

Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Evaluations at Small Schools: A Qualitative Case Study

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Abstract

Each year in the United States, school district officials spend significant time and effort evaluating teacher effectiveness. Teacher evaluation procedures have evolved through the years from a process by which local officials monitored teacher practices to assure conformity to one in which teachers and administrators work collaboratively using research-based methods to measure teacher performance. The problem was administrators often do not know how teachers feel about the effectiveness of the evaluation process. Although researchers have measured teacher perceptions of the evaluation process, scant research has been conducted on teacher perceptions of the process at small schools, creating a research gap this study aimed to address. Using the concept of self-efficacy as a framework, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand better how teachers perceived the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation process at a small school. Participants in the study included 20 teachers at a small, rural, central Illinois school who had been evaluated at least once at the time of the study. Interviews were conducted and recorded for thematic analysis and reporting. Data were uploaded into NVivo, and initial codes and final themes were developed. The investigation revealed the following: (a) teachers understand the need to be evaluated, (b) the evaluation process is too formal with excessive paperwork, and (c) the teacher evaluation process is ineffective. The research informs school administrators of the need to reevaluate teacher evaluation processes to improve effectiveness. Additional research is needed to determine administrators' perceptions of the effectiveness of teacher evaluation processes.

Keywords: educator evaluation, teacher perception, teacher effectiveness, teacher quality

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Grady and Annie, who gave up the kitchen table every Saturday and Sunday so I could work. A special thank you goes to my wife, Polly, who pretended to care about what I was writing and nodded and smiled at the appropriate times! I am so happy you are here to see this thing come to an end.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Thomas Jefferson believed so much in the importance of public education that in his 1806 State of the Union address, he proposed an amendment to establish public education (Burch, 2020). Although many of Jefferson's beliefs about Native Americans, expansionism, and his relationship with a slave, Sally Hemings, have come under scrutiny in recent years, his commitment to the advancement of public education has remained universally unchallenged (Carpenter, 2013). As Horace Mann described, public education in the United States is supposed to be a great equalizer of the conditions of men—implying no matter the conditions, education puts all on equal footing (Agostinelli et al., 2020). If education is to be a cornerstone of a nation's strength and equality, teacher quality is paramount. Teacher quality has been demonstrated as the single most important in-school factor influencing student success (Aldeman, 2017). If teacher quality is vital, an effective, efficient, and accepted teacher evaluation system is necessary to ensure classrooms are led by high-quality professionals (Taylor & Tyler, 2012).

Teacher evaluations have been described by researchers as an opportunity for teachers and administrators to collaborate and improve classroom performance, ultimately improving student achievement (Reinhorn et al., 2017). Although methods may vary, all 50 states in the United States conduct teacher evaluations (Ross & Walsh, 2019). Administrators can use teacher evaluation ratings to determine bonuses, establish reduction-in-force lists, determine the need for teacher remediation or professional development, or dismiss low-rated teachers. This case study was conducted to determine how teachers in a small school perceived the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation process. If administrators understand how teachers feel about the effectiveness

of the evaluation process, policies and procedures can be implemented to address those perceptions.

Although this study focused on teacher perceptions of the evaluation process at the study site, the study results have wide-ranging implications for various stakeholders. Teacher evaluation is an expensive, time-consuming process. As a result, teacher evaluation ratings are often artificially inflated by administrators who do not have time to commit fully to the process (Shaked, 2018). Administrators can use results to study further how to maximize benefits from the time, effort, and money invested in the process and adjust to improve the process and outcomes. The goal of teacher evaluation is to improve teacher performance, which has been demonstrated to improve student achievement (Derrington & Campbell, 2018). Teachers can use study results to work collaboratively with the administration to create an evaluation process seen as beneficial to all stakeholders. School boards are responsible for budgeting and expenditure and can use results to study future teacher evaluation processes and maximize cost benefits while improving student achievement.

To establish a basis for the study, Chapter 1 addresses the background of the problem, the study purpose, and the significance of the study. Three research questions were constructed to guide the research, and self-efficacy provided the study's theoretical framework. Chapter 1 includes definitions of terms commonly used in the study and common assumptions which could not be demonstrated but were critical to the meaningfulness of the study. Scope, delimitations, and limitations possibly impacting study findings are addressed.

Background of the Problem

Evaluating employee effectiveness has been a regular business practice for a long time, but evaluating teacher effectiveness has only become a prominent practice in education since the

early 1900s (Taylor & Tyler, 2012). Although teacher activity has been monitored since the advent of U.S. public education, early evaluations focused on assuring teachers espoused community values and mores instead of measuring student performance to determine teacher effectiveness (Jewell, 2017). Recent legislation and executive actions, including No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top, pushed states and school districts to connect teacher evaluations to student performance, often withholding funding from states and schools failing to demonstrate acceptable student improvement (Lavigne & Chamberlain, 2016). Increased emphasis on student performance and student achievement has led to school districts implementing a battery of different teacher evaluation tools and methods. These evaluations often lead to unreliable results for various reasons, including the different variables that play into student performance but remain outside the immediate control of teachers (Warring, 2015). In one case study, fewer than 1% of teachers were rated as unsatisfactory, yet, a survey of teachers in the school revealed 57% of them could identify at least one ineffective teacher (Kraft & Gilmour, 2017). Consequently, it is not surprising that teachers may view evaluations as ineffective and inefficient uses of time, even though improving student achievement is a priority (Kraft & Gilmour, 2017).

A review of the literature revealed research exists supporting that teachers often perceive the evaluation process as effective depending upon the evaluation method, the evaluator conducting the assessment, and the goal of the evaluation. Donahue and Vogel (2018) concluded teachers perceive teacher evaluations as more credible when a standardized tool, like a rubric, is used to help reduce evaluator bias and clarify expectations. In many states, the Danielson framework for teaching provides a rubric against which teacher performance is measured (Kettler & Reddy, 2017). Physical education teachers were found to perceive the evaluation

process as beneficial when evaluators were content experts and qualified to conduct evaluations (Norris et al., 2017). When the goal of the teacher evaluation is employee development, as opposed to establishing awards or punishments, the process can be productive and lead to performance improvement (Taylor & Tyler, 2012). In a study of evaluation processes, Donahue and Vogel (2018) discovered 93% of teachers valued the system and believed the process made them better teachers, demonstrating teacher evaluations can be valuable tools for performance improvement when done correctly.

Morris et al. (2018) discovered a lack of support for teacher evaluations based on several factors, including student traits beyond teacher control, unclear expectations, and inconsistency in the process. Low income, ethnicity, gender, and student age have been demonstrated to impact student achievement on standardized tests negatively. Nevertheless, these tests are often used as part of a teacher's overall evaluation rating (Morris et al., 2018). Evaluator expectations of teacher performance are often vague or unclear, although researchers have demonstrated teacher performance is improved when teachers understand expectations in advance (Mireles-Rios et al., 2019). Evaluations can differ based on the instruments used, the person conducting the evaluation, or the group of students being evaluated. These inconsistencies can lead to a lack of trust in evaluation ratings or feedback provided to teachers (Alexander et al., 2017).

Though all 50 states require teacher evaluation of some design (Reinhorn et al., 2017), administrators may not know how staff perceives the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation process. Teacher evaluation processes are intended to measure and improve teacher performance because high-quality teachers have been shown to have a tremendous impact on student achievement (Derrington & Campbell, 2018). Evaluations are performed and results delivered to teachers; yet, administrators may not realize whether teachers see value in the expensive, time-

consuming process. Research has been conducted to measure teacher and administrator perception of the evaluation process; however, the size of the school or school district where previous research was conducted has not been considered. The research site for this study was a small school (i.e., fewer than 200 students in a K–8 school) with a small teaching staff.

Relationships between teachers and administrators can significantly differ from a small school to a large school (Preston & Barnes, 2018). These differences in relationships could result in teachers perceiving the effectiveness of teacher evaluations differently than large-school colleagues. Results from this case study help fill this gap in existing research.

Statement of the Problem

The problem was teacher evaluations occur in schools in the United States every year; yet, administrators often do not know how staff members perceive the effectiveness of these evaluations. Evaluations are necessary for the continued development of teachers' and students' success (Warring, 2015). Administrators conduct evaluations for skill development, teacher retention and firing decisions, bonus awards, and promotions (Lin et al., 2020), but little research is available that examined whether teachers felt these evaluations were beneficial. In this case study involving a small, rural elementary school in central Illinois, research was conducted to determine participant perceptions of the teacher evaluation system.

The research topic is current, relevant, and important because of the sheer number of people subject to, and impacted by, the teacher evaluation process each year. In the 2017–2018 school year, there were 4.1 million public school teachers in the United States subject to evaluation (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Time-consuming evaluations have to be completed by administrators or other certified evaluators. As teacher quality is closely connected to student performance (Aldeman, 2017), millions of students are ultimately impacted

by teacher evaluations and have a stake in the effectiveness of the process. Researching this topic at this case study site helped provide insight and filled a research gap on teachers' perceptions of the evaluation process in a small-school environment, arguably a different educational environment than large schools in terms of teacher–administrator relationships (Preston & Barnes, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the teacher evaluation process at a small school and what may be done to improve the process. Teacher evaluations are intended to measure and record teacher effectiveness; yet, administrators still may not understand if teachers perceive the process as beneficial after conducting evaluations. This research study assisted administrators at the case study site in determining if teachers perceived the evaluation process as valuable and effective or if the process should be altered to facilitate teacher development and improvement.

A qualitative case study was chosen for this research. Case studies are practical and widely accepted methods of studying a specific situation or circumstance, such as teacher evaluations at a small school (Gustafsson, 2017; Yin, 2018). The research consisted of personal interviews with 20 teachers who had been subject to a performance evaluation at the study site. Thematic analysis organized the research and identified themes discovered during a careful review of the data. NVivo qualitative analysis software helped with coding, collecting, and analyzing information gleaned from the interviews.

One goal of the research was to develop data on participant perceptions of the teacher evaluation system at the study site. Teacher evaluation processes are intended to improve teacher performance, which has been demonstrated to improve student achievement (Derrington &

Campbell, 2018). Research into how teachers perceived the evaluation process developed information on whether the teacher evaluation process achieves the intended purpose. Another goal of the research was to determine what, if anything, can be done to improve the evaluation process within the constraints of Illinois state statute and the teachers' collective bargaining agreement.

Significance of the Study

Teacher evaluations have been conducted since the early days of public education. The goals of the teacher evaluation process have progressed from assuring teachers teach the mores and values of the community primarily to using teacher evaluation ratings in some states to award bonuses to high-achieving teachers or dismiss underperforming ones (Jewell, 2017; Wirt & Kirst, 2009). Several studies have cast doubt on the effectiveness of these evaluation processes (Alexander et al., 2017; Derrington & Campbell, 2018). Results from this study can advance knowledge of the problem by developing data examining what participants found either useful or ineffective about the process.

Teachers can benefit from this research, as the thoughts, feelings, ideas, and recommendations of an entire group can be synthesized into a single report of perceptions of the evaluation process. With this information, teachers can confirm the process is valuable and continue as structured, or determine improvements are needed and work with the administration to create a more effective process. A search of relevant literature revealed evaluation results are usually used to measure a teacher's performance (Ross & Walsh, 2019), but no research was discovered that explored whether administrators alter the evaluation process based on teacher feedback. Administrators can benefit from the results of this research by learning how the teaching staff feels about the evaluation process and working to adjust areas where teachers

found the process lacking. The school board may deem it necessary to change district policy on teacher evaluations as participants indicated overall displeasure with the effectiveness of the process. Finally, students can benefit from this research if teachers use the results to create teacher evaluation systems that help produce better, more effective classroom instruction.

The ability to hire, train, and develop quality teachers is paramount to improving the quality of public education in the United States. Scholars, educators, and lawmakers have often proclaimed problems in education could be virtually eliminated if high-quality teachers could be quickly hired and developed (Alexander et al., 2017). Research is clear that high-quality teachers produce higher-achieving students (Aldeman, 2017; Taylor & Tyler, 2012), so efforts to improve the quality of teachers through an improved evaluation system would be beneficial to students and society as a whole. Lifetime earnings have been demonstrated to be higher for students with higher-achieving, more experienced teachers in grade levels as low as kindergarten (Chetty et al., 2011), and higher incomes for graduates can result in positive social change through reductions in the number of people living in poverty. Suppose teacher evaluations are perceived as valuable and effective, and teacher performance improves due to the evaluations; in that case, positive social change can occur as incomes increase, improving the socioeconomic status of teachers.

Research Questions

In this study, the researcher examined teacher perceptions of the teacher evaluation process at a small, rural school. Using interviews to explore how teachers felt about the evaluation process allowed the researcher to dig below the surface to examine and understand participants' thought processes (Staller, 2015). Qualitative studies help fill research gaps by allowing researchers to determine how and why participants think and feel a particular way

instead of participants providing quantitative scores or ratings (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The following research questions guided the qualitative case study:

Research Question 1: How do teachers in a small, rural, central Illinois school describe the teacher evaluation process?

Research Question 2: What are the teachers' perceptions about the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system at a small, rural, central Illinois school?

Research Question 3: What ideas do teachers at a small, rural, central Illinois school have to improve the teacher assessment process at the school?

Theoretical Framework

Self-efficacy is the idea that an individual can succeed at any challenge presented and believe in one's abilities (Mireles-Rios et al., 2019; Wilde & Hsu, 2019) and served as the theoretical framework guiding this research. The theory derives from Bandura's social cognitive theory (Nguyen, 2016), which provides a model for understanding human behavior in certain situations. A person's self-efficacy level impacts their performance, with low self-efficacy individuals struggling with fear and insecurity. In contrast, individuals with high self-efficacy can easily overcome fear and doubt and envision success (Wilde & Hsu, 2019). Efficient and effective teacher evaluation systems could improve the quality of classroom teachers, increasing self-efficacy in teachers and improving student achievement.

Bandura believed there are many causes of high self-efficacy (Yancey, 2019). Being successful in one area often leads to success in other areas. If teachers receive helpful and effective teacher evaluations from trusted and knowledgeable evaluators, this success could enhance teacher self-efficacy and improve student achievement. Through writing about online learning, Bradley et al. (2017) discovered a strong connection between past success and future

success. Other causes of high self-efficacy include observational learning, verbal encouragement or discouragement, and feedback (Yancey, 2019), which are further elaborated on in the literature review in Chapter 2.

Self-efficacy relates to the study approach and research questions because the overall goal of teacher evaluations is to improve student achievement by improving teacher performance (Warring, 2015). The study was approached with the theory if administrators know how the staff feels about the teacher evaluation process, adjustments can be made if the research presents changes should be made. A process that (a) fully engages teachers; (b) provides critical, positive feedback; and (c) is designed to help teachers instead of punishing them can help improve teacher self-efficacy (Mireles-Rios et al., 2019). Research questions were designed to elicit details about teachers' feelings about the process and recommendations for improvement. Data were analyzed to locate themes on teacher perception of the process; thus, results may be actionable by study site administrators and administrators in other small schools. Self-efficacy was a useful, research-based theoretical framework to guide the study.

Definitions of Terms

Research often involves unique terms or definitions. Definitions and terms provide clarity for words used throughout the research. The following standard terms were defined:

Perception is how people think about and evaluate something, how the five senses interpret surroundings, or the ability to notice and understand situations quickly (Ou, 2017).

