships turn into beneficial relationships and even friendships," (Kate, personal communication, December 1, 2023).

Value Setting

While reflecting on the goals of mentorship within his journal prompt, Tobin said, "I want to be more than a check-in-the-box. I want my time and my efforts to be valued." Nine out of ten participants discussed value setting in their interviews, journal prompts, and questionnaires. Some participants focused on value being placed on the person. In other words,

they explained the importance of making someone else feel valued within the mentorship relationship. Other participants placed emphasis on defining values for the mentorship dyad – shared values. Participants communicated that value setting must be a foundational piece of setting clear expectations for the mentorship relationship to operate efficiently.

Establishing Trust

Based on participant feedback, educators want to be trusted experts in their field. They also expect their mentorship relationships to build on mutual trust. When discussing trust in his interview, Keith expressed, "Before you present yourself as a subject matter expert on a given topic that you want to train others in, you must have willing participants, and you must have trust. Without these two things you will not have an opportunity for an effective developmental opportunity." Participants placed heavy emphasis on trust, expressing the important role it plays in setting the expectations of a mentorship relationship.

Defining Effective Mentorship

The second theme is defining effective mentorship. This theme developed as eight of ten participants set definitions for effective mentorship during their interviews. Participants spoke fervently about the difference between mandated mentorship and voluntary mentorship, with voluntary mentorship being the most effective of the two. They frequently mentioned the importance of structure, feedback, and development between the mentor and the mentee. When reflecting on defining effective mentorship in his questionnaire, David said, "I think what we're doing is looking at it [mentorship] as a dedicated, deliberate, structured process geared towards giving someone continuous feedback over a long span of time." Additionally, all ten participants mentioned the importance of defining effective mentorship throughout the three data collection methods. The sub-themes of structure, feedback, and development appear through coding 403,

626, and 405 times respectively.

Structured System

Participants defined effective mentorship as a process that has a structure to it. The majority of the descriptions about the structure of mentorship included scheduled meetings between the members of the mentorship relationship. Through data collected during the interviews and in the questionnaire, participants described that blocking out time for dedicated mentorship made the process more successful and acted as an accountability piece for both members of the dyad. Several participants mentioned including agendas for mentorship sessions, but many said that these agendas do not have to be perfectly detailed. Participants communicated that the goal of the agenda was more to ensure that no support measure was missed rather than to create a time constraint. In discussing the structure of effective mentorship within his questionnaire, Houston said, "When you set the norms for your mentorship experiences, you have to include some sort of structure of what your meetings will look like. At a minimum, you need to have a schedule for your meetings so that you can communicate to your mentee that you are in the business of long-term support."

Ongoing Feedback

Participants described feedback, or lack thereof, as a determining factor for how they felt about mentorship they had received. When speaking about feedback in his journal entries, Tobin said, "Regular feedback sessions, self-assessments, and peer evaluations help participants track their progress and identify areas for improvement, fostering a culture of continuous improvement." Continuous feedback is portrayed in a positive light while a lack of mentor feedback specifically carries negative emotions and connotations. Participating educators describe a lack of mentor feedback as proof that the mentor is not genuinely invested in the

mentorship relationship.

Personal and Professional Development

The data reveals that ongoing developmental opportunities are coveted amongst educators. Educators value receiving ongoing development and many have remained in the field of education to deliver that ongoing development to others. Regarding developing others and being developed by others, Thomas mentioned, "I rely heavily on the knowledge that I have received from others. When I was struggling, the good mentors I had tried to develop my resilience skills. When I was confused about work content, the good mentors focused on developing me professionally. It's about balancing the person."

Working Within the Mentorship Dyad

The third theme is working within the mentorship dyad. The previous themes outlined the ideal parameters and expectations for educator mentorship, but the third theme focuses on the application of these parameters and how the dyad should function to support retention. Eight of ten participants discussed the dynamics of the mentorship dyad through their responses. They repetitively mentioned the essence of the sub-themes of mentor behavior, mentee behavior, and the interactions between the mentor and the mentee. These sub-themes appeared 529, 357, and 269 times respectively. The main message from the eight participants that exalted the importance of how the dyad works together was that both parties must be invested. When discussing how mentorship through his questionnaire, Dane said, "People want a working relationship where both parties do just that – work."

