

Exploring the Personal Journeys of Women Leaders Serving in K-12 Christian Schools

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the John Wesley School of Leadership

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Leadership

Carolina University

December 7, 2020

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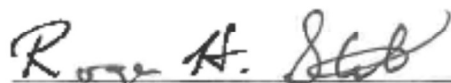
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

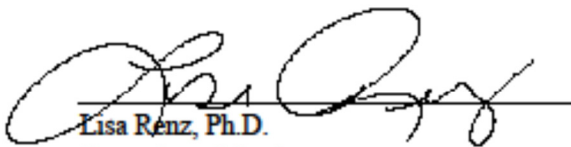
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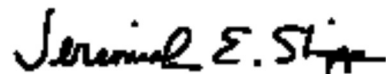
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Abstract

This phenomenological qualitative research examined the factors that influenced seventeen women leaders in K-12 Christian schools and the pathways that lead to their achievement. The research was designed to analyze the pivotal components of their journeys to further understand and enhance training for future women educational leaders. The framework of the research was in response to the underrepresentation of women in leadership counter to those serving as teachers. The participants were acquired through the snowball sampling technique with data collected via online interviews and a discussion board forum. The data was triangulated, coded, and analyzed to result in seven themes. The themes represent consistent components shared in the narratives of the participants regarding their personal journeys to Christian education leadership positions. The themes were both intrinsic and extrinsic in nature. The themes encompassed motivations such as personal desire to serve, a calling from the Lord, a commitment to live in obedience to the Lord's guidance and valuing the experience as a teacher. The remaining themes represented external influences within the accrediting agency, as well as spiritual and professional mentors who spoke words of encouragement as well as modeled servant leadership behaviors. Suggestions for further research are to include a deeper look into the mentor relationships and whether they are organic in nature or structured. In addition, research could expand to Christian leaders within secular schools. The conclusions of the study supported the literature on both external and internal sources of encouragement for women Christian education leaders. The underrepresentation of Christian educational leadership is not due to obstacles within the Christian educational realm but rather due to a direct correlation of guidance from the Lord.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family.

To my husband, Dion you have encouraged me through every word written, every book read, and every weary moment. You are my voice of reason, my problem solver, and the gift of love to my heart. I couldn't have done this without you and love you forever!

To my children, Billy and Becca you are always my joy givers. You always make me laugh at the perfect moment. You are talented, incredible young adults and I am so honored to be your mom. Don't worry, I will get off the "puter" now.

To my parents, Daddy and Momma you love me so well and I never doubt how valued I am to you. You both taught me a strong work ethic from a young age, and I am forever grateful for you both.

Dion, Billy, Becca, Momma and Daddy you are the real heroes in my life, and I couldn't love each of you more!

There is no one I talked to more through this journey than the Lord! I asked Him daily for His wisdom, His grace, His diligence, and His guidance. This dissertation is simply, yet purely, a product of the goodness of the Lord. May this work and every detail of my life point to His faithfulness and for His Glory above all!

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my sincere gratitude to my dissertation committee, especially Dr. Roger Stiles, whose wisdom and prayers were consistent. I am thankful for every amazing participant whose contribution to the Kingdom of God and Christian education can only be quantified in heaven but is clearly evident in their selfless pursuit of the Lord. Finally, to every professor in the Carolina University School of Leadership whose influence, instruction, and insight reflected godly virtue.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This desired phenomenological qualitative study will gather the narratives of individual professional journeys from women who serve as leaders in K-12 Christian schools. The journeys described will be comprised of the nuances, points of change, people of influence, and experiences acquired by the women participants in this study. The researcher proposes that the stories of the study will contribute to the depth of knowledge on the role of women in Christian educational leadership positions. The projection is that the particulars of their paths to leadership will have the potential to inspire and train future leaders.

The desire to explore and analyze the pathways from women educational leaders is in response to the phenomenon of gender discrepancy. The discrepancy is between the number of women in the field of education and the number of women represented in leadership positions in K-12th Christian schools. The proposed research addresses the gap in research specific to women leaders in faith-based educational institutions at the K-12th level. Research indicates that unique pathways exist for women who desire leadership positions in K-12 public schools. However, there is a gap in understanding the journeys for women in K-12 Christian schools.

A contribution to the field of study would increase the understanding for future women leaders on how to navigate various opportunities and obstacles and potentially forge new paths to fulfillment of personal goals, dreams, and calling through this study. The synthesis of shared stories will create a narrative of reference as future women leaders are trained and mentored. In addition, there is the opportunity within this qualitative research study to reveal timeline comparisons. As future leaders are guided, the key moments of development may be intentionally enhanced through an understanding of the experiences of the leaders who have gone before.

The final critical component of a qualitative research study on women who serve as leaders in K-12 Christian schools is the role of faith in their journey. As women of faith, their journeys will encompass personal faith experiences that guided the path to their role as a leader. These faith experiences encourage and build the body of Christ and the Kingdom of God with the testimonies for others to glean and inspire.

Background of the Study

In 1982, research on the pathways for women to achieve educational leadership positions was conducted based on the statistical data from the late 1970's which determined that "approximately 2% of public-school administrators are women" while simultaneous data stated that, "women comprise 63% of the nation's teachers" (McDade & Drake, 1982, p. 211). The study found variance within the pathways for women and problems which ranged from external perceptions of women in leadership, to personal hesitations to compete for positions primarily dominated by men (McDade & Drake, 1982). The researchers also determined the journeys for women varied depending on the geographical regions and school affiliations (McDade & Drake, 1982). Thus, the representation of women in leadership was clearly exemplified with little understanding of the explanations (McDade & Drake, 1982).

Thirty-five years later, more women fill educational leadership positions (Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray, 2013) with a greater understanding of the internal and external motives and influences involved. Overall, data and research indicate that women are making strides to leadership achievement (Sperandio, 2015). However, a more in-depth investigation of the data is needed, as an analysis of the representation of women in leadership positions varies between the public and private sectors. The statistical data compiled by the U.S. Department of Education determined, "The percentage of private school principals who were female was 55% overall,

75% in Catholic schools, 41% in other religious schools” (Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray, 2013, p. 3). The representation of women in the role of principal remains low when considering that in private schools “86% of elementary school teachers were female, and 56% of secondary school teachers were female” (Goldring, Gray, & Bitterman, 2013, p. 3).

The pathway for women to acquire leadership positions varies significantly from their male counterparts which creates a unique juxtaposition. Women in public education districts are primarily following pathways to leadership positions via district level and central office roles (Sperandio, 2015; Polinchock, 2013; Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). However, in the Christian educational arena, district and central office pathways do not exist; thus, the journey for women in educational leadership in Christian education is unique. Therefore, in a field dominated by women, the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in the realm of Christian education and the stories of advancement into leadership positions are phenomenon in need of research.

Statement of the Problem

Research indicates women continue to be underrepresented in educational leadership positions (Curry & Reynolds, 2015). Additional data designated in specific fields of study determined men receive leadership positions and tenure at a larger quantity and quicker rate than their female colleagues, regardless of the majority of women in faculty positions, (Pulia, Humbert, Kolehmainen, & Carnes, 2018). Women dominate the field of education in the role of teachers, however, the positions of educational leaders, from principals and assistant principals to levels of superintendents, are held by men (Coccia, 2019). Studies have included justifications of the opportunities and barriers for women in educational leadership but have not included the subset of Christian education and the influence of faith and religious beliefs (Coccia, 2019).

The problem is not limited to the number of women represented but also includes an understanding and investigation into the journey of women who have achieved leadership positions. Through investigation of the journeys of women who have achieved desired positions, those who desire educational leadership positions can be educated and instructed on pathways and opportunities thus, expediting their journey to anticipated positions. The statistics regarding women in education leadership exist for both public and nonpublic schools (Bauer, 2015; Marcomber, 2018). In addition, there is research which includes pathways for women in public education and their journey to acquiring educational leadership positions (Sperandio, 2015; Polinchock, 2013; Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). However, there is a gap in research for those whose journey is encompassed in the realm of Christian education. Thus, there is a need to investigate the phenomenon in an effort to acquire an understanding of potential pathways of opportunities for women who desire leadership positions and likewise support systems that promote and encourage career advancement.