School Administrator is a leader responsible for managing the people, environment, and various programs—including conducting teacher evaluations—and curriculum at a school (Cobanoglu & Yurek, 2018).

Teacher Effectiveness measures the effects of a high-quality teacher on gains in student achievement, often measured in terms of student improvement on standardized tests or other performance assessments (Bardach & Klassen, 2020).

Teacher Evaluation is a system or process wherein the skill and proficiency of teachers are measured for sanction, reward, or teacher development. Components of teacher evaluation processes include classroom observations, student performance, student feedback, or a combination of the three (Bleiberg & Harbatkin, 2018).

Assumptions

Without realizing it, researchers inject their own beliefs and philosophical assumptions into their research. *Ethical validation* refers to researchers examining internal assumptions, like political and moral beliefs, to try and minimize the impact of those assumptions on the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is crucial that researchers are aware of these assumptions and carefully determine if these assumptions comprise part of the qualitative research study. If assumptions are to be made part of the research, disclosing the assumptions and writing about them in the research reports is imperative (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research is only as trustworthy as the quality of the data collected. As a source of evidence, interviews have strengths, such as providing insight into participants' personal views and providing the researcher with details about specific case study topics. Interviews also suffer from inaccuracies due to insufficient participant recall, dishonesty of the participant, and response bias (Yin, 2018). The first assumption of the study was all participants provided honest and thorough answers to the interview questions and attempted to remain unbiased. Subject matter experts (SMEs) reviewed the research questions to ensure participants' answers would provide sufficient data. Another assumption of the study was all participants selected for this

study had participated in at least one evaluation at the case study site. The final assumption of the study was all teachers who volunteered cared about improving the effectiveness of teacher evaluations. These assumptions were necessary to gather data that were beneficial in answering the research questions.

Scope and Delimitation

Two primary steps in designing a qualitative case study are determining the case to be studied and the scope of the study. The scope of a study may be broadly or narrowly defined (Creswell & Poth, 2018), recognizing the breadth of a study impacts results. A study involving multiple cases can result in diluted results; the more cases are involved, the less in-depth analysis occurs of any particular case (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A single-case study was chosen for this research because of several factors described by Yin (2018). First, multiple-case studies often require resources beyond the means of a single researcher. Multiple cases involve more interviews, transcriptions, analyses, and ultimately, more time. Next, the single-case study allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the research problem at the study site—a small, central Illinois school. Broadening the scope to include other cases limits the depth of analysis conducted at any one research site due to time constraints. Finally, the scope of the study was limited to a single case because of the uniqueness of the school. The research site was a small school with fewer than 200 students. Finding other schools of similar size where the administration would allow staff to participate may have been problematic.

Researchers must make decisions that set boundaries, or delimitations, about the study to be conducted. One delimitation in this study involved the selection of a population to be studied. Even though administrators, the school board, parents, and students may all have perceptions of

the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system, participants in this study consisted only of teachers at the study site. Because the focus of the study was on teacher evaluations, only teachers who had experienced a formal evaluation at the study site participated. Another delimitation was the choice of a single research site as opposed to multiple sites. Yin (2018) wrote results from wider scoped, multiple-case studies are often more robust and persuasive. The choice of a qualitative case study was made primarily for time and resource constraints; as such, transferability could be impacted, as readers might determine results may not transfer to other research sites with such a small sample size and research site (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses in research affecting the applicability and generalization of study results and are inherent to the study rather than determined by the researcher (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). One limitation was the design of the research study. Qualitative research results may be viewed as less valid and reliable (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although a qualitative approach was selected for the study, a quantitative study could have been conducted and produced measurable, accurate, numbers-based data (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018).

The sample size was also a limitation of this qualitative research design. The chosen qualitative research design included structured interviews of 20 participants. Critics of qualitative research believe small sample sizes do not accurately represent the population, and results are not as reliable or valid (Mohajan, 2018). Having 20 participants may seem like a small sample compared to quantitative studies. Research has demonstrated saturation—the point at which no new data, theme, or codes are developed in the research—is minimized when the number of participants in a qualitative case study is between 15 and 20 (Vasileiou et al., 2018; Weller et al., 2018). The application of saturation principles supported the validity of purposive sampling.

Additional limitations include only examining the teacher evaluation process at one site. Other small school staff might have shared different perceptions of the process for various reasons discussed later in this study. Finally, the research site's teaching staff and participants consisted of only females because the population consisted of only females (other than the researcher). Single-sex sampling was a limitation because male teachers may have held different perceptions of the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system based on gender differences as opposed to any particular extrinsic issue. Measures taken to overcome validity, reliability, and transferability-related issues included maintaining prolonged contact with participants at the research site, allowing participants to review transcribed interviews before analysis, protecting data in a secure location, and thoroughly documenting the research processes (Birt et al., 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Yin, 2018).

Bias can influence study outcomes, but mitigation efforts were made to minimize the impact of bias. The researcher was a teacher at the research site and likely held preconceived notions about the evaluation process's effectiveness. To mitigate this bias, the researcher engaged in reflexivity, the practice of constantly evaluating and reflecting on personal biases during the study (Barrett et al., 2020). Participants completed member checks, and transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and signs of researcher bias. In addition to helping discover bias in reporting, member checks helped improve the validity of research results by improving the accuracy of participant data (Birt et al., 2016). Eliminating all personal bias in research is nearly impossible, but if researchers reveal potential biases up front, readers can better understand the context and draw their conclusions accordingly (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Chapter Summary

This qualitative case study aimed to determine how teachers feel about the teacher evaluation process at a small central Illinois school. Through personal interviews, the researcher attempted to determine if the teacher evaluation process at the research site is effective and if participants had ideas about improving the system. This research is essential because of the high number of public-school teachers, administrators, and students affected by the costly and time-consuming process of evaluating teachers. A highly trained, motivated, and effective teacher is the primary in-school driver of student success in the classroom (Aldeman, 2017; Taylor & Tyler, 2012). School board members and administrators will benefit from understanding how teachers feel about the effectiveness of the evaluation process and can determine if adjustments to the process are necessary. The purpose of Chapter 2 was to present a literature review consisting of a description of the theoretical framework guiding the research, a history of education and teacher evaluations in the United States, the importance of an effective teacher evaluation process, and the uniqueness of teacher evaluations in small schools.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Each year, millions of school teachers are evaluated to determine effectiveness. In all 50 states, administrators or other staff members evaluate teachers in some manner, including observation, student growth measurement, student feedback, or a combination of all three (Ross & Walsh, 2019). Evaluations are necessary and vital to the continued development of teachers and the success of students (Warring, 2015). The problem was teacher evaluations occur in schools in the United States every year; yet, administrators often do not know how staff members feel about the effectiveness of these evaluations. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the teacher evaluation process at a small school and what may be done to improve the process.

A literature review revealed the relevance and currency of examining teachers' perceptions of the teacher evaluation system. In the last 30 years, teachers have become more accountable for the quality of education in their classrooms than previous generations of teachers (Smith & Kubacka, 2017). After the U.S. presidential election of 2008, the Obama administration pursued improvement in public schools based on data demonstrating teacher quality as the single-most-important in-school factor influencing student performance (Aldeman, 2017). Additional research demonstrated most school districts ignored teacher in-class performance when making hiring, firing, promotion, or pay decisions, with 99% of schools in the study rating teachers as *satisfactory* (Kraft & Gilmour, 2017). With the increased scrutiny of teacher performance and formal teacher evaluations becoming more prevalent, examining teachers' perceptions of evaluation process effectiveness was necessary. Although there has been research conducted on the perceptions of teacher evaluation system effectiveness, there remains a gap in research on teacher evaluations at small schools. The upcoming sections include the

literature review strategy, theoretical framework of the study, and a review and synthesis of significant literature.

Literature Search Strategy

To assist in locating relevant information, various databases were used. ProQuest was the primary database used to review dissertations related to the topic. ERIC was widely used to locate journal articles. Google and Google Scholar were the main search engines used to search for relevant articles on the open Internet. Google Scholar was particularly beneficial in locating information, as searches were narrowed based on user search criteria, and the most recent data easily identified. Relevant information was identified using key search terms such as *evaluation*, *perception*, *effectiveness*, *Charlotte Danielson*, *framework*, and *school*. To narrow search results, relevant terms were combined: *teacher perception*, *evaluation effectiveness*, *teacher perception evaluation effectiveness*, and *Charlotte Danielson effectiveness* are examples of used search combinations.

Theoretical Framework

Self-efficacy was the theoretical framework used in this qualitative case study and comprised a subset of Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT). SCT provides a model for comprehending human behavior in given situations (Nguyen, 2016); therefore, self-efficacy was an appropriate framework to study participants' perceptions of the teacher evaluation system at a small school. Self-efficacy is the idea an individual can succeed at any challenge presented (Wilde & Hsu, 2019) and served as the framework for this research. A person's self-efficacy level can impact feelings, motivation, and confidence. A high self-efficacy level can inspire a person to work hard and envision success, accepting and overcoming challenges. Low self-efficacy causes fear and insecurity, leading to avoidance of risk and challenges and doubt in

one's ability (Wilde & Hsu, 2019). A well-planned, accepted, and efficient teacher evaluation system could help teachers become successful, overcome fear and insecurity, and improve chances for success, aligning with self-efficacy theory.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy can be defined as a belief in one's abilities (Mireles-Rios et al., 2019). According to Bandura, a strong belief in one's abilities affects how a person will approach a situation or work toward goals. If not successful at first, a person with solid self-efficacy may learn to persevere and overcome obstacles, both real or perceived (Yancey, 2019). A person with weak self-efficacy may respond negatively to feedback and believe their abilities inadequate for the situation. Strong self-efficacy allows one to observe, take critical feedback, and reflect on performance positively, overcoming self-doubt or negativity (Yancey, 2019). Though self-efficacy has been found to enhance one's performance, contradictory findings exist suggesting effects may differ with respect to different performance outcomes such as performance quality and quantity (Vancouver et al., 2014).

Causes of Self-Efficacy

Bandura wrote one cause of self-efficacy is mastering experiences and activities in the past. The idea success breeds success is supported by the theory of self-efficacy (Yancey, 2019). Bradley et al. (2017) researched the importance of self-efficacy on achievement in online learning and determined a strong connection between past success and future success in online learning. The findings indicated high self-efficacy is a strong predictor of academic success (Bradley et al., 2017).

Observing others accomplishing a task is another cause of self-efficacy. If one person can accomplish a task, the observer can learn to believe they can accomplish the task (Yancey,

2019). Observational learning occurs due to watching, retaining, and replicating behaviors and is a core mechanism of SCT and self-efficacy (Borsa et al., 2017).

Verbal encouragement, discouragement, and feedback are other causes of self-efficacy. Those who may have little or no skill or experience in a particular area or task, but receive positive verbal support and recognition, are inclined to believe in themselves. They tend to develop high self-efficacy (Yancey, 2019). In a study of relationships between positive feedback, performance, and self-efficacy, Peifer et al. (2020) developed evidence indicating positive feedback develops high self-efficacy.

Self-Efficacy and Thought Patterns

Self-efficacy influences and affects people's thoughts about their performance. A person with already low self-efficacy can feel less competent by visualizing failure. Visualizing failure in advance almost ensures failure and defeat (Yancey, 2019). People who believe skill is acquirable either by observing or taking feedback are more likely to successfully take on a challenging assignment. People with high self-efficacy see value in mistakes and understand learning from mistakes will likely increase mastery of the subject matter or skill (Babenko & Oswald, 2018). Suppose someone believes themselves incapable of learning by observation or practice and believes skill or knowledge is innate or inherited. In that case, difficult situations or tasks may be avoided to eliminate the possibility of failure and loss of self-efficacy (Yancey, 2019). The feedback someone receives determines how self-efficacy can be impacted and how ability may be viewed. If a person is told they performed well, self-efficacy increases; when told they did not perform well, self-efficacy decreases.

Self-Efficacy and Motivation

People are more likely to engage in activities and pursue goals in which they have high self-efficacy and avoid activities in which self-efficacy is low. High self-efficacy can help a person persevere in difficult situations because they possess the ability to see success instead of failure (Yancey, 2019). *Grit* has been defined as perseverance to achieve long-term goals (Usher et al., 2019). High self-efficacy and grit are related, as both are based on having the confidence to understand difficulty and failure can be overcome. Usher et al. (2019) wrote although grit's value may be inconsistent due to how the term is defined, people with higher levels of grit are better able to complete challenging goals and assignments, even under complicated circumstances.

High self-efficacy helps people deal with stress and anxiety. In a study of college students, Mahmoodi et al. (2019) found a direct association between academic self-efficacy, academic stress, and happiness in the subjects. The higher the self-efficacy, the lower the feelings of stress and anxiety. Bandura referred to people who could handle challenging and threatening situations as being capable of *coping self-efficacy* (Yancey, 2019).

Impact of Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy plays a significant role in human growth and development. High self-efficacy people are unafraid to take risks, confront new challenges, meet new people, and try new things (Yancey, 2019), all traits commonly attributed to successful people. According to Mireles-Rios et al. (2019), school administrators who take the time to improve teacher self-efficacy and not judge performance alone are more likely to produce teachers who believe in themselves and are more likely to succeed.

Self-Efficacy and Teacher Evaluations

Self-efficacy was selected as the guiding theoretical framework because the theory related directly to the study. Self-efficacy refers to the confidence one has in organizing and acting to achieve the desired result (Yancey, 2019). The higher a person's self-efficacy, the greater degree of success that person is likely to achieve. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the teacher evaluation process at a small school and what may be done to improve the process. In a survey of school administrators, Reinhorn et al. (2017) found during evaluations, administrators gave priority to developing teachers over holding them accountable. Teacher evaluations provide administrators the opportunity to critique the skills and knowledge of teachers with the idea of improving performance. Instructional development and self-efficacy can be enhanced if teachers receive fair, constructive, and effective feedback from administrators (Mireles-Rios et al., 2019). Because teachers respond positively to effective administrator feedback, teacher evaluation processes must be robust, fair, accurate, reliable, and include teacher input in the design process (Skedsmo & Huber, 2018).

Research Literature Review

The comprehensive review of relevant literature includes a history of education and the teacher evaluation process in the United States. Education and the evaluation of teachers have evolved and often reflect the values and emerging practices of different communities and the entire nation. Though contrary research has questioned the effectiveness of different teacher evaluation tools and processes, teacher evaluations in some form exist in all 50 states in the United States and play a significant role in the public education system.

History of Teacher Evaluations

The system of teacher evaluation in early colonial United States was not an organized process to determine teacher effectiveness through an objective analysis of work product. During the colonial period, there was nothing that would be considered state or federal oversight of the education or teacher evaluation system in modern education. Early colonial control of schools, and subsequently, teacher evaluation, was the domain of local communities. Many believed the primary reason to educate children was for religious reasons, and this practice was easy to accommodate, as Puritans and other religious groups controlled many communities. A teacher's effectiveness was evaluated not necessarily by the productivity of students but by the ability of the teacher to espouse the virtues and religious values of the community (Jewell, 2017). Community leaders determined if teachers were meeting these goals and had the power to fire teachers deemed inadequate. Dismissal, rather than remediation, was the norm (Jewell, 2017). Developing the self-efficacy of teachers was not a priority.