Mentor Behavior

Participants claimed that mentor behavior sets the tone for the relationship. According to participant feedback, mentors should strive to coach, model, and guide their mentees. In order to

do this, mentors must use their personal experiences, professional experiences, and learned strategies to assist the mentee with obstacles they may face in the education field or in life. When asked about the role of a mentor, Rachelle said, "As the mentor, do your homework so that when you go into that session, you're not wasting that mentee's time with information that either is below them or above them, and then be clear with whatever information you wish to share. And then what's the follow up." While a dyad is a reciprocal partnership, participants made it clear that the mentor leads said partnership.

Mentee Behavior

Mentees are expected to be invested in the mentorship relationship, especially as it pertains to their success in the field of education. Mentees are expected to come to the session prepared to learn, prepared to engage with their mentor, and open to constructive criticism. When discussing mentee behavior, Kirk had the following to say, "I think when it comes to behaviors, it's being undistracted so you know making sure that you've eliminated distractions so that you can be open to conversation and preparing to receive guidance. Don't waste my time. If I'm coming to you to ask for mentorship, I have the expectation that you're going to block off time and make this important. Make this a priority."

Interactions

The data points to a demand for respectful interactions between the mentor and the mentee. Communication should be a mutual effort. One party should not dominate mentorship sessions. Additionally, both parties must demonstrate the capacity for active listening and active application. In other words, interactions within the mentorship relationship should lead to action for both parties. Regarding the topic of mentorship interactions, Cindy replied, "Showing the learner what 'right' looks like first, then having them participate with necessary support, and

finally allowing them to show mastery on their own. An important phase afterwards is being able to apply a transfer-of-learning, demonstrating, modeling, coaching, releasing."

Outlier Data and Findings

Throughout this study, most comments from participants align with the research questions. Additionally, many participant comments can be easily grouped with one another or pertain to a general concept within the study. However, there was one outlying finding regarding the effectiveness of mentorship.

Outlier Finding

One participant mentioned that a mentor can favor a mentee too much or too little, and that this range of favor can impact the effectiveness of mentorship. The idea that getting along too well with a mentee or having too close of a relationship with a mentee is only mentioned once throughout this entire study. All other participants expressed the desire for a close working relationship with their mentor. However, David said, "If I'm extremely elated that somebody has done something well, then my feedback or my mentorship may be dismissed as you know, but if I'm overly harsh or overly critical or angry at which sometimes can occur that that also could diminish the value of that mentorship."

Research Question Responses

The purpose of this section is to provide answers to the research questions presented throughout this study. All questions are answered in a narrative format and include in vivo quotes. The goal is to present the essence of the participant group.

Central Research Question

What are the mentorship experiences of educators in higher education who have been in the field of education for five years or more? This question reflects all three themes that arose

through participant data: setting clear expectations, defining effective mentorship, and working within the mentorship dyad. Based on participant feedback, mentorship experiences are the most valuable when the mentor and the mentee are dedicated to the relationship, understand the importance of setting expectations for one another, and dedicated to bettering themselves. When asked to discuss mentorship in relation to retention, Kirk said, "I think a piece of mentoring that isn't often considered or done well is matching mentors and mentees. This is difficult to accomplish because of varied schedules, but we make time for what's important." This bit of participant feedback primarily ties to the theme of working within the mentorship dyad but also reflects the idea of setting clear expectations and defining effective mentorship. Based on participant feedback, prioritizing the mentorship relationship, knowing what roles each member plays in the dyad, and demonstrating a desire to be developed are key to the success of a mentorship relationship and crucial concepts of practice in term of retention.

Participant feedback also expressed that the community created through positive mentorship experiences plays a valuable role in one's desire to keep teaching. Participants defined mentorship as positive only when it was based on clear expectations and reciprocal efforts within the mentorship dyad. When asked about the intended outcomes of mentorship, Cindy said, "Community is important for humans, and I've noted many young people today struggling with how to create in real life community." Additionally, negative mentorship experiences made educators initially question what they were doing in the field of education but ultimately lead them to want to be better mentors for others. Although all of the sub-themes appear through participant feedback, participants fervently communicated how trust should be the foundation of the mentorship relationship. Dane summarized the effect of mentorship

experiences in his interview when he said, "People don't care about what you know, until they know that you care."