There is a decline in interest in school leadership positions globally as stated by Pampuch (2019). This trend led to research specific to the members of the working class representing the Millennial generation, ages 20 to 38 years old (Pampuch, 2019). The research participants in the qualitative study were similar in their responses as they were not interested in “actively aspiring to leadership positions” (Pampuch, 2019, p. 2). One factor of the limited interest in leadership is a belief that the current structure of succession does not support the younger generations of leaders (Pampuch, 2019). This belief scaffolds to a feeling that the established protocol places a premium on years of experience, which leads to a rigid reproduction of the current leader with little desire for diversity based on age, gender, or ethnicity. Pampuch (2019) stated, “Women

were most impacted by this model, since at the exact time that promotion positions were being offered, many female aspirants left to begin families” (p. 3).

The research presented was specifically in the realm of Christian education and The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). The recommendation following this qualitative research is for the model of leadership within Christian education to be reinvented to allow for diversity regardless of “age, gender, ethnicity, or level of experience” (Pampuch, 2019, p. 4) for the future “success of the Christian school[s] both as an educational institution and as a community of believers” (Pampuch, 2019, p. 4). Thus, a key motivation to research the stated problem of limited representation of women in Christian education and understanding of the pathways for women to serve in Christian leadership positions is not only an opportunity to develop future leaders but also a compelling need.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to discover the primary pathways for women to acquire educational leadership positions within K–12 Christian Schools given the underrepresentation of women in current positions. The purpose is to synthesize the narratives of the qualitative participants to identify similarities in the journeys regarding experience, people of influence, faith experiences, and a timeline of events. The beneficiaries of the proposed study are future leaders and their continued success in the field of Christian education.

The theory is just as women contended for the gospel alongside the Apostle Paul as recorded in Philippians 4:3, women in leadership enhance Christian education for the sake of the spiritual formation and development of the next generation. As Solomon wrote, “By wisdom a

house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches” (Proverbs 24:3, ESV).

Thus, as research contributes to the knowledge and understanding of the value of the contribution of women to the realm of Christian Education, the structure of K-12 Christian schools is also strengthened. In addition, the proposed theory supports that mentorship for future Christian women educational leaders would be enhanced through additional insight and understanding of their personal success. The increased representation of women in leadership provides insight, wisdom, and care in an environment where student achievement is the ultimate goal.

Theoretical Framework

Contemporary research examined the pathways for women who are serving as school superintendents and how they arrived in their roles. The research determined the journeys varied as some experienced a more traditional pathway from serving as a teacher, to a leadership position in the school, then to superintendent. Others in the research moved from teacher positions to district roles prior to becoming the superintendent (Martineau, 2018). Likewise, another layer of understanding, regarding the contributing factors in the journey for women educational leaders, was investigated by Barajas (2016) who determined through the stories of women in the Latino community in Arizona that there are both the internal and external motivations that contributed to their pathways.

To add dimension and depth to the topic, Hayer (2015) gathered information through qualitative research on the journeys of Asian-Indian women leaders, where it was determined that one significant external influence was the interactions and encouragement found from other women leaders. This was a significant finding, however, their positions were not limited to the

field of education. Waldron-Asuncion (2016) focused research on African American women educational leaders in the state of Florida which contributed to the field of education a vantage-point specific to their experiences in which personal faith played a role in their journey.

Summarizing the dialogue of the African American participants, the researchers stated,

For the women who had some form of faith or spirituality it has given them a sense of purpose, peace, empowerment, and a connection to understanding the people around them. Among a few participants, concern was expressed about the lack of faith or spirituality within the upcoming generation and how the absence of this will affect their sustainability in the field of education. (Waldron-Asuncion, 2016, p. 103)

Thus, from the variation of the pathways for women superintendents in the United States, to the balance of both internal and external motivations for Latino and Asian-Indian women leaders, to the spiritual influences for African American women, there have been many dimensions to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of underrepresentation. Likewise, there are differences in the journeys for women to fulfill leadership roles within the educational realm. The research on women in educational leadership from various ethnicities contributed to societal awareness and ultimately to a greater representation of women and a positive impact on the field.

However, the gap in research is evident for women in Christian Education and supported by the recommendation by Coccia (2019), whose contemporary research collected the stories of women in K-12 educational leadership positions and determined that the role of faith contributed to the pathways and influences for the participants. This recommendation was birthed from the common factor for many of the participants in the Coccia (2019) study who had previous experience as a teacher in a Christian school and thus named the faith experience as contributing

to their journey. Therefore, the recommendation for further study in the role of personal faith and Christian educational institutions was included at the conclusion of the study. The gap in research specific to women in the Christian educational realm exists. Thus, the need and framework of this study to the field of Christian education can strengthen and increase understanding for future generations of women Christian leaders.

Research Question

In an effort to collect the narratives on the journeys of women who serve as leaders in K-12 Christian schools for the benefit of the field of Christian education, in addition to the encouragement of future women leaders, the following research question will guide this study: What are the factors that influence women in K-12 Christian school leadership and the pathways that lead to their achievement?

Nature of the Study

The research for this phenomenon will be completed utilizing a qualitative research design. The qualitative design supports the desire to allow for themes and determinants to unveil through the stories and narratives of the participants rather than being predetermined. A qualitative study was chosen due to the phenomenon being studied is the previous journeys women in Christian educational leadership positions have experienced rather than solely their current reality. The researcher will present to the participants the research question and a request for their personal story with the three additional guiding questions to further the discussion and dialogue (see Appendix A). The participants will be asked to prayerfully review the question allowing time to recall details of their journey to leadership. The desire will be to complete the conversation in approximately 60 – 90 minutes with flexibility on the timeline given the priority to gather a comprehensive narrative.

The plan is to acquire 15–20 participants for the study who are women in leadership positions in K-12 Christian Schools. Each participant will represent a Christian school that is accredited through the ACSI for consistency in standard levels of education and qualifications. In accordance with the snowball sampling method, each participant will be asked to refer a colleague or acquaintance which would be qualified and available to contribute their story to the study (Lewis-Beck, Liao, Bryman, Bryman, 2004). The snowball sampling technique will contribute to limited selection bias and objectivity within the study (Ruel, Wagner, Gillespie, 2015).

The instrument used will be personal narratives through conversation between the researcher and participants with the potential of incorporation of semi-structured guiding interview questions which will be pre-determined and utilized as the dialogue progresses. The interview will be transcribed and shared with the participants to ensure consistency and validity. The responses gathered will be coded and sorted for objective analysis. The reliability measures practiced will aid in natural and unbiased results and conclusions.

Significance of the Study

A qualitative study recording and analyzing the narrative journeys of women who serve in leadership positions in K-12 Christian schools will provide a depth of wisdom and understanding for the next generation of women leaders. Given the limited research specific to Christian education and women leaders, the opportunity to provide insights on experiences, mentor relationships, and faith growing moments are beneficial for women who will follow in their footsteps. There is a unique pathway for women in Christian education to advance into leadership given most Christian schools are not in a district setting with a central office for which

women can advance and gain experience. This pathway, while unique, has also not been discussed in order to synthesize information for training and guiding purposes.

As a woman who has invested over two decades as a teacher and administrator in Christian education, I am personally cognizant of the value of Christian education. I have experienced the rewards of mentoring students and guiding them to faith in Jesus Christ, as well as a deeper understanding of the joy of being His disciple through the relationships built as a Christian educator. Simultaneously, students have increased their knowledge of mathematics through the lens of scripture and have recognized the Lord as the Author of all truth through the venue of Christian education. My experience encompasses multiple positions as a teacher, guidance counselor, assistant principal, and director of curriculum, which allows a broad vantage point.

As one who emphatically supports Christian education as a gift to students and society, my desire is for the Christian education community to grow and develop for the benefit of more students and adults. The ontological philosophical assumption is that through the participation of women educational leaders sharing their stories and perspectives, wisdom and understanding will be gained for the training and mentoring of future generations of women who desire to become educational leaders in Christian schools.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were used in this phenomenological study:

Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI): A member-based organization that provides support for Christian Schools internationally through accreditation and teacher certification (ACSI, 2019).

Administrator: One assigned to implement and lead the school constituents based on policies and procedures established by the school board in alignment with biblical principles (Coley, 2015).

Christian education: Educational institutions who are founded and practice principles essential to the Christian faith from a philosophical, theoretical, and practical biblical worldview (Knight, 2006).

Educational leadership: One who influences school constituents including students, parents, faculty, and staff for the benefit of school improvement and academic achievement in the areas of instruction and operations (Eacott, 2015).