The Industrial Revolution

Even after the establishment of the federal government, education continued to be a state and local issue. Early in the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s, the educational landscape began to change as the nation became more urbanized and immigration increased. As the number of communities and schools continued to grow, the need for an educated population and an educated teacher workforce grew. Wirt and Kirst (2009) wrote local governments controlled the education process in many cases, including the hiring of teachers. Moreover, whichever political party won elections felt entitled to appoint teachers, regardless of ability or training. Eventually, the increased number of schools led to increased availability of education for more people, signaling a move away from religious-based education taught by political appointees and more

toward a system emphasizing trained teachers and improved evaluation processes (Jewell, 2017). Positive feedback through evaluation develops high self-efficacy (Peifer et al., 2020). High self-efficacy in teachers improves the effectiveness of instructional delivery, student interactions, and student learning (Sehgal et al., 2017).

In the mid-1800s, teaching was beginning to be understood as a complicated endeavor, and teachers benefitted from more complex feedback. Supervision and evaluation of teachers began to focus on improving instruction instead of just assuring a particular dogma was being put forth (Marzano et al., 2011). Toward the end of the 1800s, school leaders began to recognize the need to monitor teachers in the classroom and develop their skills through training (Jewell, 2017). During this era, populations increased, especially in urban areas, and large numbers of teachers and administrators were needed to address these changes. School districts were organized to allow more experienced teachers to assist newer teachers, and administrators became responsible for observing and remediating weaker teachers. Based on the lobbying of Horace Mann, Massachusetts created a board of education and mandated attendance for students (Noel, 2017). As part of the initiative, colleges were instituted to instruct new teachers with professors using observation and feedback to conduct evaluations and improve skills. The goal of observations shifted from dismissal to developing skills and self-efficacy in teachers (Jewell, 2017).

Early 20th Century

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the U.S. population shifted again as the gap between rich and poor increased, and an influx of immigrants presented additional challenges for schools. A debate over the goal of public education ensued, one side arguing schools should prepare students for careers. In contrast, the other side argued schools

should teach more classical material, educating the entire child instead of simply training for a job (Jewell, 2017). The challenge of evaluating the effectiveness of teachers continued, and a solution was complicated, as different educational goals for students required different teacher evaluation processes.

As the United States continued to grow as a business superpower in the early 20th century, so did the focus on education. One prominent school of thought, espoused by philosophy professor John Dewey, emphasized social learning and the idea students learn best in a natural, social setting (Williams, 2017). The traditional educational model consisting of adult standards, methodologies, and subject content was not suitable for younger students; yet, many schools still adhered to what Dewey called *traditional settings* (Williams, 2017). Dewey (as cited by Williams, 2017) believed education was “a process of living and not a preparation of future living” (p. 92).

Conversely, Frederick Taylor, a mechanical engineer and pioneer in industrial efficiency, likened education to a factory (Maranto & Wai, 2020). The most successful schools would model successful businesses, adapting a one-size-fits-all model of productivity designed to produce consistent, steady future workers (Vadeboncoeur & Padilla-Petry, 2017). Schools were purposefully built to emulate factory settings, and teachers and students were expected to perform based on methods established by business people, not educators or academics (Vadeboncoeur & Padilla-Petry, 2017).

Edward Thorndike, a premier educational psychologist of his time, espoused the idea of using data-driven evidence to measure performance and success, including the performance of teachers. According to Thorndike, educational practice should be driven by formal learning principles and systematic, empirical learning (Akpan, 2020). Thorndike, an educational

administrator, and Elwood Cubberly, a peer of Thorndike, supported the idea of schools being run like factories and children being treated as products (Castañeda-Londoño, 2019). Teachers were evaluated on their ability to produce future workers.

Because of these new educational philosophies and reforms, methods of management and evaluations evolved. From 1900 to 1920, new theories of teacher evaluation developed, including the idea teaching performance could be measured and improved using business and manufacturing measures. Evaluations could be based on teacher observation and the development of objective standards (Jewell, 2017) and not only on inspecting teachers to assure the established curriculum was being taught. Early in his career, Horace Mann prepared reports highlighting many different aspects of public education, including data use, for the Massachusetts Board of Education. Mann's reports led to the development of a series of tests designed to measure student performance in Boston and, ultimately, teacher performance (Alkin & King, 2016). The testing was later discontinued due to the nonuse of the information.

Post-World War II

After World War II, researchers began to report on the idea of teachers as individuals. In 1945, educator Coleman (1945) wrote the first step administrators should take before conducting an evaluation is to learn as much about the teacher as possible, including the types of training the teacher has had and their interests and aptitudes. Knowing this type of information before conducting an evaluation helps an evaluator establish a positive working relationship with the teacher instead of setting up an adversarial position between the two. This new theory of teacher-administrator cooperation emphasized administrators assisting teachers instead of directing them. The assumption was teaching quality would improve as a result (Jewell, 2017).

Self-efficacy theory is supported as the teacher develops positive feelings based on positive interactions with their evaluator.

Though the importance of supervising teachers and providing constructive feedback began to be emphasized, administrators often did not have the time to conduct thorough teacher evaluations and prioritized other activities above the process. In his book, *Instructional Supervision: A Guide to Modern Practice*, Melchior (as cited by Marzano et al., 2011) emphasized the importance of classroom observation as part of an administrator's responsibilities. The book included 16 pages about classroom observation, but 23 pages were devoted to the importance of maintaining the grounds and buildings at a school (Marzano et al., 2011). This disparity indicated a higher degree of concern for school physical appearance than the teacher evaluation process. As administrator responsibilities increased, the importance of classroom observation became more apparent. Schools began to emphasize classroom observations and post-observation conferences to provide feedback and suggestions (Marzano et al., 2011), increasing teacher effectiveness and self-efficacy (Mireles-Rios et al., 2019).

Clinical Supervision

By 1980, almost 90% of school administrators used a type of clinical observation to evaluate teachers (Holifield & Cline, 1997). Clinical supervision for teachers is a process by which a peer or administrator works collaboratively with a teacher to observe, analyze, and discuss teacher performance and effectiveness to facilitate improvement (Muktar & Effendi, 2020). One of the primary influences on teacher evaluations during this time was Madeline Hunter's learning model. Originally designed to help teachers master skills, the model became an evaluation tool in many schools (Jewell, 2017). The seven steps of the procedure demonstrate designing a lesson for teachers: Anticipatory set, objective and purpose, input, modeling,

checking for understanding, guided practice, and independent practice (Marzano et al., 2011). Teachers were observed and evaluated based on the ability to implement elements of the model in the classroom. Hunter's model became the primary tool for educators to align elements of clinical observation.

Published in 1996 and updated in 2007, Danielson's book, *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*, introduced what became the primary tool for evaluating teacher performance. Danielson's tool included four domains upon which teachers were evaluated: Preparation and planning, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. In the four domains are 76 elements of quality teaching, each broken down into four performance levels: *unsatisfactory*, *basic*, *proficient*, and *distinguished*. Models like Hunter's and Danielson's became standard evaluation instruments for many schools in the United States (Jewell, 2017; Marzano et al., 2011).

Student Performance

In the late 1980s and into the early 1990s, the emphasis on teacher evaluation began to shift from observation and teacher behavior to student achievement (Jewell, 2017). Research has shown teacher effectiveness to be the critical factor in student performance (Derrington & Campbell, 2018). For student performance to be measured, methods of measuring performance had to be created. New standards for performance were created across the states, and the federal government provided financial grants to those states which agreed to evaluate teachers based on student performance (Derrington & Campbell, 2018). The push to make student performance the central part of teacher evaluation was given weight by educators who referred to subjective evaluations as wastes of time or merely exercises in marking a check box as *satisfactory* or *unsatisfactory* (Marzano et al., 2011).

In 2002, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act into law. The law was designed to improve educational opportunities for low-income and minority students and increase school accountability for student achievement (Jewell, 2017). The law was not intended to hold individual teachers accountable; rather funding for states was tied directly to school performance. Measurement of performance was conducted by measuring student achievement on standardized testing. Although measurable growth in student achievement did occur under NCLB, this growth did not translate to underrepresented students and low-income students as hoped (Jewell, 2017).

Many schools were unable to achieve the goals set out by states under NCLB and were labeled as low performing. Labeling schools in this manner was intended to incentivize the failing schools to perform better (Saw et al., 2017). States could apply for waivers from meeting the goals established by NCLB, but the states had to agree to design plans to increase performance by all students. In addition, states had to establish programs to evaluate both teachers and administrators, with much of the evaluation ratings based on student performance. In December 2018, President Barack Obama signed the Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law. This new law reduced emphasis on nationalized standard testing and shifted the emphasis to career and college readiness and state-driven standards. The state became the primary designer of evaluation instruments (Adler-Greene, 2019).

Importance of Teacher Evaluation

Although it is acknowledged multiple factors contribute to the overall success of students in the classroom (e.g., socioeconomic status, parental involvement, access to technology, safety, and class size), researchers have consistently demonstrated teachers are the most important in-school predictor of student success (Fitchett & Heafner, 2018). A professional teacher's ability to

use skills and knowledge to create positive and productive classrooms improves student outcomes and improves society as a whole. Teacher quality is especially crucial in the development and success of underachieving students (Mammadov & Çimen, 2019).

Teacher quality has been demonstrated as influenced by multiple factors. In a review of 30 prior studies, Podolsky et al. (2019) discovered a connection between teacher experience and student achievement. Podolsky et al. discovered not only do students perform better on tests but regularly do better in other performance measurements when teachers are more experienced. Teacher intelligence or cognition has been identified as an indicator of teacher effectiveness and student performance. Podolsky et al.'s findings contradicted those of previous researchers who reported teachers show the most significant productivity gains in the first few years of their careers and teaching performance levels off as experience increases (Rice, 2013). Rice's (2013) review of the literature revealed that although a 20-year teacher may be more effective than a novice teacher, the same veteran teacher is no more proficient than a 5-year teacher. Experience in the classroom remains a debatable point when it comes to evaluating teacher effectiveness.

Another factor influencing teacher effectiveness is teacher competence in the subject area. Teachers with limited knowledge in a subject area negatively impact student performance results (Mammadov & Çimen, 2019). Mastery of subject matter on the part of the teacher improves student performance. Fitchett and Heafner (2018) discovered eighth-grade teachers with secondary education and history backgrounds were more effective than those with general teaching certificates and credentials. Overall, teacher intelligence and cognitive skills are primary factors in improving student performance. In a study of students in 31 different countries, researchers determined an increase in teacher cognitive skills of one standard deviation can improve student performance by 15% of a standard deviation on a standardized test

(Hanushek et al., 2018). When evaluating teachers, attention should be paid to the teacher's cognitive abilities and classroom performance. If student performance is part of the evaluation process, research has shown teachers with higher cognitive abilities produce better results in student performance. These findings have significant implications in teacher evaluations and hiring decisions, a topic outside the scope of this study.

Professional development for teachers is a critical element in teacher performance and, subsequently, student performance (Fitchett & Heafner, 2018; Mammadov & Çimen, 2019). As stated previously, effective teacher evaluations can improve the performance and self-efficacy of teachers. Positive feedback through evaluation develops high self-efficacy (Peifer et al., 2020). High self-efficacy in teachers improves the effectiveness of instructional delivery, student interactions, and student learning (Sehgal et al., 2017). Professional development improves the working knowledge of teachers, which improves self-efficacy which improves student performance. Professional development in the 12 months prior to student testing demonstrated improved student performance (Mammadov & Çimen, 2019). However, Borg (2018) wrote although professional development is important, establishing a clear link between professional development and student performance is difficult. Though there may be conflicting evidence on its effectiveness in improving student performance, professional development is an important factor in teacher self-efficacy and student performance.

Whether the teacher evaluation process improves teacher performance and teacher self-efficacy is debatable, but research is available indicating support for both positions. When used correctly, teacher evaluation processes are found to be valuable and beneficial to teachers. In a study of six Massachusetts schools, Reinhorn et al. (2017) interviewed teachers on the quality of feedback and guidance received. Almost all teachers confirmed a commitment by principals to

help them develop and reported receiving positive and helpful feedback. As stated previously, some research has demonstrated teacher improvement stabilizes after the first few years (Rice, 2013). Despite acknowledging their study did not uncover specific reasons for improvement, Taylor and Tyler (2012) provided evidence that performance can improve after a teacher's first few years on the job, and teacher evaluations are an essential and effective professional development tool.

Factors Impacting Evaluation Effectiveness

Several factors have been demonstrated to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of teacher evaluations. One tool shown to be more effective than traditional tools is rubrics. Rubrics provide a method for evaluators to provide clear feedback on standards and provide detailed descriptions of expectations to achieve proficiency (Donahue & Vogel, 2018). The Charlotte Danielson framework for teaching (FFT) is an established rubric used by many school districts in the United States to measure teacher performance. The FFT is a research-based evaluation instrument used as a rubric or template for evaluating teachers across four different domains, consisting of 76 different elements of effective practice (Kettler & Reddy, 2017). The four domains are Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities. Before the FFT and other research-based models, evaluations were based on simple, subjective comments, suffered from a lack of consistency among evaluators, and followed a top-down model where communication was only one way from administrator to teacher (Donahue & Vogel, 2018). The FFT was initially designed as a tool to observe and evaluate novice teachers for licensure. Later, the FFT was recognized as an effective, research-based instrument effective for guiding the observation of classroom teachers and improving the quality of communication about the process (Donahue & Vogel, 2018).

Contrary research has indicated rubrics such as the FFT may not be beneficial in all situations. Teachers of noncore subjects such as physical education (PE) and music may benefit from the use of a rubric like the FFT under certain circumstances. PE is not a subject with a long history of assessing student performance; yet, PE teachers are now held accountable for student achievement as part of evaluations (van der Mars et al., 2018). A common complaint of noncore subject teachers is administrators are not content experts and are not qualified to conduct evaluations. PE teachers have reported rubrics like the FFT can be beneficial, but only if evaluators have completed training using the tool and if the evaluators have PE-specific content and pedagogy knowledge (Norris et al., 2017).

Many teachers reported the quality of feedback from administrators is a critical part of accepting the value of evaluations. Affirmation is an essential part of the feedback process, and teachers react positively when receiving praise, which increases self-efficacy (Mireles-Rios et al., 2019). Teachers reported receiving feedback on both strengths and weaknesses resulted in increased teacher self-efficacy so long as feedback was delivered in a positive, professional manner (Mireles-Rios et al., 2019). Such feedback allows teachers to work to improve their weaknesses and feel positive about their strengths.

In contrast, feedback from administrators, whether positive or negative, does not always improve teachers' effectiveness. In a study of music teachers in eight states, participants believed evaluations of music programs were inconsistent because administrators tended to offer feedback based on personal opinion instead of music education pedagogical best practices (Derrington & Martinez, 2019). Findings indicated teachers might benefit from receiving feedback from content experts or peers in the same subject area (Derrington & Martinez, 2019).

Teacher input into the process has been indicated to improve teacher support of evaluations. For much of public education history in the United States, teacher evaluation has been seen as a top-down process; administrators observe, measure, and give feedback to the teacher based on an instrument designed by the evaluators themselves (Donahue & Vogel, 2018). More recently, teachers have been recognized as essential members of the evaluation development team, and their input has been incorporated into the process. Feedback from teachers indicated a desire to be included in the development, validation, and delivery of evaluation systems. Teachers also believed they should have significant input on the design of the evaluation system because of a better understanding of subject matter, students, and other factors impacting teacher performance (Goe et al., 2017).

