International Journal of Social Science and Humanities
www.humanitiesjournals.com
Online ISSN: 2664-8628; Print ISSN: 2664-861X
Received: 04-11-2018; Accepted: 06-12-2018; Published: 06-01-2019
Volume 1; Issue 1; 2019; Page No. 24-28

Principal tenure and elementary school distinction designations in texas: experience clearly matters

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Abstract
In this Texas state wide study, the degree to which principal tenure was related to Texas elementary school accountability ratings in the 2016-2017 school year was addressed. Inferential statistical procedures revealed the presence of statistically significant differences in principal tenure between Texas elementary schools that met or did not meet the four designation distinctions: (a) Top 25% Closing Performance Gaps Distinction, (b) ELA/Reading Academic Achievement Distinction, (c) Mathematics Academic Achievement Distinction, and (d) Science Academic Achievement Distinction. Elementary schools that met any one of the four designation distinctions had principals with statistically significantly more years of experience than elementary schools that did not meet any one of these four designation distinctions. As such, evidence was established that principal experience clearly matters with respect to student academic success. Implications for policy and for practice, as well as recommendations for future research, were discussed.

Keywords: distinction designations, inexperienced principals, moderately experienced principals, experienced principals, texas academic performance reports, state of texas assessments of academic readiness, student success, tenure

Introduction

Principal leadership directly affects student achievement (Witziers & Krüger, 2003) [19]. This research finding has resulted in experienced principals being assigned to schools that are in need of immediate learning strategies and intervention protocols that will improve student academic success. In a recent investigation, Sturgis, Shiflett, and Tanner (2017) [16] reviewed the relationship in student academic success and leadership background of campus leaders at high minority and high poverty schools. They determined that principals with two or more years of principal experience at the same school had positive effects on student academic success. Sturgis *et al*. (2017) [16] concluded that principal experience influenced the overall academic rating at school campuses. However, it is difficult to retain strong leaders at low-performing school campuses that require them to use more of their time and energy than at high-performing campuses.

Béteille, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2012) [2] examined principal turnover as it related to school performance and leadership changes that occurred at a large urban school district in Florida. They determined that principal turnover can negatively affect student academic achievement and teacher retention. As such, they contended that some principals often use schools that are populated with students who have a low-socioeconomic status to seek a promotion. Based upon their findings, Béteille *et al*. (2012) [2] recommended that vacant principal positions should be filled with administrators who have leadership experience. Miller (2013) [10] also argued that principal turnover caused student achievement to decline after a review of archival data from a 12-year study that contained data that reflected poor school performance that preceded principal transition to a new campus.

In a recent study, Azaiez and Slate (2017) [1] examined the relationship between principal tenure at the same elementary school campus and student reading and mathematics performance. They analyzed a national dataset, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten cohort from 1998-1999, in the United States. In their investigation, Azaiez and Slate (2017) [1] established the presence of statistically significant differences in both reading and mathematics performance by principal tenure. Elementary school campuses with principals who had six or more years of leadership experience at that campus had students with higher reading and mathematics performance than elementary school campuses with principals who had less than six years of leadership experience.

Although researchers (Blazar & Kraft, 2016; Munck, 2007) [12] have traditionally compared teachers to student academic success, Dhuey and Smith (2018) [7] measured the effect of principal experience on student test scores in North Carolina. Statistically significant differences were present in principal experience and student academic achievement on reading and mathematics standardized tests. An important finding was the detrimental effect on student academic achievement when a novice principal assumes leadership. Student achievement continued to decline the first two years after a new principal.

Principal preparation programs encourage novice principals who are new to their leadership roles to approach situations and/or concerns that arise at their school campus with their wisdom and their educational experience. Brockmeier, Starr, Green, Pate, and Leech (2013) [7] examined predictions of principal educational background and principal stability that may affect student achievement when school-level variables are compared to elementary school student achievement. The authors concluded that principal educational experience did not compare to principal stability and principal tenure. In conclusion, researchers (Brockmeier *et al*., 2013) [4] have discovered that principal leadership experience is directly linked to student academic achievement. Principal experience has a substantial influence on student academic gains.