Sub-Question One

What mentorship practices do educators in higher education describe as having an impact on retention? When discussing educator retention, David easily summarized his thought on the topic, "Mentorship is a key aspect of educator retention." Participant questionnaires and interviews were the most thorough at answering this question, and their responses supported the generation of all three themes. Participants claimed that relationships, values, building trust, creating a structured partnership, receiving consistent feedback, seeking development, defining dyad roles, and focusing on quality interactions were all practices that improved their experiences as an educator and supported the push for mentorship as a strategy to combat educator attrition. Mentorship was often described as a staple strategy to help educator retention. When reflecting on the impact that mentorship has on retention in his questionnaire, Thomas said, "Mentorship is an invaluable part of a professional's development. Mentors provide perspective, direct assistance, and encouragement to developing professionals." When asked the same question within the questionnaire, Rachelle said, "When educators have a good mentor, they are more likely to stay as they have the support and guidance of where to get help when needed. It helps build community and ownership of the building. It's empowering."

Each participant communicated that relationship building, receiving feedback, and valuable mentorship interactions impacted their desire to stay in education but also their desire to provide beneficial interactions to others. When discussing the impact that mentorship made on her time as a post-secondary educator, Kate said, "Witnessing the transformative effects of mentorship reinforces my belief in the power of education to shape lives and careers, but I only

got to this point, because of the effort that I put into the being mentored and the effort my mentor put into me." This participant feedback reflects the concept of relationship building, seeking and giving feedback, and focusing on authentic interactions. These sub-themes fall into each of the three overarching themes from this study.

Sub-Question Two

What types of behaviors, emotions, and meanings do educators in higher education express revolving around receiving or providing mentorship? Participants were adamant about expressing the fact that negative mentorship experiences stuck with them and made them want to provide better interactions for those that they were currently mentoring. While each answer to the previous research questions integrate all three themes, the participant responses that feed the answer to this question focus heavily on the theme of working within the mentorship dyad. Based on participant input, the behaviors, emotions, and meanings that educators at the post-secondary level associate with mentorship are based on both their negative and positive experiences. The negative experiences have made them want to develop themselves into more effective mentors, and the positive experiences have challenged them to reflect on the type of mentees they had been and the type of mentees they would like to work with. While discussing negative mentorship, Dane said, "I built a lot of resilience as an educator because of the poor mentors that I had. They would not give me the time of day. I made sure that I was not like that with my mentees." Each participant discussed the downfall of a negative mentor and how even the negative experiences turned into learning opportunities.

Participants collectively communicated that ineffective mentors were often selfish, impatient, and complacent when dealing with others. This resulted in negative experiences for the participants but positive experiences for their future mentees as reported by the participants.

Regarding the delivery of mentorship, participant feedback demonstrated an importance on individually catering to each mentee in lieu of creating batch mentorship programs or standardized mentoring methods. When asked to discuss ideal mentorship scenarios, Houston said, "By knowing your mentee, you will be able to push them to levels where they never believed they could perform. You will build confidence in them while they are building confidence in themselves. A good mentor will not do the work for their mentee but be there to give honest and constructive feedback." Rachelle also summarized this concept during her interview by saying, "Mentorship is all about empathy and understanding where your mentee is at. Knowing how to develop them so they will progress not regress."

Summary

The major themes of the findings of this study are setting clear expectations, defining effective mentorship, and working within the mentorship dyad. An overwhelming amount of this research points to establishing trust within a mentorship relationship in order for it to be effective. Positive participant comments assumed that trust was established in all successful mentorship interactions. Contrarily, a lack of trust caused feelings of resentment and frustration within the attempted mentorship relationships. It is interesting to see that although many participants had some negative mentorship experiences, they were able to remain in the field of education because of the occurrences of positive mentorship which encouraged them to be the positive mentor that others needed.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the impact that mentorship experiences have on the retention of educators at the postsecondary level. Mentorship experiences were generally defined as those occurrences when a peer, subordinate, or superior devoted time to professional or personal development and support of the educator (National Academies of Sciences & Medicines, 2019). This study also sought to analyze the core traits of effective mentorship. This chapter consists of the interpretation of findings, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research. This chapter consists of six sections: (a) discussion, (b) summary of thematic findings (c) implications for policy and practice, (d) theoretical and methodological implications, (e) limitations and delimitations, and (f) recommendations for future research.

Discussion

This study applied transcendental phenomenology to analyze the mentorship experiences of educators in post-secondary learning organizations. Mentorship remains as a complex topic. The complexity of the mentorship relationship is dependent on the physical location of the participants, the delivery method of mentorship, the backgrounds of the participants, and the expected outcome for each participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, the effectiveness of a mentorship relationship is reliant on the amount of time, resources, and dedication available within the dyad (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ultimately, there is no standard recipe for mentorship success. In order to be successful, mentorship must be individually tailored, even when it exists in a prescribed platform or organization (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary of Thematic Findings

The themes identified within the participant data were setting clear expectations, defining effective mentorship, and working within the mentorship dyad. Setting clear expectations relates to the preliminary tasks of setting up a mentorship relationship. Defining effective mentorship addresses techniques that should exist within a mentorship relationship in order to make it beneficial for both parties. Working within the mentorship dyad outlines how the members of the dyad should use the preliminary tasks and available techniques to coordinate with one another within their mentor-mentee dynamic.