Student Performance as a Part of Teacher Evaluations

Classroom observations have been a significant element of teacher evaluations since the beginning of public school in the United States. As public education developed in the late 1700s, observations consisted primarily of community leaders checking in on classrooms to ensure teachers were teaching what the community wanted, often religious dogma (Jewell, 2017). Teachers who failed to deliver ascribed lessons or values were subject to arbitrary dismissal. Gradually, teacher evaluations became more research-based, with evaluators interested in assuring teachers followed a curriculum and practiced accepted educational pedagogy. In 2002, President George Bush signed the NCLB to improve student performance in K–12 schools (Jewell, 2017). As part of the law, a new factor became part of the teacher evaluation process—student performance.

As part of NCLB, states had to incorporate student performance, or value-added measures (VAMs), into their teacher evaluation plans. In 2009, a competitive grant program

called Race to the Top was enacted, causing many states to ramp up their evaluation efforts and include students in the formula (Lavigne & Chamberlain, 2016). Various student performance measurements were created and were often referred to as student learning objectives (SLOs). SLOs were designed to measure student performance time, and those results were included in a teacher's evaluation summary (Goe et al., 2017). The accepted theory was the students' performance would improve if teachers were assessed based on students' performance. Though studies have been shown to support the theory student performance can be an effective measurement of teacher performance, the accuracy and validity of that assumption have been questioned for various reasons (Alexander et al., 2017).

Designed to provide a consistent and objective way to measure academic performance across a wide range of student ability groups using the same academic standards, standardized tests are used widely to measure student performance (Warring, 2015). VAMs are designed to isolate what, if any, impact the performance of the teacher has on the success of students. Standardized tests, which make up many of the instruments used to measure student performance, are supposed to eliminate student characteristics such as race, socioeconomic status, gender, and other student traits and provide a measurement of teacher effectiveness (Warring, 2015). The necessity to include student performance in teacher evaluations came as a response to nationalized student testing scores remaining stagnant or decreasing. In contrast, teacher evaluation rating levels remained positive or increased. Teacher evaluations were viewed as too subjective and open to the opinions and biases of untrained or unqualified evaluators (Alexander et al., 2017). Proponents of using VAMs or SLOs have claimed adding objective measures to the evaluation process would improve teacher performance by increasing the stakes if students fail to show measurable academic performance (Alexander et al., 2017).

SLOs have been found to provide valuable data used by teachers and administrators. When used correctly, SLOs are easily understood and effective tools to aid in improving teaching, making hiring and retention decisions, and making teacher promotion decisions (Lin et al., 2020). SLOs provide the opportunity for teachers to be involved in the planning of the evaluation process, something teachers find important (Skedsmo & Huber, 2018). Although research was limited to pre-K teachers, Lin et al. (2020) discovered SLOs can be a valuable tool for predicting students' future academic performance. Teacher evaluations have become beneficial because evaluator subjectivity and bias have been replaced with data analysis, teacher involvement in the process, and a spirit of competition and comparison designed to improve student achievement (Holloway & Brass, 2017).

A substantial number of studies have reported contrary views of using SLOs or other VAMs as part of the teacher evaluation process due to inaccurate results, inconsistent results, or evidence these measures add little to student performance (Alexander et al., 2017). Findings by Amrein-Beardsley et al. (2020) revealed depending on the type of VAM used, teacher ratings have been found to differ significantly even when using the same data from the same group of students. Individual teachers could end up unwittingly targeted for remediation or dismissal due to inaccurate or inconsistent student achievement outcomes.

Although designed to eliminate student characteristics as a factor in test scores, VAM testing results may be unknowingly skewed by such factors. Traits such as ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and the date of birth of the students are out of the control of the teacher but are still factors that could influence standardized test scores (Morris et al., 2018). A district's ability to fairly evaluate teachers using student achievement data may be skewed by other factors. Small districts may not have the technical expertise of data and statistical analysts to

assure data integrity and use data correctly to monitor the effects of teachers on student achievement (Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2020). Poor, rural, and Native American districts often do not have the financial resources to provide services other school districts may have available to support student achievement and, subsequently, teacher evaluation ratings (Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2020).

Small Schools and Teacher Evaluations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the teacher evaluation process at a small school and what may be done to improve the process. Teacher effectiveness and the perception thereof have been researched in the past, but scant literature exists on the differences between evaluation perception at small schools versus large schools. What even qualifies as a small school was challenging to determine. In one study involving small schools, various size ranges were described, with the study's author ultimately deciding 1,000 students or less constituted a small school (Grauer & Ryan, 2019), whereas another study defined a small school as having 400 students or less (Bronson, 2013). The school in this case study consisted of approximately 200 students and 22 teachers, a small public school by almost any definition. In most studies reviewed in this research on the perception of teacher evaluations, school size was not mentioned as a factor considered in the conclusions.

The small-school movement began in response to the traditional large, industrial school model developed in the 19th century (Bronson, 2013). Instead of focusing on producing large numbers of graduates to join the workforce, the small-school movement focused on building and developing relationships between students, teachers, parents, and other community stakeholders. The effects of relationship-building in smaller schools are found not only among students but also among staff and administrators. In small schools, it is more likely a personal relationship is

developed between administrators who typically conduct teacher evaluations and the teachers. Because of the small staff size, administrators at small or rural schools are in ideal positions to develop relationships and trust with teachers, which promotes staff cooperation and supports student achievement goals (Preston & Barnes, 2018). The relationship between teacher and evaluator is likely as meaningful as the actual evaluation instrument itself (Donahue & Vogel, 2018). Small schools allow for closer relationship building merely due to the confines of the space and the smaller number of teachers.

Conversely, relationships developed between teachers and administrators at a small school may not always be advantageous. Personal relationships between teachers and evaluators in small schools could present a problem for evaluators who may have to deliver bad news. Kraft and Gilmour (2017) conducted a case study to determine why fewer than 1% of teachers in a district had been rated as *unsatisfactory*; yet, 81% of administrators and 57% of teachers could identify at least one ineffective teacher in their school. In-depth interviews of principals who conducted evaluations revealed several reasons why few teachers receive *below proficient* ratings. *Personal discomfort* was a primary reason provided by administrators. Administrators found it difficult to deliver bad news to teachers, especially when the result was the teacher's dismissal for poor performance (Kraft & Gilmour, 2017). Some administrators in the study believed dismissing ineffective teachers was a vital part of their jobs, whereas others were uncomfortable firing people. In these instances, a personal friendship between administrator and teacher at a small school could make providing difficult feedback or firing an ineffective teacher challenging.

Chapter Summary

The review of the literature highlighted the prevalence of teacher evaluation processes throughout the United States. Although there are differences in the frequency and design of the process, all 50 states require some form of teacher evaluation. The process usually involves observation, student achievement, student feedback, or a combination of all three (Ross & Walsh, 2019). The process has shifted through the years as state and federal laws changed to reflect differing research, public opinion, and political policy.

Self-efficacy was the guiding theoretical framework used in this study. As the central part of Bandura's SCT, self-efficacy refers to the confidence a person has in completing a task or job. Teacher evaluations are designed to measure a teacher's performance and are used to provide feedback to the teacher. Though not always the case, both positive and negative feedback can be beneficial in the development of teachers. If criticism and praise are done correctly, self-efficacy in teachers can be improved, possibly resulting in improved performance (Yancey, 2019). As research has demonstrated, the single-most-important school-based predictor of student success is teacher quality; thus, improving teacher performance is crucial (Aldeman, 2017).

A review of the history of education and teacher evaluation in the United States discussed how the evolution of educational pedagogy resulted in the evolution of the teacher evaluation process. Early teachers were often untrained and hired by community leaders based on their ability to espouse community values, usually based only on religious doctrine. Teacher evaluations involved community leaders watching teachers to assure community values were being taught, with little concern for pedagogy and measured achievement. The result of teacher observations was often dismissal, not the development of the teacher (Jewell, 2017). As the United States progressed through the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s, the education process

evolved to match the industrial model of the manufacturing industry. Public schools became more a training ground for future workers than a producer of students trained in traditional liberal arts. Later in the 19th century, schools began to realize teacher evaluations should not be used only to punish underperformers but could be used as professional development opportunities (Marzano et al., 2011).

The 20th century saw additional changes in education and teacher evaluation. Educators like Dewey demonstrated the need to recognize students as individuals who learn better in natural settings than in factory-like settings (Williams, 2017). Teacher evaluation processes evolved as educators, and psychologists like Thorndike encouraged using data to measure student and teacher achievement. Teachers were encouraged to use research-based teaching methods to support pedagogical efforts and were evaluated on how well student performance improved as a result (Akpan, 2020).

In the 21st century, teacher evaluations have developed into combinations of observations and data analysis. Many school districts in the United States regularly use observations and student performance to measure teacher effectiveness. A substantial number of studies report contrary views of using SLOs or other VAMs as a part of the teacher evaluation process due to inaccurate results, untrustworthy data, or evidence these measures add little to student performance (Alexander et al., 2017). Because of contradictory evidence about the effectiveness of using VAMs to assess teacher performance, some school districts have done away with this piece of the evaluation process. Another change in the evaluation process is the inclusion of teachers in the design and implementation of the process. Teachers are understood to know their students, subject matter, and other factors driving student achievement (Goe et al., 2017).

In Illinois, the teacher evaluation process has been refined into a measure of teacher performance based on observations and student achievement (Lavigne & Chamberlain, 2016). Schools have parameters for what can be used as observation instruments and student achievement measurements. School officials have to use a research-based observation instrument, and the research site of this study uses the Charlotte Danielson FFT (The Danielson Group, 2013). Student performance achievement can be measured using nationally standardized tests, district-created instruments, or teacher-created instruments, depending on the subject and availability of standardized tests. Those responsible for conducting teacher evaluations are required to pass mandated training consisting of five different modules designed to familiarize the evaluator with elements of the FFT (Lavigne & Chamberlain, 2016). Teacher evaluations are intended to measure the effectiveness of teachers for tenure, retention, dismissal, or professional development opportunities.

Although research exists examining teacher and administrator perception of the value of teacher evaluation processes, little has been published examining how teachers at small schools perceive the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system. Though small schools have been demonstrated as safer, more efficient, and produce higher student achievement (Grauer & Ryan, 2019), schools consisting of a small number of students and teachers present unique challenges to teachers and administrators. Developing positive relationships is a valuable part of the employer-employee relationship (Donahue & Vogel, 2018). Personal relationships can be problematic if an administrator must deliver negative feedback or dismiss a teacher for poor performance. What remained unknown was whether small-school dynamics affected teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation process, and this research was designed to help fill that gap.

The literature review introduced the theoretical framework for the study, a history of education and teacher evaluation in the United States, the importance of the evaluation process, and the gap in current research on teacher evaluations at small schools. Outlined in Chapter 3 are the study's research design and rationale as related to the problem, purpose, and research questions. The role of the researcher, research procedures, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and reliability and validity are explained and supported with relevant research. Ethical considerations are explored, and a summary justifying the qualitative case study methodology is presented.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In the 2017–2018 school year, there were approximately 4.1 million public and private school teachers in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). In all 50 states, administrators evaluate teachers in some manner, including observation, student growth measurement, or a combination of both (Ross & Walsh, 2019). Education leaders and stakeholders recognize the importance of evaluations on teachers' quality and continuing development and understand that teacher quality impacts student learning results (Warring, 2015). The problem was teacher evaluations occur in schools in the United States every year; yet, administrators often do not know how staff members feel about the effectiveness of these evaluations. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the teacher evaluation process at a small school and what may be done to improve the process. The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: How do teachers in a small, rural, central Illinois school describe the teacher evaluation process?

Research Question 2: What are the teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and opinions about the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system at a small, rural, central Illinois school?

Research Question 3: What ideas do teachers at a small, rural, central Illinois school have to improve the teacher assessment process at the school?

The following chapter sections outline the study's research design and rationale as related to the problem, purpose, and research questions. How the study was conducted is explained in the following sections: Role of the Researcher, Research Procedures, Instrumentation, Data Collection, Data Analysis, and Reliability and Validity. Ethical procedures for the study are described. Finally, a summary of the research study methodology is offered.

Research Methodology, Design, and Rationale

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the teacher evaluation process at a small school and what may be done to improve the process. Though quantitative research allows for the analysis of measurable behaviors or actions, qualitative research enables researchers to understand how and why those actions or behaviors occur (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Qualitative case studies help fill gaps in knowledge by going beyond a surface understanding of the subject and getting to the core of the participants' thought processes (Staller, 2015).

A qualitative case study was the most appropriate methodology for this research study, as this research design allowed for the analysis of real-life responses from teacher participants (Ridder, 2017). In this type of study, researchers conduct interviews to gain insight into participants' thoughts, perceptions, and feelings. A quantitative study was considered but rejected, as qualitative studies are better suited for research on feelings and perceptions (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Design

One advantage of a case study is its common use in qualitative studies because ample research is available, justifying the use of this design in qualitative studies (Yin, 2018). Case studies are a relevant research design for researchers to study a particular circumstance or situation, like teacher evaluations (Yin, 2018). This method aligned with the stated research questions by allowing for an in-depth analysis of the participants' perceptions. A case study fit the study's context, especially in the practical considerations of time, location, and resources, as research was conducted using readily available participants (i.e., teachers at the site) who had an in-depth knowledge of the topic being researched. A phenomenological study was considered

and rejected as irrelevant to this study's purpose. The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system, not describe participants' lived experiences about an event or phenomenon (Flynn et al., 2019).

Case studies are widely used in research circles, including the business sector; for example, case studies are regularly used to aid in the study of operations management (Ebneyamini & Moghadam, 2018). One advantage of using a case study for this research study was the ability to shed light on a set of decisions made on the teacher evaluation process, learn how this process was implemented, and note how teachers perceived this process's effectiveness. Another advantage of using a case study was that insights learned from this research can be used to evaluate and possibly impact policy and research in the future (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). A major benefit of conducting a case study for this research was administrators can use the results to examine real-life situations and in-depth data to determine if teacher evaluation systems are deemed effective. Case studies are effective tools for studying a single person or a group of people (Gustafsson, 2017).

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher in this qualitative case study was observer, data collector, and analyst. As this study involved examining teachers' perceptions of a process affecting them personally and professionally, putting participants at ease to access thoughts and feelings about the process was paramount (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Bias on a researcher's part can result in a deviation from the truth when reporting results (Kumar & Yale, 2016). Avoiding personal bias is impossible and unrealistic. The researcher must clearly state upfront any personal connection to the research topic and the participants in the study so readers can understand the context in which research is conducted and results delivered (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

At the time of this study, I had been a teacher at the research site for 12 years. In this capacity, I have had no administrative responsibilities involving power or control over the participants in this study, including evaluation responsibilities. In this small school, there was a very close working relationship between myself and many of the teachers in the study and a relatively close working relationship with the rest.

Participation in this study was voluntary with no offers of incentive. Participant interviews were conducted at the research site or by telephone, permission was received from the administration (see Appendix A), and all participating parties in the building were aware of the study. Additional ethical issues on participant privacy and data security were addressed in the informed consent documentation signed by each participant.

Research Procedures

As data are intended to provide researchers with a better understanding of the research topic, data collection is critical. Researchers must decide what information is necessary to address the research questions. The researcher's responsibility is to locate participants best able to provide thorough information about the subject (Etikan, 2016).