Statement of the Problem

Limited research has been published regarding principals' years of experience and state accountability measures. Azaiez and Slate (2017) [1] contended that school district officials struggle to recruit, retain, and develop highly effective principals who would ensure every campus is meeting accountability measures. Texas has implemented new accountability measures and no published research articles were located in which the relationship between principal experience and the new Texas accountability ratings had been addressed.

Purpose of the Study

Four purposes were present in this study. The first purpose of this study was to determine the degree to which principal tenure might differ between elementary schools that achieved the Top 25% Closing Performance Gaps Distinction and elementary schools that did not achieve this designation distinction. The second purpose was to ascertain the extent to which principal tenure might differ between elementary schools that achieved the English Language Arts/Reading Academic Achievement Distinction and elementary schools that did not achieve this designation distinction. The third purpose was to determine the degree to which principal tenure might differ between elementary schools that achieved the Mathematics Academic Achievement Distinction and elementary schools that did not achieve this designation distinction. The fourth purpose was to ascertain the extent to which principal tenure might differ between elementary schools that achieved the Science Academic Achievement Distinction and elementary schools that did not achieve this designation distinction.

Significance of the Study

Williams, Bryan, Morrison, and Scott (2017) [18] conducted studies in which they have connected teacher instruction and counselors' interactions with student academic success. Limited information exists, however, regarding the relationship of principal tenure and student academic success. The Texas Academic Performance Reports have relevant data and progress measures that might be used to determine the relationship between principals' years of experience and student academic achievement. The designation distinctions that were addressed in the study from the Texas Academic Performance Reports include: (a) Top 25% Closing Performance Gaps Distinction, (b) ELA/Reading Academic Achievement Distinction, (c) Mathematics Academic Achievement Distinction, and (d) Science Academic Achievement Distinction.

Practitioners who might benefit from the findings of this empirical investigation include superintendents, district instructional coaches, and faculty members who are responsible for principal preparation programs. New principals may benefit from the results of the study. School districts may use the data to determine principal assignments at campuses that may benefit from an experienced school leader.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in the study: (a) What is the difference in principal tenure by the Top 25% Closing Performance Gaps Distinction?; (b) What is the difference in principal tenure by the ELA/Reading Academic Achievement Distinction?; (c) What is the difference in principal tenure by the Mathematics Academic Achievement Distinction?; and (d) What is the difference in principal tenure by the Science Academic Achievement Distinction?

Method

Research Design

A quantitative, non-experimental, causal comparative research design was used to conduct the study (Creswell & Creswell 2018) using independent variables (i.e., principal tenure) and dependent variables (i.e., four distinction designations). Archival data were retrieved from the Texas Academic Performance Reports for the 2016-2017 school year. The independent variable in the study was principal tenure. Four dependent variables were in this investigation: (a) Top 25% Closing Gaps Distinction, (b) ELA/Reading Academic Achievement Distinction, (c) Mathematics Academic Achievement Distinction, and (d) Science Academic Achievement Distinction.

Participants and Instrumentation

Participants in the study included elementary principals and students who completed the State of Texas Academic Achievement and Readiness Exams. For the purpose of the study, Experienced Principals represented the head instructional leader of a school who had more than 10 years of experience, Moderately Experienced Principals represented the head instructional leader of a school who had 5-10 years of experience, and Inexperienced Principals represented the head instructional leader of a school who had less than five years of experience. Data were downloaded from the Texas Education Agency website from archival datasets that were retrieved from the Texas Academic Performance Report. The annual report detailed the range of students' performance in Texas elementary schools and school districts. Data were then converted to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) data.

Per the Texas Education Agency website, distinction designations were earned if a "district is rated A, B, C, or D and meets the distinction designation. The campus is rated *Met Standard* and meets the criteria for the distinction designation" (2018). No distinctions were earned if "the district is rated F or does not meet the criteria for the distinction designation. The campus is rated *Improvement Required* or does not meet the distinction designation" (Texas Academic Performance Report 2018). The Top 25% Closing Gaps Distinction Designation was awarded for outstanding performance in closing students' academic achievement gaps was ranked in the top 25% of campuses that were in its comparison group. The Academic Achievement in ELA/Reading Distinction Designation was awarded for outstanding academic achievement in ELA/Reading based on the outcome of performance indicators. The Academic Achievement in Mathematics Distinction Designation was awarded for outstanding academic achievement in mathematics based on the outcome of performance indicators. The Academic Achievement in Science Distinction Designation was awarded for outstanding academic achievement in mathematics based on the outcome of performance indicators.