Implications for Policy or Practice

The implications for policy and practice are based on the need for a long-term time commitment for all participants of a mentorship experience. Furthermore, the implementation of a dedicated mentorship or development program will assist with any implications for policy or practice. These needs would include any participating educators and their superiors.

Implications for Policy

There are no specific implications for government policy, but there are implications for institutional policy. This study implies the need for post-secondary learning institutions to be mandated to provide mentorship programs. Participation in these programs would not be mandatory, but the need for this opportunity at the post-secondary level is apparent through participant feedback. When reflecting on mentorship programs through his questionnaire, Houston said, "It should be mandatory to provide mentorship programs but not mandatory to attend. It is hard enough to get effective mentors and mentees. Forcing people to participate in that type of program wouldn't result in effective mentorship." The overall implication is that writing a mentorship program opportunity into policy will elevate the way in which it is

perceived by perspective participants.

Implications for Practice

Providing long-term mentorship programs at the post-secondary level may be useful in the retention of educators, especially as they navigate through professional and personal stressors. Unlike the secondary education level, post-secondary educators are taxed with caring for themselves, their families, their finances, their health, their careers, and many other demands of adulthood. These can become overwhelming when educators lack community support. An effective mentorship program offers consistent support to educators and supports the goal of educators remaining in the field. Additionally, providing training for prospective mentors may assist with creating positive mentorship experiences and support the goal of establishing a program that endures the stresses and trials of time.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

The purpose of this section is to address the theoretical and empirical implications of the study. I will be comparing and contrasting the themes identified within the data with the theories and literature from Chapter Two. This comparison includes the following themes: setting expectations for mentorship, defining effective mentorship, and working within the mentorship dyad.

Empirical Implications

The research discusses the many roles and stressors of educators (Furtado et al., 2020; Richard et al., 2009; Sutcher et al., 2016). These stressors include, but are not limited to, family life, career progression goals, finances, and caring for others (Ya'Acob & Aziz, 2021). Educators face challenges such as technology overload, overstimulation, burnout, and all of the challenges of their lives outside of their career (Boreen & Niday, 2000; Maloch et al., 2022).

Setting Expectations for Mentorship. The results of the research support the critical

need for mentorship as a support system to address these challenges. "On a personal level,

mentorship has bolstered my confidence and resilience, especially during challenging times.

Knowing I have mentors to turn to for guidance has provided a sense of reassurance and

empowerment, enabling me to confront obstacles with courage and determination," (Tobin,

personal communication, January 3, 2024). Not only does the data support the need for

mentorship as communal support, but it also defines the need for clear expectations of a

mentorship relationship and individualized mentorship. "My most effective mentor realized that I

needed her to help me visualize what she needed me to do before I could do it successfully. She

took the time to figure that out, and it made a world of difference," (Houston, personal

communication, October 3, 2023). This aligns with the empirical research that grazes the surface

of information about the importance of individualized mentorship and its benefits. This study

adds to the body of research that exalts individualized mentorship by adding key components

that support this individualization. The focus on the sub-themes of relationship building, defining

values, and establishing trust expand upon the preliminary information offered by the existing

bodies of mentorship research. The empirical implication here is that there should be more

literature on how to best establish trust, define values, and build last relationships that will foster

long-term mentorship opportunities for educators in the post-secondary level. The existing

research continues to talk about elementary and secondary educators (Boreen & Niday, 2000;

Maloch et al., 2022). Post-secondary educators are a population that does not receive the same

attention regarding ongoing mentorship.

Defining Effective Mentorship. The literature states that effective mentorship focuses

on content that highlights connection, autonomy, competence, and interactions (Darling-

Hammond, 2017; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Farmer, 2020; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022; Madigan & Kim, 2021). While the data collected in this study helps to extend these concepts, it also goes a step further by demonstrating the need for more studies on how to encourage autonomy through the mentorship process. "Coaching and modeling must come before performance and providing feedback. If a mentee has no idea what the ideal methods look like, how can perform to standard? The mentor is there is to them the standard. The mentor is the model," (Houston, personal communication, October 3, 2023). The literature explains that connection provides a foundation for the mentorship relationship to flourish (Guthery & Bailes, 2022; Madigan & Kim, 2021). Competence is necessary for the mentor to be able to support the mentee with content knowledge struggles (Arviv & Navon, 2021; Guthery & Bailes, 2022). Interactions will vary based on the personalities and needs of both members of the dyad (Arviv & Navon, 2021; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Nassar et al., 2019; Nguyen, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2019). Autonomy, however, can come about several ways. The empirical implication in this scenario is that further research is required to determine the best ways to support long-lasting autonomy of mentees.