Population and Sample Selection

The target population for this study was all 21 certified teachers (excluding the researcher) at the research site (Stotler, 2020). Purposive sampling—a method of selecting only participants who can provide rich, detailed information relevant to the study (Vasileiou et al., 2018)—was used to select 20 participants for the study. For a case study, 15–20 interviews are considered optimal to collect necessary data and to avoid saturation, the point at which no new data, themes, or codes are developed (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Eligible participants were teachers who had all been assessed at least once using the same evaluation tool consisting of classroom

observations and student performance. At the time of the study, all teachers at the site were eligible to participate based on this criterion. The only teachers excluded from consideration were new teachers whom an administrator had not evaluated; however, there were no teachers at the site who had not yet been evaluated by an administrator.

Site permission was requested via an in-person meeting with the school district superintendent, followed by a letter requesting formal permission to conduct the study onsite (see Appendix B). The superintendent presented the proposal to the school board at a regular meeting. Permission for the study was granted, and the researcher was notified via a letter from the superintendent. Participants were recruited through personal invitations requesting participation in the individual interviews. As necessary, email invitations were sent if participants could not be located and invited (see Appendix C). Participants were required to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix D). Demographic information, including grade level and/or subject taught, was captured at the beginning of the interviews.

Instrumentation

The personal interview process included a series of semi-structured interviews with participants. The research questions in this study were designed to allow a deeper understanding of participant perception of the teacher evaluation system at the site, and interview questions were designed to answer the research questions by being open-ended, not close-ended. Open-ended questions are used to explore subjects in-depth and to understand processes and procedures in detail. Answers to open-ended questions may result in short answers, lists, or extended narratives (Weller et al., 2018).

Questions were designed following Yates and Leggett's (2016) model of asking open-ended questions to encourage rather than guide participation. *What*, *how*, and *why* are common

question starters in case study research (Yates & Leggett, 2016), and the interview questions for this study were designed to capture the in-depth meaning of those starters. As is more common with case studies than any other type of research, the researcher pays close attention to the data collected (i.e., interview answers) during the research, not just at the beginning or end of the process (Yin, 2018). Open-ended questions allowed for participants to expand on opinions as the researcher listened carefully for opportunities to engage in follow-up questions to gain a better understanding of the answers.

The use of open-ended questions was justified as a means of gaining a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions of the teacher evaluation system at a small school. Open-ended questions are used to collect information and motivate participants to expand on answers (Zull, 2016). Researchers use open-ended questions to examine an unknown range of different answers, avoid lengthy lists of response options, and refrain from asking questions that lead or influence a participant's response (Zull, 2016).

A common complaint of case study research is a failure by the researcher to develop a set of unbiased measures. Construct validity is the practice of assuring correct measures are taken in the design of the research process (Yin, 2018). Three subject matter experts (SMEs) were asked to review the interview questions for clarity, relevance to the research topic, and alignment with the research questions (see Appendix E). The SMEs consisted of a school superintendent and two school principals, all of whom had conducted many teacher evaluations during their careers. SME responses were received (see Appendix F), and feedback was incorporated into the final interview questions (see Appendix G).

Data Collection

Quantitative research is the use of numbers and accuracy to report study results. Results are measurable, unlike qualitative research, where results are based on perception (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Quantitative researchers remain detached from participants, analyzing data only after collection. In a qualitative case study, the researcher participates as the research design involves questioning participants in detail about perceptions of the topic, often in the form of in-person interviews. The researcher is the main data collection instrument (Clark & Veale, 2018).

Permission and approval to recruit participants and conduct research was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The school superintendent provided permission for research to be conducted after regular hours at the research site. Participants included 20 teachers at the school who had been evaluated using the teacher evaluation process. Interviews took place at an onsite location of the participant's choice (e.g., classroom, office, or conference room) or by telephone. Participants signed the informed consent agreement to be eligible for the study, consent for recording audio of the proceedings was obtained, and the opt-out process was explained. Single interviews of no longer than 1 hour were recorded, and data were collected on a password-secured iPhone and securely stored on a password-protected cloud account. The electronic data will be stored in a password-protected cloud account for three years and deleted (Electronic Code of Federal Regulations [eCFR], 2018).

After each interview, participants were debriefed, allowing them to ask questions, express concerns, or clarify any information. Participants were reminded of the contact information on the informed consent letter and advised to contact one of the listed parties with any questions or concerns. Participants were invited to review the audio recordings and transcriptions once transcriptions were complete.

To prepare data for analysis, interviews were transcribed using an online transcription service, Otter. After transcription, participants were asked to review the audio recordings and transcriptions for accuracy and also if there were objections to any of the data being reported (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2015). The transcriptions were reviewed for spelling, grammar, and clarity issues to improve analysis accuracy. Because no participants withdrew after being interviewed, no additional interviews had to be scheduled using the same selection criterion as described in the Population and Sample Selection section of this chapter.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method to identify, organize, describe, analyze, and report themes found in interview data. Participant responses can be compared and contrasted, and unexpected insights developed (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis does not require the researcher to have extensive knowledge of more detailed theoretical and technical qualitative analysis methodology (Nowell et al., 2017). NVivo qualitative analysis software was used to assist in the collection, coding, grouping, and analysis of data.

The first step in thematic analysis involves familiarization with the data. The data were first read multiple times to become familiar with meanings and patterns (Nowell et al., 2017). During this familiarization process, notes on coding ideas were taken (Nowell et al., 2017).

The next step in thematic analysis occurs after becoming familiar with the data and developing an idea of what kind of information has been collected. Coding involves simplifying and focusing on particular parts of data. Interesting and relevant sections of text from across all interviews were identified and marked as possible themes across the dataset (Nowell et al., 2017).

After data were coded and collated, potentially relevant information was sorted into themes (Nowell et al., 2017). Themes were identified by recognizing common ideas and fragments in the interview data and collecting them to look for relationships otherwise not obvious (Vaughn & Turner, 2015). The theme development process highlighted common ideas among participants, which led to conclusions.

Reviewing the developed themes was the next step in the process. During this step, themes were examined to determine if coherent patterns emerged from the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Individual themes were reviewed to determine if the themes represented the overall data as a whole (Nowell et al., 2017). Themes without enough supporting data or those too diverse and watered down were set aside or redefined to assure the accurate measurement of participant intent (Nowell et al., 2017).

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are the two most important features in the design of an effective research instrument (Mohajan, 2018). In quantitative research, rigid, structured, and preset design methods are followed. Conversely, in qualitative research, the researcher is the measurement instrument dealing with subjective and fluid narratives (Cypress, 2017). In both qualitative and quantitative research, the researcher is responsible for assuring rigor during the research process (Cypress, 2017). Yin (2018) wrote there are four criteria for evaluating the validity of case study research designs, three of which applied to this study: Construct validity, external validity, and reliability.

Credibility refers to confidence in the truth of the research findings (Amankwaa, 2016). Using SMEs to evaluate interview questions improved research credibility by assuring interview questions aligned with research questions and the purpose of the study. Data saturation is the

point at which all salient information has been collected from participants, and few new ideas, themes, or codes are identified (Weller et al., 2018). In-depth interviews were conducted until data saturation was achieved. Prolonged contact with participants at the research site also increased the credibility and believability of data analysis and interpretation (Wu et al., 2016).

Dependability refers to the principle that findings in a study are consistent and could be replicated (Amankwaa, 2016). Having a researcher uninvolved in the research conduct an inquiry audit is a method to improve the dependability of a study. The purpose is to determine if the findings of the research are supported by the data (Amankwaa, 2016).

Reliability is the principle of replicability. A reliable research design is one in which findings and conclusions will be the same if the same process is followed by later researchers (Yin, 2018). To improve reliability, Yin (2018) advised researchers to adhere to the case study procedures, maintain a database of data collected in the study, and maintain a safe chain of data evidence. In this study, the case study research design was strictly adhered to, notes and data collected during the research were collected and recorded, and data were safely stored using password-protected computers and cloud-based networks.

Research bias can also be minimized through the practice of member checks. Member checking is a technique for enhancing the credibility of research results (Birt et al., 2016). In this study, transcribed interviews were returned to participants to review for accurate, factual data. Although this method did not allow for confirming the accuracy of the final analysis, the method did allow participants to confirm the accuracy of data transcription, thereby increasing the validity of collected data (Birt et al., 2016).

Source triangulation was used in this study to ensure credibility, dependability, and reliability. Triangulation involves collecting information from multiple data sources and is

necessary for determining if the same findings are present from each data source (Yin, 2018). Triangulation of sources involves collecting data from a variety of sources in the same research method (Amankwaa, 2016). Data from this research method were collected from a variety of participants, including those who taught elementary school, junior high school, and specials (e.g., physical education [PE], art, music). Junior high teachers teach content-specific classes, so data from those participants reflected the perceptions of those with specific content-area opinions. In addition, the sampling guaranteed a selection of teachers with different tenure, as the research site employed teachers of varying experience levels from 1st-year teachers to those with over 20 years of experience.

To ensure transferability (i.e., the practice of thoroughly describing participants and methodology so readers can determine if the study applies to their study), a detailed account of the study participants and process is described (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). A thick description of the participants and research process includes detailed information on the sample, sample size, sampling strategy, site details, socioeconomic status of subjects, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and interview topics and questions (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). A description of this information is included in the Methodology section of this study.

Trustworthiness relates to the degree to which readers can have confidence in the results of a study (Cypress, 2017). Transparency on the purpose of the research, the research process, data generation and analysis, and data integrity and management is essential to establish trustworthiness (Hammarberg et al., 2016). To maximize transparency, the researcher's background, role at the job site, and relationship with the participants are explained in the Methodology chapter. Researchers can reduce bias by practicing reflexivity—the exercise of closely examining one's potential biases to minimize bias and predispositions that could impact

the study (Cypress, 2017). The researcher engaged in reflexivity by continually questioning and challenging personal biases and presumptions during the study. Participants were asked to review interviews for accuracy and signs of researcher bias.

Ethical Procedures

Ensuring ethical procedures during the study was a priority. The primary purpose of ethics in a research study is to regulate the relationship between the researcher and the participants (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). As outlined in the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research [NCPHSBRR], 1979), participants in the study were respected, and beneficence and principles of justice were demonstrated.

Several steps were taken to protect participants in the study. All eligible teachers at the site were invited to participate in the study using an in-person and email invitation. Participants were interviewed in person or remotely if the participant was concerned about anonymity. Real names and other potentially identifying information were removed from any reports or records. At the beginning of each interview, informed consent was explained to each participant, the informed consent form was obtained and secured, and participants were given the opportunity to opt out of the study at any time by notifying the researcher. Paper records of activities are secured in a locked cabinet, electronic data are password protected on a personal computer and in a cloud-based storage file, and all data will be destroyed three years after completion of the study (eCFR, 2018).

An increased degree of ethical scrutiny is expected when a study involves colleagues of the researcher. Though these relationships may call into question the researcher's objectivity, this relationship between participant and researcher provided the researcher with insights into the

topic and participants' experiences, providing valuable insight into participant opinions (Reid et al., 2018). The researcher may be seen as having a conflict of interest, as any actions school administrators may take based on the results of the study could impact the researcher directly. Power imbalance is a dilemma in research involving peers or colleagues of the researcher because the researcher is traditionally seen as the party in control of proceedings (Reid et al., 2018). Still, the researcher had no administrative responsibilities involving power or authoritative control over participants in this study, including evaluation responsibilities.

Chapter Summary

For the purpose of this research, a qualitative case study was determined most suitable to examine participants' perceptions of the teacher evaluation process at the research site. Using semi-structured questions, the researcher interviewed participants in an effort to understand the teacher evaluation process from their points of view and explain their perceptions of the effectiveness of the evaluation process (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). The sample size included the teaching staff of the research site, and 20 teachers meeting the inclusion criteria were interviewed. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using analysis software by NVivo. Responses were analyzed, coded, and grouped by themes.

Research credibility was maintained using various methods, including those designed by Yin (2018): construct validity, external validity, and reliability. Transferability was addressed by the detailed description of participants and research methodology. Trustworthiness was achieved through the transparency of purpose, process, and data analysis and reporting.

Using the Belmont Report (NCPHSBBR, 1979) as a guide, participants were respected, and the principles of justice and beneficence were demonstrated during the research process. Confidentiality was paramount, and participant identities and responses were protected. The

researcher regularly reflected on potential bias during the research and endeavored not to deny bias or predisposition but to incorporate knowledge of the research site and participants to enhance the investigative and analysis process (Reid et al., 2018).

The methodology section described how data were collected and analyzed to produce study results. Data were collected and analyzed in Chapter 4 using the methods described in Chapter 3. A research design is a plan for progressing through the research study, from initial research questions to conclusions; a well-designed and executed plan improves the chances of producing valid, reliable conclusions addressing the initial research questions (Yin, 2018). The goal of Chapter 4 was to provide study results and confirm the methodology outlined in Chapter 3 was followed.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Data Analysis Results

Though the practice of evaluating employee performance has been an everyday business activity for a long time, assessing teacher performance using objective, data-based methodologies is a relatively recent phenomenon (Taylor & Tyler, 2012). Teacher evaluations in the early years of public education focused more on making sure teachers were upholding community standards (usually religious) than measuring the ability of teachers to improve student learning and achievement (Jewell, 2017). Federal and state officials increased emphasis on student achievement, which led to laws such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top, and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), all of which were designed to tie student achievement to teacher evaluation ratings (Lavigne & Chamberlain, 2016). Results of these legislative efforts have been mixed, often due to the unreliability of test results due to factors outside of teacher control (Warring, 2015). Because of the uncertainty of student growth measurements and other evaluation issues, teachers may question the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation process entirely. The problem was teacher evaluations occur in schools in the United States every year; yet, administrators often do not know how staff members perceive the effectiveness of these evaluations. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the teacher evaluation process at a small school and what may be done to improve the process. The following research questions were designed to guide the qualitative case study:

Research Question 1: How do teachers in a small, rural, central Illinois school describe the teacher evaluation process?

Research Question 2: What are the teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and opinions about the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system at a small, rural, central Illinois school?

Research Question 3: What ideas do teachers at a small, rural, central Illinois school have to improve the teacher assessment process at the school?

The study consisted of an exploration of data to uncover findings of teachers' perceptions of the teacher evaluation process at a small school. Included in this chapter is an outline of the methods used to collect data and an explanation of how data were analyzed to determine relevant themes. Results were collected and shared to provide a clear understanding of the conclusions. Reliability and validity practices were also included in the findings.