Results

To ascertain whether principal tenure differed between Texas elementary schools that met or did not meet four designation distinctions, Pearson chi-square procedures were conducted. The

statistical procedure was viewed as the optimal statistical procedure to use because frequency data were present for (a) the Top 25% Closing Performance Gaps Distinction, (b) the ELA/Reading Academic Achievement Distinction, (c) the Mathematics Academic Achievement Distinction, and (d) by the Science Academic Achievement Distinction and for principal tenure. Because these variables were categorical, chi-squares are the statistical procedure of choice (Slate & Rojas-LeBouef, 2011) [15]. In addition, with the large sample sizes, the available sample size per cell was more than five. Therefore, the assumptions for using a Pearson chi-square procedure were met.

For the first research question, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 37.07$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was small, .11 (Cohen, 1988) [5]. As delineated in Table 1, elementary schools that met the Top 25% Closing Performance Gaps Distinction designation had a statistically significant higher percentage of Experienced Principals, 5 to 10 percentage points more than schools with Moderately Experienced Principals and Inexperienced Principals. In addition, schools who met the Top 25% Closing Performance Gaps Distinction designation had a statistically higher percentage, 6 percentage points more, of Moderately Experienced Principals than Inexperienced Principals. Schools that met this distinction were 50% more likely to have Experienced Principals than Inexperienced Principals.

Table 1: Frequencies and Percentages of the Top 25% Closing Performance Gaps Distinction at Elementary Schools by Principal Tenure

	Met Standard	**Did Not Meet Standard**
Principal Experience	*n* of schools	*n* of schools
Inexperienced	(*n* = 146) 20.1%	(*n* = 582) 79.9%
Moderately Experienced	(*n* = 149) 26.1%	(*n* = 422) 73.9%
Experienced	(*n* = 641) 31.7%	(*n* = 1,384) 68.3%

Regarding the second research question, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 29.44$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was below small, .09 (Cohen, 1988) [5]. As presented in Table 2, elementary schools that met the ELA/Reading Academic Achievement Distinction designation had a statistically significantly higher percentage of Experienced Principals, 5 to 10 percentage points more, than schools with Moderately Experienced Principals and Inexperienced Principals respectively. In addition, schools who met the ELA/Reading Academic Achievement Distinction designation had a statistically higher percentage, 7 percentage points more, of Moderately Experienced Principals than Inexperienced Principals. Schools that met this distinction were 50% more likely to have Experienced Principals than Inexperienced Principals.

Table 2: Frequencies and Percentages of ELA/Reading Academic Achievement Distinction at Elementary Schools by Principal Tenure

	Met Standard	**Did Not Meet Standard**
Principal Experience	*n* of schools	*n* of schools
Inexperienced	(*n* = 139) 19.1%	(*n* = 588) 80.9%
Moderately Experienced	(*n* = 146) 25.6%	(*n* = 425) 74.4%
Experienced	(*n* = 596) 29.4%	(*n* = 1,430) 70.6%

Concerning the third research question, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 19.82$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was below small, .08 (Cohen, 1988) [5]. As delineated in Table 3, elementary schools that met the Mathematics Academic Achievement Distinction designation had a statistically significantly higher percentage of Experienced Principals, 5 to 10 percentage points more, than Moderately Experienced Principals and Inexperienced Principals, respectively. In addition, schools who met the Mathematics Academic Achievement Distinction designation had a statistically higher percentage, 6 percentage points more, of Moderately Experienced Principals than Inexperienced Principals. Schools that met this distinction were 50% more likely to have Experienced Principals than Inexperienced Principals.