Leadership style: A methodology utilized and implemented in an effort to guide and influence followers for a greater good. Leadership style is multidimensional and includes both internal and external factors and components all in an effort to lead others (Smith, Minor, Brashen, & Remaly, 2017).

Summary

For a young woman with dreams and desires to invest in the lives of children in the field of education, knowledge and wisdom on the precepts of the role as an educator is a priceless commodity. The more that can be acquired by women currently serving in educational leadership positions, the more future teachers can be guided to their personal success and achievement. In addition, the narratives which include faith experiences will provide testimonials for the advancement of Christian education and the Kingdom of God. As stated in this chapter, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover the primary pathways for women to acquire educational leadership positions within K–12 Christian Schools given the phenomenon of underrepresentation of the female gender in current positions. The information gathered will

be utilized for the benefit of future educational leaders through enhanced mentor relationships. In addition, knowledge of the pathways of previous leaders may encourage the next generation of young women to follow in their steps of influence and pursue leadership roles.

In the following chapter, specific historical, biblical, theoretical, and conceptual components will paint a picture of the influence and contributions of select women. In addition, the leadership strengths, emotional intelligence, and gifts of women leaders will advocate for continued research and study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The ancient writings of the wise King Solomon affirmed the truth, “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps” (Proverbs 16:9, ESV). This statement applies to all humanity. The journey for every person is handcrafted by God with unique moments, people, and circumstances for His Glory (Hebrews 13:21) and the utilization of the gifts empowered to all believers (I Corinthians 12). Individually, the Lord has orchestrated pathways and journeys for women in Christian educational leadership unique to their male and public-school complements (Sperandio, 2015; Polinchock, 2013; Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). These distinct journeys and stories are yet to be told, compiled, and studied to see the fingerprints of the Lord and the ways in which He established each individual’s steps. The journeys shared will contain recollections of people, experiences, and circumstances which may have been unforeseen but nevertheless fulfilled the truth stated by the Apostle Paul in that each journey was for the glory of God and for the good of all in the field of education (Romans 8:28). The narrative from women who serve as Christian education leaders contributes to a greater understanding and wisdom which in turn can bring strength in training, teaching, and preparation for future women leaders in Christian education.

Women in the field of education have influenced countless generations from instruction in the classroom, to advocacy and projects that increase opportunities and equity. However, the journey for women to achieve leadership positions continues to be unique to their gender with continued underrepresentation in leadership. Thus, there is the need to learn, increase understanding, and develop pathways for young women to experience transitions into leadership with guiding principles experienced by women who have gone before them. Women in

educational leadership positions within public education primarily achieve their leadership role due to “strong community investment, in-depth knowledge of the larger school district, and long-term commitment to a chosen school district” (Sperandio, 2015, p. 423). However, women in educational leadership positions in the realm of Christian education are not privy to similar opportunities as their peers in the public sector as district positions and involvements are not applicable. The gap in research and need for continued study, is found in that the pathways for advancement through school district positions are invalid in the Christian education realm where schools operate in isolation rather than a district model. This study will attempt to address the gap in research and understanding through the shared stories of women in Christian education leadership positions. The desire for increased understanding will enhance and refine mentoring for future women leaders within the culture and distinctions particular to Christian education.

Conceptual Framework

Historical Framework

Women have contributed greatly to the historical growth and development of the American nation. Women have been caretakers of the home, educators, and the first to instill the virtues of good citizenship, biblical principles, and societal contributions into future leaders (Carter & Porter, 2017). The primary role and responsibility for most women during the period of colonization and early American history was within the home. The home was an integral component of the success of the family, children, and community (Carter & Porter, 2017).

The value placed on academia was a product of early settlers who had received their formal education at famous British Universities coupled with the desire for educated men to share their faith in God as a minister of the gospel (Jeynes, 2007). The cultural belief of the time placed the primary responsibility with the home to educate children to be godly and productive

citizens as the boys were trained to emulate skills and behaviors of their fathers, and girls likewise of their mothers (Lamphier & Welch, 2017). One of the founding educators in colonial America, John Clarke, spoke boldly that the purpose of education was to instill integrity in the heart of young boys to be men of great virtue (Jeynes, 2007). The high regard placed upon the home with the parenting, training, and education of children set a strong foundation for the future of education in America and the influence of parents in the formation of children (Jeynes, 2007).

Women were an essential aspect in the education process early in American history as many mothers taught children to read, write, and do arithmetic at home (Kidd, 2019). In addition, Puritan communities organized schools where young women stepped into the role of teachers (Jeynes, 2007). There was a difference between the breadth and depth of education for boys and girls under the overarching belief of their responsibilities and roles within the community dictating additional academic training needed for the boys rather than the girls (Jeynes, 2007; Kidd, 2019). Regardless, the education of children centered around the biblical scriptures and the desire for children to be able to read the Bible (Jeynes, 2007).

Toward the end of the colonization period, women took on additional roles as changes and a desire for freedom as an independent nation would change responsibilities of women to stand alone in the home while men and fathers were on the battlefield (Smith, 2010). This role was both respectable and challenging as women cared for their families and supported their husbands during a time of great change and growth. However, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, post-revolutionary America experienced even greater change. One particular transformation involved the philosophy regarding education and equality in education for both boys and girls (Jeynes, 2007). American mothers had been forced to independence during the years of the Revolutionary War, which stirred the movement titled “Republican

Motherhood” (U.S. History, 2019) in which the accepted and common belief was the success of the new nation was in the hands of the primary educators of American children, which were American mothers (Kidd, 2019).

The cultural philosophical change in the view of the influence of mother was a radical transformation, but one which was supported by strong women, such as Judith Sargent Murray, who advocated for girls to be empowered through education (Michals, 2015). Likewise, Catharine Beecher, whose passion for education and understanding of the gifts and talents of women persuaded Horace Mann, a powerful influence of change, to support equality in education (Goldstein, 2014). Thus, by the late eighteenth century, women were being employed at universities (Solomon, 1986). Female teachers were recruited, trained, and sent to the territories during the westward expansion to establish schools as educators (Lucas, 2018). The paradigm shift continued such that by “1840, four times as many new Massachusetts teachers were female than male” (Goldstein, 2014, p. 26).

As much as Catharine Beecher influenced the role of women representation in the field of education, the inequality in financial compensation remained (Dublin & Sklar, 2002). However, another leader carried the mantle for women advancement in education as Susan B. Anthony responded to the fact that “in 1850, four-fifths of New York’s eleven thousand teachers were women, yet two-thirds of the state’s \$800,000 in teacher salaries were paid to men” (Goldstein, 2014, p. 36). Susan B. Anthony became a voice for fair compensation and a steady movement of empowering women as educational leaders (Litwin, 2016).

In the decades to come, women would continue to break through barriers as evidenced by Anna Cooper who adopted five destitute children as a young widow while pursuing a career as a teacher (May, 2012). She advocated for fair compensation for teachers and ultimately would

“become one of the first African American women to earn a PhD” (Goldstein, 2014, p. 61). Throughout the twentieth century, women would advocate for political rights in the suffrage movement, contribute to the labor force during the World Wars and through the industrial age, and advocate for policies and fundamental changes for school reform (Goldstein, 2014; Kessler-Harris, 2018). The evidence supports a historical framework of women who have made positive contributions that are both substantial and fundamental to American history.

History of Christian education. The history of formal public education and the history of formal Christian education are simultaneous events as the faith of the founders of the new world were deeply rooted in Christianity, thus their schools reciprocated their Christian faith. The immersion of faith in education was evidenced in the 1647 Massachusetts law which required children to be provided education with the primary justification being taught the knowledge of the scripture (McCalman, 2017). However, in 1802 Thomas Jefferson responded to the Danbury Baptist Association where he stated, “Religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God” thus advocating, “building a wall of separation between Church and State” (Koch & Peden, 1998, p. 307). This statement of position was considered a response and support of the first amendment of the constitution and also became the catalyst for which a century later in 1962 the U.S. Supreme Court would support the case for removal of prayer in school followed by prohibiting students and teachers from reading the Bible (Waggoner, 2012).

The separation of faith and formal education drove the establishment of an organization in 1920, currently known as Christian Schools International, which supported independent educational institutions whose desire was to teach from a biblical worldview incorporating the scriptures into the core content areas of mathematics, science, history, and English (McCalman, 2017). The establishment of this independent accrediting association for Christian schools was a

catalyst which would see an explosion of international development in the 1970's. During the decade of the 1970's The National Christian School Association (NCSA), The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), and the American Association of Christian Schools (AACCS) would all be established and begin supporting the Christian school movement where schools would commit to teaching students academia integrated with biblical truths and worldview (Hunt & Carper, 2012).