Data Collection

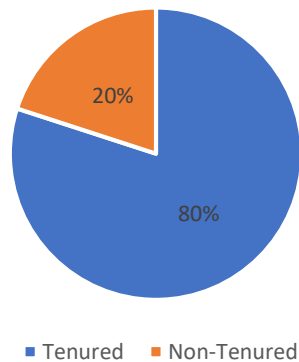
Staff members at the research site were recruited via email (see Appendix C), and all 20 participants submitted signed informed consent forms (see Appendix D). The informed consent forms were collected in person by the researcher in September and October 2021 before interviews were conducted. Staff members participated in semi-structured interviews lasting between 11–20 minutes, depending on the amount of information the participant shared. Because interview durations were less than originally proposed, the researcher received approval from the Doctoral Research Review representative to conduct five additional interviews, in addition to the original 15 interviews, to ensure sufficient data were collected. All interviews were conducted in person at the research site or via telephone in September and October 2021. The interviews were recorded on a password-protected iPhone using the Otter app, which allowed for recording and transcription. The investigator referred to participants by an anonymous number, each participant was asked in advance if they understood the interview was electronically recorded, and replies were captured accordingly. No participant objected to having their interview recorded. After interviews were uploaded to Otter's password-protected website, the researcher listened to each interview in its entirety, clarifying disparities between recording and transcript while not

changing nor deleting any of the applicable content. Each participant was offered the opportunity via email to review transcripts for clarity and accuracy. Interview length ranged from 11–20 minutes, which was a minor deviation from the study proposal; however, data quantity proved sufficient to establish relevant themes addressing the research questions after adding another five participants as required by the Doctoral Research Review representative. One respondent who initially agreed to participate withdrew from the study over confidentiality concerns before being interviewed. The researcher secured participants from across the entire school grade and specialty band. Participants' grade-level demographics and tenure status are displayed in Table 1 and Figure 1, respectively.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

| Demographic variable | <i>n</i> | % |
|----------------------|----------|-------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 0 | 0.0 |
| Female | 20 | 100.0 |
| Grade level | | |
| 1 | 1 | 5.0 |
| 3 | 1 | 5.0 |
| 4 | 1 | 5.0 |
| 5 | 1 | 5.0 |
| 6–8 | 9 | 45.0 |
| Anonymous | 7 | 35.0 |
| Job description | | |
| Classroom teacher | 13 | 65.0 |
| Specialist | 7 | 35.0 |

Figure 1*Participant Tenure*

Data Analysis and Results

The researcher conducted in-person, semi-structured interviews in September and October 2021. The purpose of the interviews was to answer the research questions on participant perceptions of the teacher evaluation system at the research site. Before each interview, the interviewer received verbal consent to record the interviews. The research goal was explained, and each participant was offered the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were allowed to opt out of any particular interview question, but no participant opted out. The goal of participant interviews was to answer the three research questions.

Responses were analyzed to discover themes to answer the research questions. The researcher expected participants to have varying perceptions of the teacher evaluation process based on tenure, subject area, grade level, and experience with particular evaluators. Member checks were conducted by allowing participants the opportunity to review transcripts for bias, inaccuracies or to edit content as deemed necessary.

Data Preparation and Coding

Thematic analysis was used to develop themes. Researchers utilize thematic analysis to identify, organize, describe, analyze, and report themes found in interview data. Responses can be compared and contrasted, and unexpected insights developed (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis does not require the researcher to have extensive knowledge of more detailed theoretical and technical qualitative analysis methodology (Nowell et al., 2017). The first step of thematic analysis involved reading the raw data to become familiar with patterns and ideas. The next step involved determining what kind of data had been developed and would help answer the research questions. Interesting and relevant data were identified and marked as possible themes across the dataset. Themes were then developed using common ideas and fragments from the interviews to look for relevant relationships (Vaughn & Turner, 2015). Finally, developed themes were examined to determine if relevant patterns emerged from the data. Individual themes were reviewed to determine if those themes represented the data as a whole. Themes with insufficient supporting data were eliminated or redefined (Nowell et al., 2017).

Each interview transcript was loaded into NVivo for coding. Initial codes were generated based on participant responses to each of the research question-based interview questions. A line-by-line review of the interview transcripts was conducted, and initial codes were generated based on alignment with research questions (see Appendix H). Subcodes were developed in each code, and as a result, themes in each research question emerged (see Table 2). Saturation began to occur as more interviews were coded and sub-coded, which supported increased data integrity.

Table 2*Sample of Codes*

| Participant number | Quote | Code/s |
|--------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 2 | "I don't like filling out forms. That's not beneficial to me." | Pre-observation practice |
| 17 | "I only look at it when I'm being evaluated, and it becomes like a checklist and me proving the checklist as an evaluator." | The Danielson model |
| 6 | "Feedback is very valuable to me. Getting to know what they see as something we should be doing or something I should try." | Evaluation process and effectiveness |

Key Themes

Significant themes emerged while coding and analyzing the data on teacher perception of the teacher evaluation process at the research site. The developed themes supported findings from the literature review. Emergent themes corroborated the study's framework of self-efficacy (Mireles-Rios et al., 2019; Wilde & Hsu, 2019) on how participants feel about the teacher evaluation process's ability to help execute actions to become better teachers. These themes were examined in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework of the study.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked: How do teachers in a small, rural, central Illinois school describe the teacher evaluation process? Participants were interviewed on their knowledge of the teacher evaluation process. During data analysis, several themes emerged, including information about the measurement instruments themselves and the administrators conducting the evaluations.

Theme 1: The Danielson Model. In examining data from participant interviews, several of the respondents were unfamiliar with the Danielson framework (i.e., "Danielson") used in the

evaluation process. Newer teachers tended to have little familiarity with Danielson, stating on several occasions they had not been exposed to Danielson either in college or prior to their first evaluation. When asked what they had heard about Danielson, Participant 13 stated Danielson had just “been referenced to me. So anything besides that, I would have to research myself.” Participant 17 remarked, “I only look at it when I’m being evaluated, and it becomes like a checklist and me proving the checklist to an evaluator. When they talk about domains and stuff like that, I would have to look it up.” Other teachers expressed some familiarity with Danielson, whereas only one participant expressed significant knowledge of the framework.

Theme 2: The Evaluators. During the interviews, participants expressed overall confidence in the good intentions of administrators to conduct teacher evaluations. Participants were mixed on perceptions of the qualifications of administrators to conduct evaluations—not because of a lack of knowledge of evaluations, but because of a lack of knowledge of the content area or grade level knowledge of the evaluators. Participant 4 stated their evaluator “knows the ins and outs of how to work the Danielson model, and I really do feel like they want us to do well on our evaluation. Their knowledge helps me score higher on my evaluation.” Other participants expressed concern that by not being familiar with a subject or grade level, evaluators could not accurately assess teacher effectiveness through observation. One participant noted, “I believe that just having an administrative degree is not enough to understand what happens in each individual classroom. In order to evaluate me, you should have somewhat of the same degree so that you have the same understanding.”

As the research site was a small school, participants were asked if the size of the school had an impact on the evaluation process. Almost all participants expressed that in a small school, evaluators and teachers are more likely to have a closer relationship with each other than at a

larger school. When asked how this relationship can affect evaluations, participants were divided on whether personal relationships between teacher and evaluator provide positive or negative results. Participant 2 stated they appreciated the personal connection to their evaluator and felt like they were more open to feedback due to this connection. Participant 8 expressed that their personal relationship with their evaluator makes the process easier, stating, “You’re more able to feel like yourself when being evaluated.” Conversely, Participant 3 stated, “I don’t know if we’re getting honest feedback sometimes, positive or negative.” Several staff members expressed concern that evaluators cannot remain objective when relationships are personal. Participant 6 stated, “I have a good relationship with the person whom I’ve known,” yet, they also noted, “But at a small school, it is harder to be objective because you know the people and the kids.” Another participant noted:

Because if you’re in with the administrator, you’re going to get a much better evaluation than if you’re not. And, you know, you can have two people doing the exact same thing, but if one of them’s more friendly with the administration, they’re going to get a better evaluation than the other person.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked: What are the teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and opinions about the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system at a small, rural, central Illinois school? The researcher interviewed 20 staff members who had been subject to the teacher evaluation process. Data were analyzed, and several themes emerged, including the idea that the evaluation process seems more like a checklist than a development tool for teachers. Moreover, although some found the process helpful, teachers overall gained very little from the evaluation process.

Theme 3: Checklist Versus Tool Designed to Improve Teaching Effectiveness.

Although some teachers expressed positive feelings about all or some of the evaluation process, most teachers viewed evaluations as a time to mark boxes on a checklist instead of improving teacher performance. Staff members understood state law dictates much of the teacher evaluation process, but that did not diminish their generally negative attitudes about the process.

Participants largely viewed the process as just something all schools must do to remain compliant with state law.

Specific steps in the evaluation process stood out as confirmation of teacher evaluations being a checklist instead of an improvement process. With tenured teachers evaluated and observed only twice every other year, and nontenured teachers being evaluated and observed twice a year until tenure, many teachers did not feel like evaluators could accurately experience what occurs in their classroom on a day-to-day basis. Participant 3 stated, “I think the process is invalid . . . because it’s only picking out three times out of an entire year. It can’t see all the relationships you build . . . that really makes a classroom work.” Another participant commented on the observation piece involving the recording of classroom activities by the evaluator.

Participant 2 noted:

The way the evaluations go now . . . they’re just supposed to sit there and type everything that happened. I feel like they are more qualified to do that than they are to really understand the content of what is going on in class. I feel like they’re not really assessing the content of it.

When asked if they saw teacher evaluations as a checklist or a tool to improve teacher effectiveness, almost all teachers responded similarly to Participant 5, who noted:

Well, through the eyes of a teacher, I would say that it's jumping through the hoops of the evaluation process to get the checkmark to be able to keep your job, to get on the right list. From an evaluator's standpoint, they would tell you it's to give you constructive criticism and make you a better teacher.

Theme 4: Evaluation Process Effectiveness. The primary purpose of the study was to determine teachers' perceptions of the teacher evaluation process at the research site. Based on participant responses, most teachers did not feel the current teacher evaluation process improves their overall teaching effectiveness. Though many respondents believed some aspects of the process held value as a development tool, most participants responded negatively when asked if the evaluation process had improved their teaching effectiveness.

Few respondents found the pre-observation piece of the process beneficial. Specifically, most respondents find minimal benefit in filling out the paperwork that accompanies the pre-observation, often referring to that part of the process as a waste of time. The observation piece of the process was generally considered a waste of time and effort. The post-observation part of the evaluation process was often described as the most valuable part of the process. Teachers appreciate and benefit from the opportunity to reflect on their actions and receive feedback from their evaluators. Most participants viewed the student learning objective (SLO) process as a significant waste of time for multiple reasons, including the belief that SLOs do not accurately measure a student's progress. The uploading of artifacts to the Evaluwise website was generally seen as unproductive, though some teachers liked that by uploading artifacts, their evaluators can see evidence of teacher work not visible during observations. Although teacher perceptions of the process varied, the overall number of negative comments about the effectiveness of the process far outweighed the positive comments (see Appendix H).

Most teachers expressed there is value in being assessed and reviewing their performance with administrators. Several participants indicated receiving helpful advice and tips from evaluators. Participant 5 stated, “One of my evaluators constantly challenged me to connect what I was teaching to real life. So, I’ve found that just through thinking of that a little, I could do it pretty easily and pretty successfully.” The uploading of artifacts and pre-observation and postobservation paperwork was often mentioned as unnecessary and unhelpful. Participant 5 responded, “The paperwork before the observation is the least useful part of the evaluation for me.”

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked: What ideas do teachers at a small, rural, central Illinois school have to improve the teacher assessment process at the school? Participants were asked to reflect on what they would change if there were no state laws dictating what school districts have to do on teacher evaluations. After interviewing the 20 participants and analyzing the data, two key themes emerged: Eliminate the pre-observation paperwork and replace formal observations with more frequent classroom drop-ins by administrators.

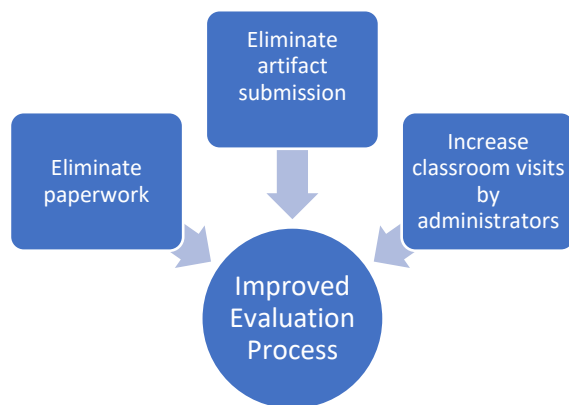
Theme 5: Pre-Observation Practice. On pre-observation practices, comments from most participants reflected an overall negative attitude about the amount and effectiveness of required pre-observation materials and meetings. Participant 5 recommended less paperwork, noting, “It’s hard for me to imagine anything different, but maybe just less of the paperwork side of things and more of the meeting and discussing side of things.” Several participants found the pre-observation paperwork not reflective of real-world activity. Participant 16 stated, “I would say one that is not beneficial to the process is the paperwork. We do things that are unrealistic [in planning observed lessons].”

Theme 6: Formal Evaluations Versus Classroom Drop-Ins. Of the 20 participants in the study, nine said they would welcome more evaluator drop-in observations instead of once or twice per year formal observations. One participant noted, “I would say get rid of the extra paperwork and SLOs and have more of the unplanned ones because if you come in unplanned, you’re going to see much more reality of what goes on in a room.” Many teachers welcomed the idea of more regular classroom visits and less formal feedback (see Figure 2). Participant 1 stated:

I don’t understand the purpose of the formal observations. We’re a small enough school, just come in and see me teach because I should be doing my job at all times; and yes, there are days where things get a little out of hand, or we have filler going on, but for the most part we’re small enough to just come in and watch us, and then have the conversations that need to be had. I don’t feel like you need to be as formal in such a small school. I also think that if you’re evaluating, then you need to be in classrooms more and have more conversations about what’s going on.

Figure 2

Teacher Recommendations to Improve Evaluation Process



Reliability and Validity

Two of the most critical factors in the design of a research study are reliability and validity (Mohajan, 2018). Research results are trustworthy when transparency, transferability, and credibility issues are addressed in the study. All interview questions focused on the research questions. Credibility criteria were met as data were triangulated via source triangulation. Triangulation of sources involves collecting data from various sources in the same research method (Amankwaa, 2016). Study participants represented a variety of grade levels, content areas, and teaching experience. In this varying group of participants, common themes emerged, creating validity in the research study.

The study measured perceptions of the teacher evaluation process at a small school. Participant inclusion criteria included (a) must have been evaluated at least once at the research site and (b) willingness to participate in the study. The researcher invited every certified teacher at the research site to participate in the study via email (see Appendix C), and the invitation to participate explained the study requirements. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no incentive was offered. All participants replied to the researcher either via email or in person. Before each interview, participants signed the informed consent form, were informed of the study's goals, and were allowed the option to opt out of the study prior to being interviewed or anytime thereafter. Confidentiality was discussed further, and participants were only identified during the recorded interviews as *participant*. The electronic data will be stored in a password-protected cloud account for three years and deleted (Electronic Code of Federal Regulations [eCFR], 2018). To preserve data consistency, interview questions were associated with the three research questions. The researcher directed attention to the interview questions during interviews

and only asked for participants to clarify or elaborate on answers as needed. Subject matter experts (SMEs), including a school superintendent and two school principals, reviewed the research questions to ensure the participants' answers would provide sufficient data.

To minimize researcher bias, member checks were conducted. Member checks are a technique for increasing the credibility of research results (Birt et al., 2016). Transcripts were returned to participants who were offered the opportunity to review them for inaccuracy and signs of researcher bias. No revisions were suggested by participants. The process of allowing study participants to review and make corrections to transcripts is one method of achieving research transparency.