Table 3: Frequencies and Percentages of Mathematics Academic Achievement Distinction at Elementary Schools by Principal Tenure

	Met Standard	**Did Not Meet Standard**
Principal Experience	*n* of schools	*n* of schools
Inexperienced	(*n* = 118) 16.2%	(*n* = 609) 83.8%
Moderately Experienced	(*n* = 123) 21.5%	(*n* = 448) 78.5%
Experienced	(*n* = 490) 24.2%	(*n* = 1,536) 75.8%

For the fourth research question, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 29.08$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was below small, .09 (Cohen, 1988) [5]. As presented in Table 4, elementary schools that met the Science Academic Achievement Distinction designation had a statistically significantly higher percentage of Experienced Principals, 5 to 10 percentage points more, than Moderately Experienced Principals and Inexperienced Principals, respectively. In addition, schools who met the Science Academic Achievement Distinction designation had a statistically higher percentage, 6 percentage points more, of Moderately Experienced Principals than Inexperienced Principals. Schools that met this distinction were 50% more likely to have Experienced Principals than Inexperienced Principals.

Table 4: Frequencies and Percentages of Science Academic Achievement Distinction at Elementary Schools by Principal Tenure

	Met Standard	**Did Not Meet Standard**
Principal Experience	*n* of schools	*n* of schools
Inexperienced	(*n* = 144) 20.1%	(*n* = 573) 79.9%
Moderately Experienced	(*n* = 149) 26.3%	(*n* = 418) 73.7%
Experienced	(*n* = 615) 30.5%	(*n* = 1,404) 69.5%

Discussion

Information regarding principal tenure and elementary school distinction designations were obtained from the Texas Academic Performance Report for the 2016-2017 school year. In this statewide analysis, Experienced Principals had more than 10 years of experience, Moderately Experienced Principals had 5-10 years of experience, and Inexperienced Principals had less than five years of experience. Principal experience clearly mattered in all four of the designation distinctions previously mentioned. The extremely low numbers of elementary schools that met the designation distinction and the high number of schools that did

not meet the distinction designation had higher percentages of Inexperienced Principals than their counterparts. As principal experience increased, the number of schools that met the distinction designation increased. As principal experience decreased, the number of schools the met distinction designation decreased. The number of elementary schools that did not meet the distinction were much larger than the number of elementary schools that did meet the distinction. The percentage difference between schools with Experienced Principals and Moderately Experienced Principals supported research findings regarding that principals with experience were aware of the readiness standards that students had to master for their schools to meet progress measures. A stair-step effect was present in the results for all four statistical analyses. Elementary schools that met the four designation distinctions had higher percentages of Experienced Principals, followed by Moderately Experienced Principals. Elementary schools that did not meet the four designation distinctions had the highest percentages of Inexperienced Principals. Experienced Principals knew which supports to provide teachers to minimize students' academic achievement gaps. The results for designation distinctions were consistent throughout the study. After data were analyzed from the study, Moderately Experienced Principals efforts at elementary school campuses that earned designation distinctions was also revealed to have a higher statistically significant difference than Inexperienced Principals.

Implications for Policy and for Practice

Based upon the findings of this Texas statewide investigation, several implications for policy and for practice can be made. First, legislators and policymakers may use the results from this empirical Texas statewide investigation to assign principals in schools where students would benefit academically from the experience that an administrator might use to enhance student achievement. Practitioners might use the results presented from the study to gain insight on the experience that principals need to move their students to their next academic achievement level.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based upon the results of this Texas statewide analysis, several recommendations for future research can be made. First, researchers are encouraged to replicate this study in other states. The extent to which these results based on Texas data would be generalizable to other states is not known. Second, because this study was limited solely to elementary schools, researchers are encouraged to extend this study to middle schools and to high schools. The degree to which results based upon elementary schools would be generalizable to other school levels is not known. Finally, researchers are encouraged to examine principal demographic characteristics such as gender and ethnicity/race to ascertain the degree to which they might be related to student academic success.

Conclusion

In conclusion, elementary schools that met the four designation distinctions had principals with statistically significantly more years of experience than did elementary schools that did not meet these four designation distinctions. Clearly evident in the results is that principal experience is related to student academic success. Careful thought should be given by educational leaders when they reassign principals to a different school campus.

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