Working Within the Mentorship Dyad. The literature and the results of the data within this study are similar regarding the expectations of the mentor. A mentor is expected to give full effort and diligence to the mentee in order to support retention (Pennanen et al., 2016; Shalka, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). The mentor is also expected to mentor the personal and professional side of the mentee. Contrary to the literature, this study revealed the time commitment that is involved in taking the time to understand the values and challenges of a particular mentee. The implication here is that more research is needed to understand how a mentor can effectively support a post-secondary educator in terms of mentorship. Furthermore,

what time is required of the mentor to ensure that the mentee is provided with personal and professional opportunities to grow?

The empirical literature also visits the concept of mentorship models and mentorship delivery methods. This is something that was not thoroughly discussed within the research. Mentorship models were briefly discussed in the research when analyzing the structure of a mentorship program (Bardach et al., 2021; Hightower et al., 2021; Whalen et al., 2019). However, the results from this study explain the delivery methods in broad strokes. More research is needed to determine what factors of mentorship delivery methods are actually beneficial. A further study of the mentorship models and mentorship delivery methods would add value to the body of literature on mentorship at the post-secondary level. The largest empirical implication of this study is that dedicated mentorship programs are lacking at the post-secondary level. Additionally, establishing ongoing mentorship at this level may drastically impact educator retention by creating a support system for people that are at a very challenging sect of their lives. The mentorship dyad may be a highly effective support tool that can provide personal and professional benefits to both parties.

Theoretical Implications

The theory that this study was based on was the leader-member exchange theory (LMX) (Bunin et al., 2020). The LMX demands a high level of individualization within each interaction with the goal of creating interactions that are beneficial for both members of the dyad (Fein & Tziner, 2021). This study was based on the mentorship experiences of individual educators. Participants were asked to speak on their experiences as mentors and mentees. However, perspectives differ amongst people. Although a participant may have been self-described as an effective mentor, that cannot be proven without the input of the actual mentee. The theoretical

implication is that in order to determine the efficiency of mentorship as it pertains to retention, both parties within the dyad must be surveyed to gather full context about the mentorship experience. Considering that LMX focuses on the success of the entire dyad, both parties would need to be part of the research for full efficiency. Additionally, this same study should be conducted using dyads in order to glean more information about a mentor's perceived impact on educator retention versus actual impact on retention as explained by the mentee.

Limitations and Delimitations

The following information addresses limitations and delimitations of this study. The limitations of this study were involuntary. The delimitations of this study were voluntary and necessary for the scope of the study.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were the number of participants and lack of diversity of the participants. This study relied on volunteer participants. This proved to be problematic regarding the amount of data analyzed. The ideal participant size was 10-12 participants. Over twenty participants volunteered, but several refused to participate after volunteering to assist. Only ten participants completed the necessary data collection methods. Ultimately, there was not a bigger pool of willing personnel to choose from. This also caused the diversity of the participant pool to be limited. The small participant pool created a group of people that were mostly from the same area. Despite varied educational experiences, many participants had similar upbringings. This deprives the study of the additional experience richness that can only come from having a diverse population of participants.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study included the requirement of educators that are working at

the post-secondary level and educators with five or more years of experience in the education

field. There were two goals behind these delimiting factors. The first goal was to limit the

participation to educators with five or more years of education experience to demonstrate a

population of retained educators. The other goal was to choose educators that were at the post-

secondary level because of the lack of research about long-term mentorship for educators at the

post-secondary level. A final delimiting factor was choosing transcendental phenomenology over

other concepts. As a former educator, it was critical for me to remove myself from the research

so that I could understand the mentorship phenomena from other educators that want to stay in

the field, rather than relying on my own understanding of the concept of mentorship.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering this study's findings, limitations, and delimitations, there are several

recommendations for future research. While this study supports the need for long-term

mentorship as a means to combat educator attrition at the post-secondary level, there are several

aspects that require additional analysis. The first recommendation for future research is for a

larger study focusing on long-term mentorship at the post-secondary educator level. The body of

literature on this topic is small. However, this information may be beneficial to educators and

organizational leadership as they assess attrition issues. Mentorship for post-secondary educators

differs due to context. In terms of content support and mentorship, elementary and secondary

educators seek mentorship to address struggles with children. On the other hand, post-secondary

educators are charged with teaching and supporting other adults. This is innately more complex

due to the mental, physical, or emotional struggles that may hinder adult learners and educators.