For research results to be transferable, those results must be generalizable to other locations and larger groups (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). One method the researcher used to ensure transferability was by ensuring a cross-section of participants in the study. Participants included newer, tenured, elementary, primary, and special subject (e.g., physical education [PE], music, art) teachers. This cross-section of participants allows future researchers to replicate this study and minimizes the concern that particular demographics may have been excluded (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

Chapter Summary

The goal of this qualitative case study was to discover teachers' perceptions of the teacher evaluation process at a small central Illinois school. The first research question addressed participant knowledge of the details of the evaluation process itself. Participants generally understood the various steps of the evaluation process, including the pre-observation, observation, post-observation, and SLO process. Newer teachers expressed a lack of understanding about the evaluation process, having never learned about the process in college or

upon hire by the research site school. Most teachers expressed minimal knowledge about the domains in the Danielson framework, with several claiming they only refer to the framework when they are evaluated.

The second research question asked for participants' perceptions of the overall effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system. Very few participants felt the evaluation process helps improve teacher effectiveness. Participants generally expressed a desire to improve their teaching effectiveness but did not recognize the current teacher evaluation process as helpful in facilitating improvement. The participants felt there is an excessive amount of paperwork involved, including pre-observation forms and uploading artifacts, that does little to improve teaching performance. Many participants referred to the process as more of a checklist than a tool designed to improve performance.

The final research question sought to determine what suggestions participants had to improve the teacher evaluation process at the research site. Participants understood much of what drives the teacher evaluation process at the school is dictated by state statutes. To improve the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation process, teachers recommended eliminating paperwork from the pre-observation part of the process and eliminating the need to upload artifacts to confirm teacher activities evaluators cannot readily witness during observations. Staff members value administrator feedback but would replace the formal evaluation process with more frequent administrator classroom visits, followed by informal feedback sessions. Interpretations, conclusions, limitations, recommendations, and leadership implications are included in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

A problem facing school administrators is the requirement to conduct teacher evaluations without knowing how teachers feel about the effectiveness of the evaluation process. When teacher quality improves, student performance has also been demonstrated to improve (Derrington & Campbell, 2018). Teacher evaluations can provide an opportunity for teachers and administrators to work together to improve classroom performance, ultimately improving student achievement (Reinhorn et al., 2017). As the process is time-consuming and costly, administrators often do not fully engage and artificially inflate evaluation ratings (Shaked, 2018). When administrators are unaware of how the staff feels about evaluation effectiveness, they may continue to conduct teacher evaluations that teachers often find of little benefit.

The studied evaluation process at the research site consisted of classroom observations and student growth. The observation part of the process involves a pre-observation meeting with the evaluator, observation during an actual lesson, and a postobservation debriefing with the evaluator. The Charlotte Danielson framework for teaching (FFT; The Danielson Group, 2013) is used as the rubric for the observation and professionalism part of the evaluation. Donahue and Vogel (2018) concluded teachers believe evaluations are more credible when a standardized tool (e.g., a rubric) is used to reduce evaluator bias and clarify teachers' expectations. Student growth is measured by administering either a standardized test or a teacher-created test approved by an evaluation committee. The study examined teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the process and revealed recommendations for improving the process.

In this qualitative case study, participants answered interview questions aligning with the three research questions. As demonstrated in Table 1, source triangulation was achieved by interviewing 20 staff members of varying tenure, grade-level representation, and content-area

expertise. The study's purpose was to collect staff perceptions of the teacher evaluation process and recommendations for improvement at a small school. The objectives of the study were achieved via semi-structured in-person and telephone interviews.

During analysis, data were coded, and themes were revealed that aligned with the research questions. Findings revealed a general lack of confidence in the current teacher evaluation process, yet, participants expressed willingness to be evaluated and given feedback. As noted in Table 2, the lack of confidence in the current process resulted from what participants viewed as a checklist process instead of a process designed to measure teacher effectiveness and improve performance. Participants identified ways to improve the process, including eliminating paperwork, eliminating artifact submission, and increasing classroom visits by administration (see Figure 2). Staff members reported a less formal evaluation process involving less paperwork and more administrator classroom drop-ins might be more effective than the current formal structure.

Although research revealed positive aspects of the evaluation process, overall study findings indicated teachers negatively perceived the current evaluation process. The following section includes research findings, interpretations, and conclusions. Limitations to the study became apparent during data collection and analysis and formed the basis for suggestions for future research. Suggestions for additional research led to implications for leadership.

Findings, Interpretations, and Conclusions

The goal of early teacher evaluation processes in the United States was to determine if teachers supported and promoted community values and mores rather than improving the quality of teacher performance (Jewell, 2017). Through the years, various programs such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) or Race to the Top were developed to force states and school districts to

evaluate teacher performance by measuring student achievement (Lavigne & Chamberlain, 2016). Evaluating teachers is a difficult task, as many factors that can influence a student's performance are outside the teacher's control (Warring, 2015). When many teachers can identify subpar teachers, yet very few teachers receive poor evaluation ratings, administrators should not be surprised when teachers lack faith in the effectiveness of the evaluation process (Kraft & Gilmour, 2017). This qualitative case study aimed to examine teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation process at a small school. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person or via telephone. Collected data were related to the research questions, and themes materialized during the analysis. Three significant conclusions emerged from the data analysis: Staff members understood the need to be evaluated, the evaluation process involves too much paperwork and formality, and teachers perceived the evaluation process as ineffective and a waste of time and effort.

Need for Teacher Evaluations

Research has demonstrated a connection between teacher excellence and student performance (Derrington & Campbell, 2018; Fitchett & Heafner, 2018; Mammadov & Çimen, 2019). Though many outside factors (e.g., socioeconomic status, parental involvement, and access to technology) have proven to impact student achievement, the most influential in-school factor guiding student success is the quality of classroom teachers (Fitchett & Heafner, 2018). When a highly competent and knowledgeable teacher leads a classroom, student performance improves. Having a process in place to evaluate the performance of classroom teachers is helpful and necessary to the development of teachers. When done correctly, criticism and positive feedback can improve teachers' self-efficacy, possibly improving students' classroom performance (Aldeman, 2017). The present study's findings revealed a desire by participants to

be evaluated and provided feedback to help facilitate teacher improvement. Most staff members expressed that although the process's elements added little to their effectiveness as teachers, classroom observations and evaluations are beneficial to professional development if done correctly.

Excessive Paperwork and Formality

Staff members felt the evaluation process is too formalized and paperwork intensive. Formal observations include filling out online forms in advance of and after classroom observations. In preparation for observation, teachers must prepare a much more detailed lesson plan than is typically designed. Teachers must meet with evaluators in advance to discuss the lesson, the students in the class, and what the evaluators should look for during the lesson. Rubrics have been identified as a valuable tool for evaluators to provide clear and precise feedback to teachers (Donahue & Vogel, 2018). The Charlotte Danielson FFT is a research-based rubric consisting of different elements of teaching performance (Kettler & Reddy, 2017). Study participants, however, saw adherence to this rubric as excessively formal and merely a list of activities that must be checked off a list. Several staff members mentioned only referencing the Danielson framework when being evaluated and never referring to it otherwise.

Ineffectiveness of the Teacher Evaluation Process

Teacher evaluations have been a part of education since the beginning of the public education system in the United States (Jewell, 2017). Early evaluations were intended not to measure the educational effectiveness of teachers but to monitor teachers' ability to echo community mores and values, especially those religious in nature (Jewell, 2017). Teachers were not offered professional development if found lacking in skill and ability but were summarily

dismissed from employment (Jewell, 2017). In most school districts, teacher evaluations have evolved over the years to include data and classroom observations.

The effectiveness of teacher evaluations is a continual point of debate. This study involved an analysis of data to determine how participants felt about the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation process at a small school. If done correctly, evaluations can be effective, and evaluators can improve teacher self-efficacy through observational learning, verbal encouragement or discouragement, and feedback (Yancey, 2019). Staff members recognized the need for teacher evaluations, but most study participants believed the evaluation process does little to improve teaching effectiveness.

A typical response by participants was that teacher evaluations feel more like a hoop to jump through rather than an opportunity to develop classroom skills. Tenured teachers are evaluated twice every two years (including one announced and one unannounced classroom observation), and nontenured teachers are evaluated every year until earning tenure. The study determined teachers believed when evaluators rarely observe lessons, any conclusions drawn on a teacher's performance are skewed.

Student growth measurement is also a significant part of a teacher's evaluation rating. Student learning objectives (SLOs) were metrics used by participants to measure student growth. When used correctly, Lin et al. (2020) characterized SLOs as practical tools to measure student and teacher improvement, make hiring decisions, and promote qualified teachers. Conversely, Alexander et al. (2017) determined inaccurate, and inconsistent SLO results can lead to inaccurate teacher evaluation ratings. The study's findings indicated staff concurred with Alexander et al. (2017) and believed SLOs provide little value to teacher evaluations. Several participants expressed concern that factors outside of teacher control can impact teacher

evaluation ratings based on student growth. For example, students may be having a bad day when they are being tested. If included in the sample, special education student scores could negatively affect overall classroom scores. One teacher expressed that because the test scores have no impact on students' grades, students have no incentive to do well on the tests. Participants believed student growth is essential, but SLOs do not necessarily contribute to effective teacher evaluations.

The study results reflected elements of the theoretical framework of self-efficacy, the theory derived from Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT; Nguyen, 2016). Self-efficacy is the idea that belief in one's abilities can increase the individual's chance of success (Mireles-Rios et al., 2019; Wilde & Hsu, 2019). Although study participants generally disliked the teacher evaluation process, many expressed personal satisfaction when receiving positive feedback from administrators and when students displayed academic growth. Because a person's self-efficacy level impacts performance, study findings indicated the importance of school administrators developing teacher evaluation processes that help teachers feel good about themselves instead of merely measuring performance.

Limitations

The study was limited by several factors. No male staff members participated in the study, resulting in a lack of male perspective on the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation process. The sample size of 20 was small, and all participants were employed by the same rural K–8 school in central Illinois. A regular criticism of qualitative studies is that small sample sizes do not reflect the actual population, rendering data analysis results less reliable and less valid (Mohajan, 2018). The school itself was a single-school district with only two administrators who conduct teacher evaluations. Teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the evaluation process

were consequently limited to the opinions of the actions of just two evaluators. Results may only be generalizable to female elementary staff members in small, rural schools with similar populations.

Another limitation of the study was the examination of evaluation effectiveness at small schools. The study's goal was to examine teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system at a small school. Finding small schools similar to the research site where staff members were willing to participate in interviews contributed to conducting a single-site case study.

A final limitation was the need to maintain participant anonymity. Almost all teachers volunteered to participate, but many were concerned about confidentiality. Because participants were all from one school, analysis results had to be carefully reviewed to ensure no information was reported that violated participant privacy. Strict adherence to the guarantee of participant confidentiality limited the number of specific details disclosed in the final report. Participant reflections often had to be generalized to avoid identifying a particular grade level or subject teacher. In many cases, there was only one teacher of a particular grade level or subject. This generalization limited research results from being broken down into various groups like special education teachers, first-grade teachers, or physical education (PE) teachers.

Credibility refers to confidence in the truth of research findings and can be achieved through multiple means (Amankwaa, 2016). To address this limitation, subject matter experts (SMEs) were used to review interview questions to ensure the questions aligned with the research questions and purpose of the study. Regular contact with study participants was maintained throughout the study, which improved data analysis credibility and believability (Wu et al., 2016). A limitation of case studies is dependability (i.e., reliability), the principle that

research findings are consistent and replicable (Amankwaa, 2016). This limitation was minimized by following Yin's (2018) guidance to closely adhering to case study procedures, developing a database of data collected in the study, and maintaining a safe chain of data evidence. Triangulation of sources was used to maximize dependability by collecting data from a variety of participants from different backgrounds in the same research method (Amankwaa, 2016). A mix of elementary, junior high, special education, and "specials" teachers participated in the study.

Results of the study are transferable to other small schools. Participants and methodology were thoroughly described so readers can determine if the study applies to their studies (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). A limitation of the transferability of study results—the small size of the sample group—was overcome by including a cross-section of participants, including subject matter, tenure, and grade level.

Recommendations

Practical and applicable recommendations emerged from the findings of the study. Study participants believed teacher performance needs to be evaluated, but the evaluation process is ineffective at improving teacher performance. Staff members reported the process as a series of checklists rather than a tool to improve teacher performance. Although most teachers appreciated receiving feedback from evaluators, much of the evaluation process was considered a waste of time. Specifically, the pre-observation paperwork and the uploading of artifacts were considered especially unproductive. For the teacher evaluation process to become a helpful measurement of teacher effectiveness, school administrators need to determine how to reform the process within the boundaries of state law, teacher contracts, and state board of education guidelines.

Research needs to be conducted to determine which parts of the evaluation process are established by school officials and which parts are mandated by state law. Research should include an analysis of state law to determine what changes can be made to the evaluation process at the school. Evaluation tools and processes from other school districts should be reviewed to determine if those tools or processes might fulfill the needs of the study site school.

Additional research is recommended to build on the findings of this study. Further research should include multiple small schools to gain teacher perspectives from more than one school. Including other schools would help reduce the possibility that bias against individual administrators impacted study results. Any additional research should include a sample large enough to ensure males are included to ensure a male perspective is considered in future analysis.

Supplementary qualitative research should be conducted. A limitation of the study was the inability of results to be broken down and reported based on grade level, subject matter, or specialty area where a participant may teach. Additional research should include enough participants to maintain confidentiality while still reporting results based on the previously referenced areas. Results could indicate teacher evaluation instruments should be tailored to specific groups instead of generalized for all teachers. More research should be conducted to determine administrators' perceptions of the effectiveness of teacher evaluation processes.

The study conducted was a qualitative case study, and further research could consist of quantitative research to quantify teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation process. Quantitative research would allow for more responses and for reporting data at different levels while maintaining participant confidentiality. A quantitative study would also allow for the easier inclusion of multiple schools in the study.

Implications for Leadership

The goal of the study was to help small-school administrators understand how teachers perceive the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system. Teacher evaluations are intended to improve teacher performance and effectiveness and, subsequently, improve student performance (Derrington & Campbell, 2018). Administrators can use results to determine how to maximize benefits from the time, effort, and money invested in the teacher evaluation process and adjust to improve the process and outcomes.

Most Teachers Understand Evaluation Process

Research Question 1 asked: How do teachers in a small, rural, central Illinois school describe the teacher evaluation process? From the semi-structured interviews, evidence revealed varying levels of understanding of the teacher evaluation process. Donahue and Vogel (2018) claimed rubrics could help teachers understand what is expected to achieve proficiency. Findings showed teachers either had no understanding of the Danielson framework for teaching used by evaluators or participants only referred to the rubric when they were being evaluated. Most participants felt they understood the overall steps of the process, including pre-observation, artifact collection, SLOs, and postobservation requirements. Newer teachers, however, expressed little understanding of how the evaluation process works, having neither learned about the evaluation process in school nor after being hired by the school.

The implications of these findings could encourage school administrators to review how well the evaluation process is explained to teachers being evaluated. New teachers need to be introduced to the school evaluation system upon hiring. Schools should allocate time during professional development sessions to train teachers about the particular rubric used to evaluate their performances. Instead of viewing a rubric as a checklist to be completed during

observations and evaluations, teachers who understand and use the rubric regularly could benefit from using the tool as intended—to improve teacher performance and, in turn, student success.