There are many women who contributed to the advancement of education immersed in Christian principles. Susan B. Anthony, mentioned earlier, not only advocated for the equal compensation of women in the field of education but also was a woman devoted to her Christian faith whose desire was against secularization of education but rather the immersion of faith and learning (Polk, 2019). Harriet Beecher Stowe, a half-sister of Catherine Beecher, the educational reformer for women, was an American author whose writings brought to light the tragedy of slavery and the need for social justice for all people (Michals, 2017). She was in many ways an educator as she educated the nation on a subject which stirred political action and conflict, but ultimately freed many lives (Michals, 2017). Lucy Jane Rider Meyer was another advocate for the integration of faith and learning (Benowitz, 2017). She attended Oberlin College, the first college in the United States to award degrees to women, where she valiantly defended the curriculum of the college which "included biblical studies, theology, church history, sociology, economics, basic medical training, and courses chronicling the accomplishments of women (McEllhenney, n.d., para 4). Meyer's advocacy was based on a belief "that women needed thorough intellectual training in order to minister to the temporal and spiritual needs of urban Americans" (McEllhenney, n.d., para 4). These women not only were great pioneers in the field of education but also understood the truth of educating the whole child, which is the mind, body,

and spirit, and believed that the immersion of biblical truths intertwined with knowledge of core content areas best supports the educational development of children.

Biblical Framework

As the historical framework for women in education has been one of change, increased empowerment, and continued value in broader more diverse roles. The biblical role of women is one of strength and value established in the early accounts of history through women such as Esther, Deborah, and Ruth (Esther 4:14; Ruth 4:13-15; & Judges 4-5). The influence of women continued through the establishment of the first church following the resurrection of Jesus Christ through women such as Lydia and Priscilla (Acts 16:14; Romans 16:3). It is written in the early recorded scripture in the book of Genesis that both men and women were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). From then, key women were utilized in building the Israelite nation and were ultimately included in the lineage of Jesus, the son of God and redeemer of all humanity. It was women in the first century who were chosen by God to be the first voices to proclaim the good news of the resurrection of Christ (Matthew 28:7) during a time where the cultural view did not place women in leadership positions. Therefore, when the disciples and authors of the gospels included women as a fundamental source of truth and advancement of the cause of Christianity, which was countercultural and precarious position. The liberation of women to be voices of truth and leaders for the gospel was empowering (Cobb, 2019). The role of women in the advancement of Christianity was established and recorded in the scriptures as a fundamental source for women leading others in a cause of eternal value.

Women leaders in the Old Testament scriptures. When the nation of Israel was in crisis, the scripture lists several women as key leaders in overcoming obstacles and the survival of the nation. In the book of Joshua, the scripture included the bravery of Rahab who was

instrumental in the nation crossing the Jordan River and occupying a new land of freedom promised by God (Joshua 2). Rahab was a woman of immoral occupation, however, it was neither her gender or her sin that prohibited the Lord from saving her and affirming her value and purpose.

Once the nation of Israel was settled in the land, the Israelites began to ask God for judges to guide them (Judges 2:16). As many judges were established, a woman by the name of Deborah was appointed to lead the people (Judges 4). Deborah was described as one who guided the people, “She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment” (Judges 4:5). She was not only a woman who led the nation in personal and daily concerns, she also led with military discernment. When Jabin, the King of Canaan, brought oppression against the nation, it was Deborah’s wisdom and discernment which guided the victory for the nation (Judges 4: 7-9). Deborah’s leadership was not only successful, it encompassed longevity as scriptures state that “the land had rest for forty years” (Judges 5:31).

During the same period of history for the nation of Israel, another woman was chosen by God for significance and a great purpose; a Moabite woman named Ruth (Ruth 1-4). Ruth provided a picture of the committed Savior as she was devoted to her mother-in-law, Naomi (Ruth 1:16-18). Ruth trusted her mother-in-law and her faith in the God of Israel through dire circumstances (Ruth 1:4-5). She lived a life committed to God and experienced the life change of redemption (Ruth 4:14). The story of Ruth provides another example of the value of women to the kingdom of God. Although her journey was unconventional, it was purposeful as she is listed in the lineage of the Savior, Jesus Christ (Matthew 1;5). She was an example of the plan and

purpose the Lord has for women and the gospel of Jesus for all humanity without regard to gender, ethnicity, or division.

When young King Josiah was only eighteen years old, he became King of Judah (2 Kings 22:1). As a young King, his officials read to him from the book of the law of Israel (2 Kings 22:10). When the words stirred concern within the King, it was a woman, Huldah the prophetess, who spoke God's words of instruction to him (2 Kings 22:14-20). King Josiah responded as he promised to "walk after the Lord and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book" (2 Kings 23:3). The influence of Huldah, a woman of God influenced King Josiah and once again established the influential leadership qualities of a woman in the advancement of the gospel.

When many Hebrews were living under the reign of King Ahasuerus in Persia, an evil official Haman plotted to destroy the Jews (Esther 3). Esther, a Jewish woman, became queen of Persia and the Lord used her to ultimately save the nation. (Esther 7:3-5). Esther was an example of the strength and bravery of a leader as she instructed her uncle to bring the Jewish community together in prayer and fasting asking for the Lord's favor (Esther 4:16). She trusted the Lord and used unorthodox measures to go before the King with the understanding that "though it [was] against the law," she might perish (Esther 4:16). Esther's leadership, virtue, and trust in the Lord were instrumental in saving the nation from the hands of evil (Esther 8:5).

Esther, Deborah, Ruth, and Rahab are recorded in the Old Testament as examples of women used to lead for the good of God's kingdom. The biblical model of women leading in collaboration with great men of God is established in the Old Testament scriptures. And as the Apostle Paul wrote, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction,

that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

Women leaders in the New Testament scriptures. The value, importance, and work of women for the Kingdom of God was first recorded through women of the Old Testament and continued as the New Testament records women used in proclamation of the gospel. It was on the first day of the week outside of a garden tomb (John 19) when Mary Magdalene was the first to encounter the risen Savior. Mary Magdalene then became the first to declare the good news of the resurrection as stated, “I have seen the Lord” (John 20:18). Not only was the role of women affirmed as a voice of the gospel, there are practical details that were countercultural. Mary and many of the women listed in the scriptures were not only respected members of the Christian faith, they also were present in assemblies with Jesus or his disciples (Johnson-DeBaufre & Schaberg, 2006). “The most striking thing about the role of women in the life and teaching of Jesus is the simple fact that they are there” (Hurley, 2002, pg. 82).

Scholars also cite the roles of Lydia and Priscilla, as recorded in the book of Acts, as women who were instrumental in the Apostle Paul’s ministry as a missionary to the Gentiles (Smith & Tyson, 2013). In Acts chapter sixteen, the scripture records information about Lydia, a woman of economic success as she sold purple cloth (Acts 16:14). She is also listed as being a follower of Christ and key in the conversion of her family to Christianity (Acts 16:14-15). Lydia’s home became a refuge for Paul and Silas following imprisonment where a fellowship of believers gathered (Acts 16:40). Priscilla and her husband Aquila of Corinth were recorded as being instrumental in the advancement of the gospel and a safe refuge for Paul during his missionary journey (Acts 18:26). Paul does not exclude Priscilla’s role as a woman, rather attributes value as he identifies Priscilla and Aquila as, “my fellow workers in Christ Jesus”

(Romans 16:3). The biblical role of women from creation, to Jesus' day, to the current time is one of "valor" (Evans, 2012) as only with courage and bravery that women have faced and overcome difficulties of culture, perceptions, limitations, discrimination, and suppression.

Women leaders as missionaries. Numerous women have been leaders for the advancement of the gospel both in the past and present. When Elisabeth Elliott's husband and four other missionaries were killed by the Auca Indians, she chose to remain in Ecuador to continue the relationships and work of the missionaries, which ultimately led to the natives becoming believers in Jesus Christ (Saint, 2005). Amy Carmichael, the missionary to India, despite obstacles of poor health and the early death of her father, ministered to countless young women and men for the sake of the gospel (Murray, 2015). She assisted diligently to meet their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs motivated by her love for the Lord and as an example of a servant leader (Murray, 2015; Houghton, 2013). She was a model of innovation with minimal resources trusting the Lord in fervent prayer for provision (Houghton, 2013). Bertha Smith led a girl's school in China in the early twentieth century where many girls and subsequently their families came to know Christ (Patterson, 2014). Smith's work continued the labor of Lottie Moon whose decades of service and advocacy for future missionaries to the Chinese people established a work that continues today (Benge, 2000). The influence of women on the mission field has not only a history of influence but continues to be influential as approximately two-thirds of all Christian missionaries are women (Piper, 2016).