The recommendation is to analyze the long-term impacts of mentorship on educators at the post-

secondary level through a case study. This would provide the in-depth information about the

nuances of adults mentoring other adults to support adult education.

The second recommendation for a future study is for a case study on the "release method" of mentorship. This study has demonstrated that one of the major goals of mentorship is to create autonomy. Educators should feel supported by a mentorship community while also being able to be successful on their own. It is unclear at which point in a mentorship process that this release into autonomy would occur. A case study would support the researcher in finding initial information about this process and what it may look like in a long-term mentorship relationship.

The third recommendation for a future study revolves around the outlier finding. During his interview, when discussing behaviors and emotions that are associated with mentorship, David explained that the way that a mentor views a mentee can impact the efficiency of the mentorship experience. He went on to express that liking a mentee too much could diminish the effectiveness of the feedback the mentor gives. On the other hand, not favoring the mentee as much may lead to lackluster mentor feedback. Considering that these concerns were outliers in this study, further research is suggested to investigate the validity of these concepts. This could be done as a stand-alone study that involves studying mentors and mentees separately or it could be accomplished as a combined study that looks at the efficiency of the dyad based on how much compatibility exists between a mentor and mentee.

The final recommendation for a future study is a replication of this study but through the lens of the actual dyad. This study inquired about both sides of the mentorship dyad, but it did not utilize both members of current dyads. This study relied on each participant to respond to questions based on their role as the mentor and the mentee within the dyad. Conducting this study with current dyads would allow the researcher to gather more information on the

perception of effective mentorship from the mentor perspective and the mentee perspective.

Conclusion

This study highlighted an ongoing issue in the realm of education – educator attrition. The problem of educator attrition affects students, schools, parents, and the community (Allen et al., 2004; Baker et al., 2020; Black et al., 2016; Breci & Martin, 2000; Bryman, 2016; Charters, 1970). It is a complex problem that required more investigation due to holes in the literature, specifically pertaining to educators at the post-secondary level (Allen et al., 2004; Baker et al., 2020; Black et al., 2016; Breci & Martin, 2000; Bryman, 2016; Charters, 1970). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the impact that mentorship experiences have on the retention of educators at the postsecondary level. This was done by employing transcendental phenomenology and using data collection methods that would support the analysis of authentic educator experiences. The three data collection methods used were interviews, journal prompts, and questionnaires. This study applied both manual and digital coding to derive the key themes of setting clear expectations, defining effective mentorship, and working within the mentorship dyad. There are several key takeaways from this study. The first takeaway is that despite the existence of extensive mentorship research, mentorship is still a field of study that is complex and requires more inquiry to address different educational levels and varying backgrounds. Ultimately, this study demonstrates the capacity for mentorship to be a positive strategy to assist in combating educator attrition. This study also demonstrates the vast differences in mentorship experience amongst educators. There is no standard method for mentorship delivery that guarantees retention success. However, there are tenets that deserve recognition: establishing trust, building relationships, creating a mutual structure, providing long-term support, and devoting time to the mentorship relationship.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval

Appendices

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 1, 2023

Rebecca Arsenault
Constance Pearson

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1317 Mentorship Experiences of College Educators: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Rebecca Arsenault, Constance Pearson,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) 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 the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information

electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [OMITTED].

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Title of the Project: Mentorship Experiences of College Professors: A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Rebecca Arsenault, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a current educator working at the university level. You must also have five or more years of continuous service in the field of education. This study is for educators that teach any subject at an institution of higher education (college/university level). Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about, and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to determine the influence of mentorship on educator retention in higher education.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Interview: Participate in a one-hour interview with the researcher to discuss your experiences as an educator. This interview will be recorded and transcribed to capture your authentic experience. You will receive the transcript so that you can review it for

accuracy and completeness. This interview will be conducted virtually or telephonically, based on the participant's request.

2. Journal: You will be asked to complete four journal prompts over a period of four weeks.

3. Questionnaire: You will be asked to complete a five-question, open-ended questionnaire that asks for information about your experiences with mentorship.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include assisting in gaining more insight into how to retain quality educators.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased, and any hard copy transcriptions will be shredded. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings and the transcriptions.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your university of employment. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Rebecca Arsenault. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [OMITTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, [OMITTED], or email at [OMITTED].