Evaluation Process is Ineffective

Research Question 2 asked: What are the teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and opinions about the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system at a small, rural, central Illinois school? If teacher evaluations provide an opportunity for teachers and administrators to work together to improve teacher and student performance (Reinhorn et al., 2017), teachers must have faith in the effectiveness of the evaluation process. Participants in the study generally perceived the teacher evaluation process as ineffective and much of the process as a waste of time and effort. Teachers understood the need to be evaluated but did not feel the teacher evaluation process improves teacher and student performance. Staff members concurred with Taylor and Tyler (2012), believing if teacher quality is critical to the development of students, an efficient, effective, and accepted teacher evaluation system is necessary to ensure classrooms are led by qualified professionals.

The research revealed several implications for schools and administrators. School administrators need to review evaluation processes with staff members to determine how the evaluation system affects teaching habits and performance. Honest and open conversations about the process could lead to easily implemented changes that improve all stakeholders' processes. One complaint of participants was an unreasonable and unhelpful amount of paperwork during the evaluation process. A discussion among all parties could lead to a streamlined process involving less paperwork while maintaining process integrity. Another implication is the involvement of staff in designing a new or revised teacher evaluation process. After recognizing how the staff feels about the ineffectiveness of the process, administrators should work with staff

to develop a process that meets state requirements while incorporating staff suggestions for improvement.

These implications support the study's theoretical framework of self-efficacy. A person's self-efficacy affects their performance. If school leaders can develop a robust and accepted teacher evaluation process that engages teachers, provides helpful negative and positive feedback, and helps teachers grow instead of punishing them, teacher self-efficacy can be increased (Mireles-Rios et al., 2019). Teachers with well-developed self-efficacy can overcome fear and doubts and become high-achieving classroom performers (Wilde & Hsu, 2019), subsequently improving student performance.

Improving Teacher Evaluation Effectiveness

Research Question 3 asked: What ideas do teachers at a small, rural, central Illinois school have to improve the teacher assessment process at the school? Findings from the study indicated a willingness by teachers to be evaluated by administrators. Staff members generally appreciated receiving feedback and noted sometimes suggestions from evaluators are incorporated into their daily practices. Several suggestions were made that could lead to staff perceiving the evaluation process as more effective and beneficial to teacher and student performance.

A common suggestion by participants was the reduction or elimination of paperwork, seen as adding no value to the evaluation process. Pre-observation forms were described as time-consuming and unproductive, adding nothing to teacher development. Uploading artifacts into the Evaluwise system simply to prove what was done in the classroom was viewed as more of a checklist than a teacher development step. An additional implication of these findings was a desire by participants to make the evaluation and observation process less formal. Staff members

welcomed the idea of changing the evaluation system to include more classroom visits by administrators instead of formal, announced, and unannounced classroom visits. Where possible, based on state law, administrators should consider working with teachers to develop a much more streamlined evaluation process involving more drop-in classroom visits and informal feedback sessions. A final implication of the study was the need to increase opportunities for teachers to observe and provide feedback to each other. This study finding was supported by Derrington and Martinez (2019), who reported teachers benefit from receiving feedback from peers and content experts in the same content area. Administrators should consider expanding these opportunities for teachers.

Conclusion

Costly and time-consuming teacher evaluations involving classroom observation, student growth measurement, student feedback, or a combination of all three occur in all 50 states (Ross & Walsh, 2019). The goal of the study was to examine how teachers in small schools feel about the effectiveness of teacher evaluation processes. The aim of the study was met through a series of semi-structured interviews. Staff responses were collected, interpreted, and analyzed based on the research questions.

Based on the study findings, teachers want to be evaluated, held accountable, and receive positive or critical feedback. Small school administrators need to reassess the different steps of teacher evaluation processes to determine if improvements are possible. Study results indicated eliminating unnecessary paperwork, replacing formal observations with less formal classroom drop-ins, and revising student growth measurements are ways administrators can revise current processes to create an evaluation system more acceptable to teachers. If evaluations are

conducted correctly, teachers can feel optimistic about their performance, thereby improving self-efficacy in ways that translate to improved teacher and student achievement (Yancey, 2019).

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Appendix A

Site Approval Letter



January 28, 2021

Thomas Fuller
Social Studies Teacher
XXX District #98

Dear Thomas Fuller:

On behalf of XXX, I wanted to make you aware that the Board of Education approved your request to complete your dissertation research about teacher perceptions of educator evaluations at a small school. This approval occurred at the Board of Education Regular Meeting on January 25, 2021.

I provided background information about your request to the Board of Education, which included, "Mr. Fuller is requesting permission for the above study. The study will be of XXX, solely. The Administration and XXX Association of Teachers are supportive of this study. Mr. Fuller plans to utilize time outside of the work day for the research and for the interviews. Teachers are not required to participate. The study will be published and the District will be able to analyze and reflect on the results of the study. Given the study is solely of XXX, I believe the BOE needs to vote to approve it. I do recommend approval."

The above background information will serve as the foundation for you completing the research as it relates to XXX. We congratulate you for being at this stage of the journey of completing your Doctoral Degree at the American College of Education. Best wishes as you complete your journey. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Dr. XXX, Superintendent

Appendix B**Site Permission Request**

1/15/2021

Dr. XXX
[Address Redacted]

Dear Dr. XXX:

My name is Thomas Fuller, and I am a doctoral candidate at American College of Education (ACE) writing to request permission to interview teaching staff members at Rankin School. This information will be used for my dissertation research related to *Teacher Perceptions of Educator Evaluations at a Small School: A Qualitative Case Study*. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to investigate teachers' perceptions of the teacher evaluation process at a small school and what may be done to improve the process.

If you allow these interviews, please provide permission in the form of a short note on school district letterhead.

Thank you for your attention to this issue and prompt response. I appreciate your time and consideration of my request.

Regards,

Thomas C. Fuller

Appendix C

Invitation to Participate

Date:

Dear -----

I am a doctoral student at American College of Education. I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a dissertation research study.

Brief description of the study: This will be a study to examine the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system in a small school. Teachers who have been evaluated by administrators at this site will be interviewed and given the opportunity to offer their opinions about the evaluation process and its effectiveness.

Description of criteria for participation: Any teacher who has been evaluated by an administrator at Rankin School is eligible to participate in the study.

Your participation in the study will be voluntary. If you wish to withdraw from the research at any time, you may do so by contacting me using the information below.

I may publish the results of this study; however, I will not use your name nor share identifiable data you provided. Your information will remain confidential. If you would like additional information about the study, please contact the following:

Candidate Contact Information: Thomas C. Fuller xxxxx@my.ace.edu

Chair Contact Information: Dr. Larry Gay Reagan xxxxx@ace.edu

If you meet the criteria above, are interested in participating in the study, and would like to be included in the potential participant pool, please come see me in person or send an email to the above address.

Thank you again for considering this dissertation research opportunity.

Appendix D

Informed Consent Letter



Prospective Research Participant: Read this consent form carefully and ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether you want to participate in this research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research.

Project Information

Project Title: Teachers' Perceptions of Instructor Evaluations: A Qualitative Case Study

Researcher: Thomas C. Fuller

Organization: American College of Education

Email: xxxxxx@my.ace.edu

Telephone: XXX-XXX-XXX

Researcher's Dissertation Chair: Dr. Larry Gay Reagan

Organization and Position: American College of Education

Email: xxxxxx@ace.edu

Introduction

I am Thomas Fuller, and I am a doctoral candidate student at American College of Education. I am doing research under the guidance and supervision of my Chair, Dr. Larry Gay Reagan. I will give you some information about the project and invite you to be part of this research. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research. This consent form may contain words you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information, and I will explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them then.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to investigate teachers' perceptions of the teacher evaluation process at a small school and what may be done to improve the process. You are being asked to participate in a research study which will assist with evaluating the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system at your school. Conducting this qualitative methods study will help provide useful information to your administration and set the stage for potential future research.

Research Design and Procedures

The study will use a qualitative methodology and a case study research design. The study will comprise of 15–20 participants who will participate in this research. Only teachers who have been evaluated will be invited to participate. The study will involve personal interviews to be conducted at a site most convenient for participants.

Participant selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because of your experience as a teacher whose performance has been evaluated by the administration at this site.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you choose not to participate, there will be no punitive repercussions. If you choose to participate in this study, you may change your mind later and stop participating even if you agreed earlier.

Procedures

We are inviting you to participate in this research study. If you agree, you will be asked to agree to a personal interview. The type of questions asked will range from a demographical perspective to direct inquiries about the topic of teacher evaluations in a small school.

Duration

The interview portion of the research study will require approximately 30 minutes to complete. If you are selected to participate in the study, the time expected will be a maximum of 45 minutes at a location and time convenient for you.

Risks

The researcher will ask you to share personal and confidential information, and you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. You do not have to answer any questions or take part in the discussion if you don't wish to do so. You do not have to give any reason for not responding to any question.

Benefits

While there will be no direct financial benefit to you, your participation is likely to help us find out more about the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system. The potential benefits of this study will aid the school district in assessing the effectiveness of its teacher evaluation system.

Confidentiality

I will not share information about you or anything you say to anyone outside of the researcher. During the defense of the doctoral dissertation, data collected will be presented to the dissertation committee. The data collected will be kept in a locked file cabinet or encrypted computer file. Any information about you will be coded and will not have a direct correlation

that directly identifies you as the participant. Only I will know your identity, and I will secure your information.

Sharing the Results

At the end of the research study, the results will be available for each participant. It is anticipated to publish the results so other interested people may learn from the research.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

Participation is voluntary. At any time you wish to end your participation in the research study, you may do so without repercussions.

Questions About the Study

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or xxxxx@my.ace.edu. This research plan has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of American College of Education. This is a committee whose role is to make sure research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to ask questions of this group, email IRB@ace.edu.

Certificate of Consent

I have read the information about this study, or it has been read to me. I acknowledge why I have been asked to be a participant in the research study. I have been provided the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I certify I am at least 18 years of age. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print or Type Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily. A copy of this Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print or type name of lead researcher: _____

Signature of lead researcher: _____

Date: _____

PLEASE KEEP THIS INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS.

Appendix E

Subject Matter Expert Review Request

Good afternoon,

As part of my upcoming research, I would like experts like yourselves in the area of teacher evaluations to take a look at my proposed interview questions. If you have any feedback or suggestions, I would be glad to hear them and incorporate them into my interviews.

I've included my research questions so you can see what I will be looking for during interviews and you can see if my questions align with the interview questions.

Research Question 1: How do teachers in a small, rural, central Illinois school describe the teacher evaluation process?

Research Question 2: What are the teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and opinions about the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system at a small, rural, central Illinois school?

Research Question 3: What ideas do teachers at a small, rural, central Illinois school have to improve the teacher assessment process at the school?

If you would take a look and send an email back with any suggestions if you have them, that would be great. You don't have to make suggestions to the document itself, simply provide some feedback in the text of an email. If everything looks good, then feel free to just say that!


Thanks so much for your help!

Thomas C. Fuller

Appendix F

Subject Matter Expert Responses

School Superintendent



Dr.
to me, April ▾

Thu, Jan 28, 3:28 PM ☆ ↩ ⋮

Hi Thomas,

The questions seem comprehensive, which is a positive. I think you should add why or why not to the question about improved teaching. The friend question seems unique; however, I don't have a suggestion as to how to change it. I find that question to be so subjective without a definition of what friendship is etc. and how this compares to a larger school etc. I think you could consider if nervous tension exists and/or if that impacts perception or overall effectiveness of the process. I would also consider try to understand how many times they have been evaluated and/or if all of their evaluations have been at ... I think without knowing this the perceptions could include feelings about the process from another school (i.e. misleading results). Also, I think the obvious issue related to this study occurring now is the potential impact of the pandemic, MOU, general deferral process etc. Further, you may need to define what it means when talking about the formal state process etc. This could be abstract for some and/or participants could all have a different understanding and/or perception of what this means.


Just my two cents. Hope this helps!

Dr. [redacted], Superintendent

Our School is a Great Place to Learn

Message created from my mobile device

High School Principal




to me ▾

Mon, Feb 1, 8:16 AM (13 days ago) ☆ ↩ ⋮

So I didn't see the attachment. No wonder I was confused.

I think I would take a look at #2. The rest of the questions focus on opinion of the overall evaluation system. #2 is particular to an individual, and the results could be biased simply because the staff do or do not like the evaluator. If you're going to include the question, I think it needs to request that interviewees give specific, factual information (ie. 1st year evaluator, unfamiliar with content, etc.) to avoid answers about the popularity of the evaluator, attitude, etc. These things do not negate their ability to effectively evaluate.

Grade School Principal



to me ▾

7:14 AM ☆ ↩

I'm sorry that I am holding you up on this. I like the questions you have and I look forward to hearing how the teachers answer.

I like 1 and 3 especially. I feel they will help me to know if we as a district needs to better educate our staff about the process and tool better. I feel those are important questions.

I also like 12 and 13. I like that you are asking teachers how they have improved/changed through the process. Since that is the goal, I like you added it in.

I look forward to reading the answers to the other questions as well. I think it will be interesting to get the perspective of the staff.

Please let me know if there is any else.

Appendix G**Interview Questions**

Interview Date and Time:

Interview Location:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Interviewee:

By signing below, I verify the completion of the participant informed consent form.

Name _____ Date _____

Introductory Questions:

How many years have you been teaching?

Why did you decide to become a teacher?

Interview Questions:

1. What is your understanding of the evaluation process as you have experienced it here?
2. How would you assess the qualifications of the evaluators to accurately evaluate you based on the process in place?
3. How familiar are you with the evaluation tool used in your evaluation?
4. How well do you think the current evaluation instrument measures your effectiveness as a teacher?
5. What makes the evaluation instrument a valid or invalid tool to measure your teaching effectiveness?
6. What is the most beneficial part of the evaluation process?
7. What is the least beneficial part of the evaluation process?

8. How do you think being a very small school with two evaluators impacts the administration of the evaluations?
9. What do you think is “fair” or “unfair” about the current process?
10. At a small school, you may have much more daily contact with administrators than at a large school. What effect, if any, does that have on the evaluation process?
11. What would you like to see your school do differently in regards to the current evaluation system?
12. What about your teaching has changed as a result of being evaluated under the current system? Please provide specific examples.
13. How has the evaluation process affected your teaching performance?

Closing question: What else would you like to add to your responses?

Your responses are confidential and will not be reported as a response tied to your name.

You will receive an email with the transcript of your interview for you to approve. Thank you for your participation.

Appendix H

Participant Comments

Table 3

Theme Development

| Emergent themes | Subcode | Final themes |
|---|---|---|
| Excessive paperwork Uploading artifacts not beneficial Too many “hoops” to jump through | Evaluwise process Pre-observation meeting | Pre-observation Practice |
| Evaluators do not observe teachers enough to draw conclusions Quality of feedback varies by evaluator Administrators do not know my content area or how to teach it | Evaluator inconsistency Content area | The evaluators |
| Only evaluated every 2 years Planned observation too “structured” Observations not “real life” | Observations Quantity of observations | Checklist versus tool for improvement |
| Unfamiliar with Danielson Helpful to have a rubric | New teachers Danielson model use | The Danielson model |
| Prefer drop-ins over formal observations Would welcome administrators in class more | Administrator class visits Informal observations | Formal evaluations versus informal drop-ins |
| Formal observations suddenly rescheduled Nothing has changed with the way I teach SLOs are waste of time Teachers should be evaluated Nothing happens to bad teachers | Student growth Necessity of evaluations | Evaluation process Effectiveness |