There is a substantial historical and biblical framework of women leading for the sake of education and the gospel. The value of women leadership is evidenced in the lives of many mothers, teachers, judges, disciples, and missionaries, some of whom are well known and others just as honorable but only the depth and breadth of their influence will be revealed in heaven.

The framework to continue to study Christian women serving in educational leadership positions is relevant, established, and beneficial for future leaders.

Characteristics of Women Educational Leaders

Women in leadership positions are a benefit for organizations as women are unique in qualities and skills advantageous to organizations and the cultures therein. One important skill evident in women is the increased ability to collaborate with others, which research has correlated to increased innovation and creativity (Teague, 2015). The research indicates the increase is not solely due to the leadership ability of women but rather the effects of a diversified team comprised of both men and women leaders (Teague, 2015). Innovation and creativity keep organizations on the cutting edge of growth and prevent the organization from being stagnant in its approach. One possible explanation for the increase in the level of innovation through a diversified team is collaboration (Elias, 2018). Increased collaboration is proven to be more substantial within the organization where women are leaders (Elias, 2018).

Collaboration is rooted in effective communication as the leader practices active listening. Active listening is considered a pertinent skill for a leader as it provides perspective from a variety of contributors (Sax, 2018). Active listening is defined as a focused practice to thoroughly listen to others without preplanned responses but rather is a manner that gives full attention to the speaker (Spataro & Bloch, 2018). Research supports the benefit of communication skills, in addition to various social skills, as strengths of women leaders and a desired component of a successful organization (Kreidy & Vernon, 2018).

The characteristics of collaboration, active listening, and effective communication are the strengths of women leaders. Krieidy and Vernon (2018) conducted research on the manner in which increased social and communication skills are perceived by their subordinates. The

perception and receptiveness of those within the sphere of the leader are of great importance to the leader. Research indicates the culture of organizations has developed and evolved from previously prevalent dominant leadership style to a democratic and collaborative model exhibited by women in leadership (Kreidy & Vernon, 2018). Not only are there characteristics of women in leadership positions that are advantageous to contemporary organizations, there are motives, both internal and external, that encourage women to continue to fulfill their calling and work in their giftedness (Kreidy & Vernon, 2018; Matthews, 2017).

Intrinsic Motivation and Perceptions

When examining the internal and external motivators for a leader, one must consider the locus of control, a psychological theory in which the individual attributes their personal motivation and potential success to internal or external factors (Hamedoğlu, Kantor, & Gülay, 2012). Rotter (1966) developed a quantitative list of inquiries to determine an individual's locus of control. Furthermore, the internal locus of control, according to Rotter (1966), lies within the control of the individual based on their chosen behavior; whereas, the external elements are independent of the individual's domain and attributed to factors outside of their control.

Through a quantitative study on leadership and gender, results were conclusive for the women participants in which they were more likely to choose democratic leaders and gravitated to a desire for inquiry and investigation as a leader (Hamedoğlu, Kantor, & Gülay, 2012). The women also evidenced a higher internal locus of control than male leaders (Hamedoğlu, Kantor, & Gülay, 2012). Therefore, although women are influenced by both internal and external factors, it is the internal choices and behaviors which are primarily attributed to their success. Research indicates one of the primary internal motivators for women is a sense of passion and purpose in their work (Longman, Lamm Bray, Liddell, Hough, & Dahlvig, 2018). A purpose is a strong

motivator as it seeks to make a difference in the lives of others and the community for the greater good.

Extrinsic Motivation and Circumstances

Even though women, in general, have a strong internal locus of control, in which are the internal choices and factors that are primarily responsible for motivation, there are external factors which research indicated motivate women leaders (Longman et al., 2018). The influence of mentors, the recommendation of a respected colleague, and a desire to fulfill a calling within acknowledged giftedness are the three primary external motivators according to research (Longman et al., 2018).

Mentorship. The mentor relationship is of great value to the future leader as it is often the influence of a mentor which motivates someone to step into a leadership position (Jones, 2006). Not only is mentorship a great motivator, there is also proven beneficial and important to increase retention and overall success, specifically in the field of education and the longevity of teachers (Duran, 2016). However, there are needs within the mentor structure. Research indicates the lower numbers of women in leadership positions have led to the mentorship of opposite genders and generational gaps which limit the benefits (Joseph-Collins, 2017; Hill & Wheat, 2017). Research supports the greatest achievement for a mentee is when the mentor relationship is with the same gender for both career advancement and post graduate achievements (Kogovšek & Ograjenšek, 2019). Thus, there is the need for representation of women in leadership positions to maximize the benefits with the mentorship structure. The role of mentorship is critically important in the faith-based community of Christian education where the admonition of the disciple James stated, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1).

Mentorship for believers immerses the biblical truths into conversations and relationships to ensure trust on the guidance of the Lord.

Calling and giftedness. The mentorship relationship based on Christian principles and biblical truths aligns with a second external motivator of fulfilling a calling and exercise of giftedness (Longman et al., 2018). As Seller, Thomas, Batts, and Ostman, (2005) stated, “Vocation is the use of our gifts as a response to God, listening closely to what the Lord requires” (p. 198). Women leaders are often motivated to live with purpose and utilize the gifts and talents innate to them as unique individuals. To all believers in Jesus Christ the apostle Paul encourages, “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them” (Romans 12:6). Women leaders in the field of education who are living in the admonitions of the Lord are functioning in the grace of the Lord when they use their gifts as a form of worship and in discipleship of the next generation.

Responsibility. The final external motivator identified in contemporary research on women in leadership positions found many were motivated by a sense of responsibility (Longman et al., 2018). Whether it was responsibility to the organization, a responsibility to fulfill a personal faith-based calling, or a responsibility to a superior or colleague who advocated and appealed on their behalf for a leadership role, many are motivated by the external influence of personal responsibility.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is generally defined as the leader’s ability to manage their emotions through a range of techniques and practices such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills (Goleman, 1995). The benefit of a leader exhibiting strong emotional intelligence is in the ability to create organizational effectiveness through emotionally

healthy relationships. An emotionally intelligent leader understands both intrinsic and extrinsic emotions affect the organization and relationships therein must be managed and controlled (Goleman, 1995).

One research study suggested a need for women educational leaders to regulate emotions through the implementation of intentional self-management and self-awareness (Maseko & Proches, 2013). Both self-management and self-awareness are attributes that should be encouraged, trained, and guided through mentorship. Regulation of emotions has increased value and necessity when leaders are executing and fulfilling an intentional succession plan (Maseko & Proches, 2013). There is specific evidence that supports the value of emotional intelligence for leadership success (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). The value specified for educational leaders is in both longevity in the field, as well as sustenance to implement change initiatives, which could produce an increase in student achievement (Fulcher Gutierrez, 2017). This evidence is gender non-specific with an understanding that both men and women possess key attributes within the emotional intelligence spectrum and affirm the role of emotional intelligence in creating an atmosphere and organizational culture conducive to effective communication. One attribute of emotional intelligence demonstrated on a more consistent level by women in educational leadership is the mentorship and coaching role (Fulcher Gutierrez, 2017). Research indicated that women in educational leadership participate in unsolicited mentorship roles more frequently than their male counterparts (Fulcher Gutierrez, 2017).

There are basic components of emotional intelligence that are found beneficial for all leaders, however, particularly self-awareness, communication effectiveness, and empathy are of great benefit for an educational leader (Coles & McGrath, 2014). Üstüner and Kiş (2014) determined increased communication skills associated with emotional intelligence, specifically

exhibiting appropriate empathy, were effective in conflict resolution and decreased interpersonal conflict. The need for emotional intelligence to be exhibited by educational leaders is not only for healthy organizational culture and relationships, it is greatly needed for educational reform (Mason, 2018). Contemporary qualitative research found there to be a strong relationship between the emotional intelligence of the educational leader and increased student achievement (Valenzuela-Santoyo & Portillo-Peñuelas, 2018). Educational leaders who successfully managed their emotions, supported an educational culture and climate, which supports students and thus leads to increased achievement (Valenzuela-Santoyo & Portillo-Peñuelas, 2018).