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

[__] *I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

[__] The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Printed Subject Name

_____

Signature & Date

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position.

2. What expectations did you have for your teaching career?

3. Describe your mentorship experiences throughout your career.

4. How did developmental or mentorship experiences affect you?

5. What behaviors, expectations, and emotions do you associate with mentorship?

6. What experiences, beliefs, or values have made you stay in the field of education?

7. In your opinion, what is the structure, if any, of an effective developmental opportunity?

Appendix D

Participant Interview Transcription Excerpt

*This transcript excerpt has been scrubbed for any personally identifiable information. This transcript was transcribed using Otter.Ai technology. This transcript was left in original form (transcription errors were not fixed if they did not impede understanding). It has been reviewed by the participant.

I: Describe your educational background and career through your current position.

R: So UMI was a non traditional college student so I had my first child when I was 16 and then obtain my GED when I was 17. So before a year before I was to graduate high school. But I always wanted to be a teacher, so I wasn't gonna let that stop me. And then my husband and I got married. And then I started going. I had taken some college classes before that, but then I like officially like started. So I was twenty. Yeah. And so I definitely know how to balance all the things having kids and stuff and so and then we had our second child that I had him in the middle of a semester, so that's fun. Uh and ohm, so it took me 10 years to get my bachelor degree, but all that. Time I was working in daycare centers, preschools and then graduated in. By that time, I was working at a public school and as their preschool teacher, director, and then I found out that as that position I wouldn't get paid as a teacher. So that was nice. UM, so I stayed with that position for another year and then the Superintendent asked me if I was interested in special Ed. I'm like, well, sure. I'm just not certified in that. I was early childhood and I said, but I've always had a desire for that. I mean, way back then I wanted to be a teacher for the hearing impaired, but that just didn't come to for it tradition. But he's like, well, you know, think about it. Talk about it and he said, I'll give you a couple of days and then, you know, let me know. Umm, the next day he calls me and says. So what do you think? That wasn't a couple days, but sure, I think I will cause they had an elementary speed opening and so I said, yeah, I'll think I'll try four. He goes OK. Come over today at three and interview. I'm like Mr P, I'm in jeans. I'm in preschool clothes. I am not. He's like, don't worry back. Don't worry about them. So that's how I got in to teaching special Ed. And so that was a a huge change for me just because I I was able then to collaborate more with gen ed teachers and find that commonality of the students or our students instead of this is a speed student. This is your student, so we really were tired on that collaboration. UM and got that mindset change from the what the previous speed teacher had done, and we became a blue ribbon school. Because of that work, so that was really huge. And then I just continue to inspect and and the kept shifting to where I kept taking leadership roles. So that's how I got into admin. Umm. And then my my thought was if I can help more teachers become better teachers, then I can help more students exponentially versus just my little classroom. So that kind of why did that? So I was in K12 for 15 years before becoming into higher Ed, and that was just because it was a whim of the position came open and my husband's like, this is up your alley. And I was like, well, I'm not supposed to leave K12 yet. I can't retire, I said. But I'll try this to see and here I am so.

Appendix E

Journal Prompts

Journal Prompt #1: Explain your most memorable personal mentorship experience.

Journal Prompt #2: Explain what motivated you to seek or prohibited you from seeking

mentorship opportunities for yourself.

Journal Prompt #3: Explain an opportunity you had to mentor someone else (peer, superior,

subordinate, student).

Journal Prompt #4: In your own words, describe the difference between formal and informal

mentorship and explain which one is more beneficial. Please include examples.

Appendix F

Participant Journal Entry Sample

***These journal entries have been scrubbed for any personally identifiable information.**

Journal Prompt #1: Explain your most memorable personal mentorship experience.

One of the best mentors I ever had was a man who loved teamwork. He would share everything he knew with us so we could be successful in our individual taskings, collectively work on bigger projects in the conference room so we could all function and learn together, and ensure everyone felt involved. This individual had heart, tact, knowledge, professionalism, expertise, and exceptional personal skills. His mentorship impacted me to the point where I wanted to emulate those same attributes to those I was able to mentor in the future.

Journal Prompt #2: Explain what motivated you to seek or prohibited you from seeking mentorship opportunities for yourself.

I currently have a terrific mentor at [OMITTED]! Our organization mandates a mentor to each online professor, which I appreciate. I seek out her help quite frequently, especially when we begin new procedures or software updates. She reaches out twice a week to provide a check-in through Microsoft Teams, but she also creates events where we can all virtually meet online to catch up on tasks, upcoming events, and to see if we need any assistance or have questions. She is always available to our team for prayer as well!

Journal Prompt #3: Explain an opportunity you had to mentor someone else (peer, superior, subordinate, student).

One semester I mentored a doctoral student in his scholarly writing process by using the 7th Edition American Psychological Association (APA) guide. When he first started with [OMITTED] University, he expressed that he had zero experience with APA and this course was his very first after over a decade off from college. Weekly he would submit papers to which I would assist him with his title page, in-text citations, research skills, reference page and the formatting of references, grammar and spelling, paragraph outlines, and creating a product that would pass the rubric criteria. The result for him at the end of eight weeks was truly remarkable! This gentleman worked harder than most students I have every semester and he expressed a level of gratefulness that was deeply humbling. This student now helps others around him, teaching them the lessons he learned and mastered. I could not be more proud of him!

Journal Prompt #4: In your own words, describe the difference between formal and informal mentorship and explain which one is more beneficial. Please include examples.

Formal mentoring seems more structured, objective-based, and specific in method. I did have an informal mentor when I worked in Government Service who is currently a GS15. She would review my Individual Development Plan (IDP) twice a year, check on my progress monthly, and even recommend training and courses for my professional development. We still communicate since we established a good friendship years ago. I would have to say, the point of need is what dictates which type of mentor is more beneficial. Informal mentors are beneficial, as those relationships are more casual and easy-going. I personally feel like the Holy Spirit should be our forever formal mentor, while we have informal mentors through this life for whatever our point-of-need (e.g., education, guidance, support, counsel, training, feedback, how-

to tasks, etc.) which comes at different lengths of time throughout our life. "To everything there

is a season, and a time to every purpose under the Heaven…" Ecclesiastes 3:1.

Appendix G

Questionnaire Questions

1. What are some strategies to improve educator retention?

2. Explain how mentorship would or would not be a useful tool for educator retention.

3. How would you implement effective mentorship?

4. What are the intended outcomes of effective mentorship?

5. What would effective mentorship have to include in order to be a standard tool for

educator retention?

Appendix H

Sample of Participant Questionnaire Responses

*These responses have been scrubbed for any personally identifiable information.

1. What are some strategies to improve educator retention?

Performance incentives, mentorship and development programs, promotion opportunities.

2. Explain how mentorship would or would not be a useful tool for educator retention.

Mentorship would be a useful tool for educator retention by establishing a long-term care

program for employees that seeks to improve their performance over time, address employee

issues, and create shared understandings of the vision and mission of the organization.

3. How would you implement effective mentorship?

Deliberate counseling program to tailor performance feedback, discussion issues, and receive

bottom-up feedback.

4. What are the intended outcomes of effective mentorship?

To improve overall employee performance of employees through professional development,

increased job satisfaction, enhanced work culture, and candid feedback from employees
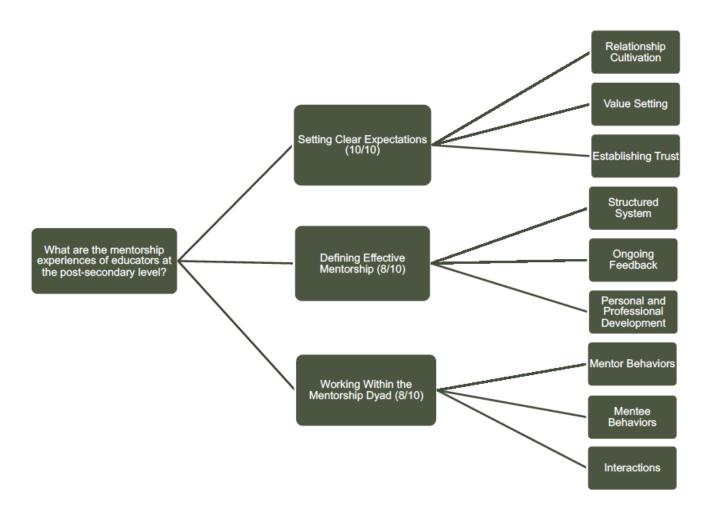
5. What would effective mentorship have to include in order to be a standard tool for

educator retention?

A counseling program to review performance, provide feedback, and address issues between

educator/administration.

Appendix I

Themes and Sub-Themes

*Numbers underneath each theme represent the number of participants that mentioned the theme.