Women Representation in Educational Leadership

Social Implications of Women Representation in Educational Leadership

The disparity in female representation is concerning considering a study by Berkovich (2017) which stated, “When the principal and teacher are of the same gender, both affective and cognitive trust in the principal is higher” (p. 561). Likewise, additional research suggested, “Women principals are more likely to employ leadership styles and enact leadership behaviors that are associated with more positive schooling outcomes” (Fuller, Pendola, & LeMay, 2018, p. 15). The data is not limited to public schools, as research for Christian schools acknowledged the role of leadership style and behaviors correlated to teacher retention rates (Jones & Watson, 2017). However, the research on the social implications of teacher satisfaction and student achievement, specific to women in Christian education leadership, is desired and could provide significance in women role models for next-generation leaders.

The need for additional understanding and support for women to lead in Christian schools is not only the need for equity in representation, but it is also beneficial for students and teachers (Berkovich, 2017). Research indicates a strong relationship built on trust when teachers are led

by the same gender (Berkovich, 2017) and there are research-based indicators that student performance increases with female administrators (Johansen, 2007; Meier, O'Toole, & Goerdel, 2006). The promotion of student achievement within a culture of trust due to equity in representation is a noble pursuit with positive social implications.

Jogulu and Wood (2006) reviewed three decades of research regarding the leadership qualities of men and women, many of which excluded women from the studies due to the limited number of participants available. They determined the social implications of the studies during each time period supported the status quo (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). However, as women were immersed into studies in the 1990's, the research determined transformation and transactional leadership qualities were evident in both men and women and both genders brought value to the organizations (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). Social implications of women representation in educational leadership are not simply for the increased equity in representation but rather the representation bringing credibility and validity to future research as new leadership models and implications are studied.

Theoretical Implications of Women in Educational Leadership Positions

The scripture states, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). Likewise, in the gospels Jesus expresses value for humanity by statements such as, "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12:6-7). Thus, the theoretical implications of an investigation into the phenomenon of underrepresentation of women in educational leadership are that both men and women are of value in the work of the Lord and have a role as mentors within the church and Christian school community. The apostle Paul

wrote that the older women of the church should teach the younger women (Titus 2). Thus, the theoretical implications are the salient points to be acquired from research of women Christian education leaders as those precepts may be used to guide the next generation.

Theoretical Implications of Women Leadership Styles

One theoretical implication of increased study of women in educational leadership is an expanded understanding of the leadership style most prevalent by women. Subsequently, the understanding of leadership style exhibited by women may be immersed in the education and training of future women leaders through mentorship and formalized training. Recent research supports the increased motivation for teachers to complete a task when under the direction of a leader who practices transformational leadership characteristics (Lee & Kuo, 2019). The transformational leadership style is commonly practiced by women, specifically in the field of education (Baqutayan & Raji, 2017; Munir & Iqbal, 2018). The transformational leadership style is described as being rooted in effective communication, vision, and relationships (Northouse, 2019). Transformational leadership strives to leverage the influence of the leader, to empower the followers in an effort to transform organizations through appropriate and timely change initiatives (Northouse, 2019). This is beneficial for the ever-changing and evolving field of education. In addition, research suggests an educational leader who implements transformational leadership practices, such as increased teacher accountability and higher stakes professional development, is favorable (Anderson, 2017). The transformational leader keeps the vision active while motivating the teacher through instructional changes and curriculum adjustments.

In quantitative research, empirical evidence supports that transformational leadership has a positive correlation to increased organizational efficacy (Getachew & Zhou, 2018). The increased efficacy, a feeling of effectiveness and influence, is supported and sustained through

transformational relationship behaviors displayed by leaders (Getachew & Zhou, 2018). Efficacy is a vital component to successful schools as there is a positive correlation between efficacy and student achievement, as well as teacher longevity and sustainability (Gonzalez & Maxwell, 2018; Colson, Sparks, Berridge, Frimming, & Willis, 2017).

Not only is transformational leadership effective when exemplified by women leaders, the transactional leadership characteristics are shown to engage subordinates in all areas of business in a healthy manner for positive gains organizationally and relationally (Ghani, Derani, Aznam, Mohamad, Zakaria & Toolib, 2018). According to Jogulu and Wood (2006) the flattened organization structure is best supported by transformational leaders and the qualities that encompass the structure are best exhibited by women. The heart of the flattened leadership model is leveraging collaboration among a team (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). The flattened leadership model is emerging in the educational realm as grade level and curriculum teams flatten their structure away from chairperson led teams to teams that are for the benefit of all (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). Collaboration has been proven to be beneficial for student achievement and teacher efficacy, as it heightens the diversity of thought and strategy (Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006). Therefore, the theoretical implications of women's leadership styles are relevant and applicable to the field of education and increased student achievement.

Summary

The impact of women in the history of the American nation is evidenced by many great women teachers who influenced students and society. The impact of women on the first Christian church is apparent through the writings of the Apostle Paul as women were fellow laborers in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In contemporary organizations and educational institutions, women flourish in leadership through strong emotional intelligence and

characteristics of transformational and transactional leadership. In the following chapter, details of research methodology and the role of the participants will be discussed.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The limited understanding of the particular details entailed in the journey of women who have achieved leadership positions in K-12 Christian schools created a problem that merited research. Through investigation of the journeys of women who have achieved desired positions, those who desire educational leadership positions can be educated and instructed on pathways and opportunities thus, expediting their journey to anticipated positions. The statistics regarding women representation in education leadership exist for both public and nonpublic schools (Bauer, 2015; Marcomber, 2018). In addition, the research regarding the new pathways for women in public education and their journey to acquiring educational leadership positions exist (Coccia, 2019). However, there was a gap in research for those whose journey is encompassed in the realm of Christian education. There was a need to investigate the phenomenon to acquire an understanding of potential pathways of opportunities, for women who desire leadership positions and likewise support systems that promote and encourage career advancement.

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to discover the primary pathways for a sample of women as they acquired educational leadership positions within K-12 Christian Schools given underrepresentation of the female gender in current positions. The purpose was to synthesize the narratives of the participants to identify similarities in their journeys regarding experience, people of influence, faith experiences, and a timeline of events for the benefit of future leaders and ultimately continued success in the field of Christian education.

This chapter encompasses the methodology and protocol established to attain narratives and subsequent data in order to draw conclusions that added to the body of knowledge on the

topic of women in Christian education leadership. The setting, the description of participants, methods for acquiring data, and analysis is described in the following pages.

Research Method and Design

The research for this phenomenological study on gender discrepancies within Christian Education leadership was completed utilizing a research design as one which captures the “complexity” (Vaughn & Turner, 2016, p. 42) of the journey and perspective of the participants. The researcher presented to the participants the research question and a request for their personal story with the inclusion of a series of predetermined guiding questions to identify themes that distinctly revealed their advancement into educational leadership roles. The qualitative design allowed for themes to unveil through the stories and narratives of the participants rather than being predetermined. The problems revealed during the research contributed to understanding the phenomenon regarding gender inequality in K-12 Christian school leadership (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). The phenomenological qualitative design “attempts to understand people’s perceptions and perspectives” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 233). The phenomenological design of this study explored women’s perceptions and perspectives through their experiences in K-12 Christian educational leadership roles and may help to prepare future women Christian leaders.

A qualitative study was chosen due to the phenomenon being examined is the previous journey women in Christian educational leadership positions have experienced rather than solely their current reality. In Christian education, the journey through experiences is often naturally occurring as the participant has moved through roles as a classroom teacher, then team leader, learning community leader, and then eventually an administrator with global leadership in the educational organization. Given the organic nature of the journey coupled with the phenomenon of the limited representation of women in leadership, the qualitative design is optimal for study.

One recommendation for the interviews, which provided the data for the study, was an understanding that the questions guided the conversation for the topic of interest but must be fluid and flexible to obtain authentic stories and dialogue which “produce rich data” (Packer, 2011, p. 7). The purpose for semi-structured interviews was to provide an opportunity for participants to provide deep meaning on the phenomenon of interest through the interview process (Packer, 2011). Therefore, variance from the predetermined questions was allowed for the sake of uninhibited interview transcription. The desire was for thorough and comprehensive narratives from participants acquired through fluid recommendations in naturally occurring Christian education settings.

Research Question

In an effort to collect the narratives on the journeys of women who serve as leaders in K-12 Christian schools, the following research question guided this study: What are the factors that influence women in K-12 Christian school leadership and the pathways that lead to their achievement?

Setting/Site

The desired participants represented the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), which is the appropriate setting for “a phenomenological view in which reality inheres in the perceptions of individuals” (Joyner, Rouse, & Glatthorn, 2018, p. 82). This was given the culture and climate of faith-based education is reflected in both the individual participant and the organization in which they represent. Given the certification requirement from the Association of Christian School International (ACSI) for all educators to hold a biblically based philosophy of Christian education, the narratives collected reflected the core values of Christian education,

which immerses a Biblical worldview mindset and vantage point particular to the Christian faith (ACSI, 2020).

The setting was of value to the study as Christian education is comprised of fundamental values and beliefs which shape the culture and members. The journey of women leaders operating under a biblical worldview and belief system as disciples of Jesus Christ provided information unique and distinct to the Christian education community. The leaders, which served as participants, were selected as the research transpired. Given the snowball sampling technique, the participants were acquired through organic recommendations within the community of the Association of Christian School International (ACSI) member schools and natural networking connections.

The participants were contacted via email or written postal service depending on the information provided through referral. The participants were asked to participate in a recorded interview through a virtual online video conference call or in-person depending on availability and distance. Given virtual availability, the geographical location of participants did not hinder the research or data collection. The participants were asked, in addition to the interview, to join a discussion board where they agreed to correspond with the other participants to provide additional dialogue. Thus, the site and setting for data collection was within the network of Christian schools through virtual connections with no limitations on time of day or physical location.

Participants

The participants in the study were women in leader positions in K-12 Christian Schools who were accredited and certified through the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). I recruited 17 participants through a snowball sampling method. Each participant was

asked to refer a colleague or acquaintance who was qualified to participate based upon the *Participant Criteria* (see Appendix A). The participants were advised on the qualifications which included their leadership position, certification level within the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), and finally a willingness to share their story.

To limit bias and errors within the research findings, participants did not include colleagues of the researcher. In addition, no interviews were conducted at the school in which the researcher serves. The snowball sampling technique was chosen due to the participant requirements and to ensure limitation of error or bias. In addition, a secondary method to limit bias was the review of the transcript by each participant to validate the interview recording was without error.

In admiration of the wonders and works of the Lord, the psalmist wrote, “I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old” (Psalm 77:11, ESV). The words of the psalmist remind Christians of the powerful benefit of reflecting on the hand of God which is evident in life and creation. Likewise, the reflexive nature of the interview process, for participants as they recount their personal journey, had the potential to be profitable as blessings of the Lord surface through the interview process. Dennis, (2014) affirms the potential benefits for participants in qualitative research as the interview process provides an opportunity for them to share their stories without appraisal. In addition, the participants could have been potentially encouraged with the knowledge and understanding that their story joins other professionals who are similar in passion and pursuit. Finally, according to research it could have been beneficial for the participant to share their journey (Dennis, 2004). This was due to having an understanding that the findings from their story coupled with the stories of others has the potential to contribute

to the greater good of the field. The benefit to the participants was not tangible, however, potential emotional advantage may have been accrued during the interview process.

The Researcher's Role

The role of the researcher was to carefully listen and record the stories of the participants in the study without the interjection of personal connection or resemblance. The researcher exercised care to not guide the participants outside of the initial research question and guiding questions. The researcher validated all contributions through interviews and discussion board posts through a written transcript shared with each participant for authentication of their statements. The guiding principles of the informed consent (see Appendix B) were upheld with careful attention to the protection of the participant and the study.

Materials and Instruments

The interview instrument was semi-structured questions that were shared with the participants prior to the interview. The participants were asked to share their personal stories and if needed, guided into the conversation using the research questions. The primary goal was to acquire rich dialogue. Guiding questions were available during the interview (see Appendix C). The questions included topics such as the people who have influenced the participant, the role of personal faith in the journey, and the leadership style utilized by the researcher.

The researcher utilized not only paper and pencil to record interview responses and field notes, but also a digital recording of the interview was used to validate responses, as well as aid in transcription. The digital recording was created through Zoom, a video conferencing platform. The transcription was created by the researcher using dictation software immersed into Microsoft Word software. The written transcript of the data was checked with the audio recording to

validate the findings. Additionally, the transcript of the interview was shared and validated by the participant post-interview.

Data Collection

The primary data collection method was through semi-structured interviews of 17 women participants in leadership positions within K-12 Christian schools. Green and Thorogood (2004) affirmed the sample size of 15-20 as a review of expertise and experience for qualitative researchers demonstrated that “little new information is generated after interviewing 20 people or so belonging to one analytically relevant participant category” (p. 102). Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, and Young (2018) discussed the desire for a qualitative study to achieve saturation with the understanding that once that is determined findings may be verified for reliability through additional sampling.

The schools represented were all accredited through the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) to ensure standardized accreditation and certification standards. The certification standards dictated levels of education and training, as well as experience to place all participants with equality of qualifications. The snowball method was used in which I began a conversation with an ACSI school woman leader and requested assistance with recommending subsequent participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

The interview process was a fluid procedure as the time required to conduct the semi-structured interview varied based upon the participant’s dialogue. “The semi-structured interview is more flexible than the survey and makes use of the resources of everyday interaction” (Packer, 2011, p. 8). The allotted amount of time was 60-90 minutes with flexibility applied to ensure complete responses to each question and no compromise of data due to a time limitation. The participants were encouraged to elaborate and share details of their personal stories to achieve

deep and descriptive information. This was completed with respect to the participants' time, however, without compromise of the content.

The participants were provided the list of semi-structured questions interview questions prior to the interview to allow for thoughtful reflection, consideration, and prayer. All participants were provided the research question and semi-structured questions exactly one week prior to the interview to ensure standardization. Likewise, the transcript of the interview was shared with each participant to validate the recording and to review for accuracy.

Through a recorded interview, either in person or through an online conference, each participant was asked to share their personal story consisting of thoughtful and prayerful responses and assisted by three semi-structured interview questions. The interview consisted of approximately 60-90 minutes in duration which provided sufficient time to collect the data.

Each participant was also be asked to join and contribute to an online discussion board with fellow participants in the study where they were asked to post at minimum two components of their narrative journey. This was with the understanding that within the discussion board collaborative, additional specifics of their individual journeys emerged and were added to the study. The discussion board was open for two-weeks following the collection of interviews and all participants were asked to contribute within the time period to ensure completion of the data collection. The discussion board allowed for details to emerge without prompt or involvement of the researcher, thus minimalizing influence and data limitation. The participants utilized an assigned pseudonym for the discussion board which was also used in the transcription of the interview in protection and anonymity of the participants.

Data Processing

The data acquired through the interview process was first sorted and organized through “abstraction and generalization” (Packer, 2011, p. 80) to aid in analysis. The desire was to code the interview responses. The coding process was an exercise in dividing and sorting the content of the interview transcript into categories being careful to avoid interpretation through the organization process (Packer, 2011). Qualitative research dictates a careful breakdown of the interview dialogue, which as Vaughn and Turner (2016) stated, “One of the greatest challenges of conducting qualitative research is determining what is worth analyzing” (p. 50). Appropriate assessment and organizational tools were used in the study to sort and shape the data. Likewise, the data acquired through the discussion board was sorted and organized in similar fashion.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological analysis was conducted once the data was attained. The data was reviewed for noteworthy statements which lead to quantifying frequently common themes as aligns with qualitative phenological research analysis (Crewell, 2007; Shi, 2011). The MAXQDA coding instrument for assessing the consistencies within the responses was used as a qualitative strategy (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). The coding process and analysis process are interwoven as stated, “Coding along themes and topics can help to highlight priorities and provide focus to the process of analyzing qualitative data” (Vaughn & Turner, 2016, p. 50). The goal was to sort the interview transcript into sections or categories, which allowed for the extraction of key elements of content to provide “objective knowledge” (Packer, 2011, p. 80).

Triangulation of the data was accomplished by coding based on themes, as well as coding based on topics to enhance and validate the analysis and interpretation of the analysis. This triangulation process was complete with the third element of discussion board data, thus bringing

the three elements together to allow for authentic information to emerge. The frequencies and quantities from the phenological analysis and triangulation of the data provided the resulting themes.

Methodological Assumptions

The qualitative research study was based on the assumption that women who have experienced the journey through the phenomenon of being one in the underrepresented number of women in K-12 Christian education leadership positions would have similar pivotal points as they have navigated through their careers. These points of similarity would provide understanding to the hindrances and affirmations for the next generation of women who desire leadership roles in Christian education.

The assumption was also founded in the inclusion of a faith perspective from participants representing Christian schools in the network of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) that represent and would be shared by others with similar demographics. The study assumed the participants would be willing to authentically share their experience in the interview setting with complete disclosure for the greater good of the field of study. The final assumption was that the faith and religious belief systems for the women in educational leadership was a relevant factor of the phenomenon.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study were primarily due to the regional geographical restrictions as the participants represented ACSI schools, an international organization. The participant's availability to interview had the potential to limit the scope of the study. The researcher mitigated the limitations through online communication with consideration to time zone adjustments for the benefit of the participants.

Delimitations of the Study

The scope of the study was to review the journey for women in Christian education, a foreknown delimitation. This eliminates representation of Christian educational leaders serving in K-12 public schools and non-Christian schools. A secondary delimitation was the participants represent schools within the K-12 ACSI membership organization. This eliminates school leaders whose school had not received accreditation from ASCI. The rationale for the delimitation was founded in the network created within the ACSI community forms a standardization for the educational qualifications for the women in administrative roles, as well as a network for attracting participants.

Ethical Assurances

Ethical assurances protect the participant, the researcher, and the field of study. Klenke, Wallace, and Martin (2015) cautioned qualitative researchers as stated, “Numerous ethical dilemmas that can arise during data collection and fieldwork, many of which revolve around issues of honesty and lying, power and privilege, and the overall quality of the relationship between researcher and researched” (p. 49). The researcher was committed to exemplify trust in the relationship between the researcher and participants through decisions rooted in integrity and honesty for the good of all (Tichy & McGill, 2003). As Joyner et al. (2018) discussed the ethical components of, “equity,” “honesty,” and “human consideration” (p. 7) provides a foundation for success and credibility within the findings and for the conclusions.

As a method to provide ethical compliance and protection, the researcher followed informed consent practices, careful disclosure and voluntary participant agreement structure, and honesty and confidentiality (Klenke, Wallace, & Martin, 2015). The participants in this study were informed of the potential risks of a time commitment that may encroach on personal

responsibilities and heightened emotions through personal story sharing, which may have increased fatigue. As beneficence factors balance the risk-benefit ratio, the benefits for participants in this study were the potential contribution to the understanding and knowledge specific to women leaders in Christian school. The goal for the researcher was to contribute to understanding and knowledge of the field educational leadership and area of gender equity without any flaw or bias through honest processing.

The researcher addressed and limited personal bias through two intentional methods. First, by utilizing a neutral online source to code and organize the data. In addition, the written transcription and audio recording of the interview data were provided to the participants for validation of credibility and accurately. Ultimately, the desire for research-based data to unearth knowledge and beneficial findings without error was the goal of the researcher.

Summary

Everyone has a story concerning the paths of life they have traveled and what they have learned along the journey for both their personal and professional lives. This phenomenological qualitative study was formulated and designed to acquire the stories of women who serve in educational leadership positions in a K-12 Christian school in order to contribute to the body of knowledge for the mentoring and training of future leaders. Through the methodology, snowball sampling technique, acknowledgement of limitations and delimitations, and ethical assurances that the following data was acquired for the future benefit of Christian education. The following chapter holds the stories of the participants, as well the results that emerged as the data was collated, sorted, and triangulated. From these results, conclusions will be articulated to contribute the body of knowledge on the field of educational leadership.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to explore the journeys of women leaders in K-12 Christian schools in order to contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of educational leadership. Using the phenomenological approach, the goal was to gather from the narratives and discussions of 17 participants the paths that lead them to leadership and the influences from others along the way. The primary research question which guided the study and interviews was:

What are the factors that influence women in K-12 Christian school leadership and the pathways that lead to their achievement?

The interview process used semi-structured questions to answer the research question (see Appendix C).

Trustworthiness of the Data

The data was acquired through online interviews of 17 participants through the snowball sampling technique. The themes began to emerge with the first participant and saturation reached with 17 participants. The demographics of the participants included the average age of 55 years old with an average of 22 years of experience in Christian education and subsequently serving in an administrative position for an average of 18 years. Approximately 60% of the participants served in Christian schools which are the ministry of a local church, while the remaining participants served in Christian schools which are managed by a school board. Twenty percent of the schools identified as a suburban school with the size of the schools equally distributed between schools of 200 students or less to schools with over 1000 students. Eighty-eight percent of the participants were Caucasian with the remaining 12% being African American. Thus, the participants well represented a breadth of demographics with substantial years of experience.

Creswell & Poth (2018) recommended the acceptable number of between 15-20 participants for a phenomenological study. Seventeen participants provided saturation for the study and aligned with research for phenomenological analysis.

The interviews were conducted with audio and video transmission. Video errors occurred during the interviews with Participant 2 and Participant 15 and only the audio recording was used for the transcription process. All other interviews utilized both audio and video recordings, which were used for dictation in creating the transcripts. The dictation software within Microsoft Word was utilized to initially create the transcript with the researcher then manually reviewing the transcript with the audio recording. The transcript was verified by the participants to ensure accuracy. The researcher used the strategy of reading and creating annotations (Creswell & Poth, 2018) in the margins of the field notes and transcripts to explore the data to gain overall themes and understanding prior to detailed coding. The transcripts were then loaded into the MAXQDA qualitative research software for organization of the data and detailed coding. The coding system emerged from the memos and references within the transcripts. Following the coding, analytics and frequencies within the coding configurations finalized the analysis progression.

In addition, the participants were asked to contribute to a discussion forum where they would post a salient point from their reflection of their journey as an educational leader or the point that resonated most with them as they revisited the details of their journey. The participants were also asked to comment on two other posts to initiate conversation and discussion amongst the participants. The data acquired from the discussion forum was triangulated with the interview transcription data for the maximum benefit in analysis.

Results

The findings are a reflection of the journeys of 17 women Christian educational administrators and the lived experiences they shared during the interview and discussion forum. Assessment of the data was determined by quantifying codes, specifically triangulated with the discussion board data. The code frequencies coupled with summation analysis resulted in the themes assimilated. The themes were common pivotal points shared by the participants. Seven themes emerged from the data analysis process.

1. Desire to Serve: The desire to serve others with excellence.
2. The role with Christian education reflects a specific calling and equipping from the Lord.
3. Empowered by Others: The influences of others, throughout their journey, was not limited to professional associates but represented a lifetime of people from all ages and disciplines as encouragement throughout their journey.
4. Modeled Behavior: Parents, Grandparents, Spiritual and Professional leaders modeled servant leadership behaviors to be emulated.
5. Beginning a career in the field of education as a classroom teacher is valuable for the role of an administrator.
6. Obedience to the guidance of the Lord was greater than any fear, doubt, uncertainty, or personal desire.
7. The network of ACSI personnel through the accreditation process was valued.

Of the 7 themes that emerged, there were additional subthemes which supported the major themes. The following tables provide a graphic depiction of the 7 primary themes as well as the subordinate themes which were identified according to their frequencies in the data. There are 2 to 3 subthemes for every theme which contain further specific elements derived from the themes

to provide additional depth of understanding and insight. The narrative, which follows the tables, elaborates on the themes and subthemes with notable details extracted from the narratives of the participants.

Table 1

Subthemes Supporting Themes 1-3

	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
	Desire to serve	Called and equipped by the Lord	Empowered by others throughout the journey
Subtheme	Students were a priority.	Did not necessarily pursue the administrative position but rather felt called.	Empowered by a strong male mentor as a pastor or school leader.
Subtheme	Desire to teach from a young age.	Valued continued education and learning as a life-long student.	Empowered by strong female school leader, ministry leader, or pastor's wife.
Subtheme	The instructions on dealing with conflict, as stated in the eighteenth chapter of the gospel of Matthew, was important to implement during conflict.	Many life experiences prior to the administrative role where allowed and designed by God for a ministry purpose.	Empowered by parents, grandparents, or relationship outside of the professional circle.

Table 2*Subthemes Supporting Themes 4-6*

	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6
	Modeled Behavior	Teaching experience is valued	Obedience to the Lord
Subtheme	Parents, grandparents, and those within the faith community modeled servant leadership behavior to emulate.	Many participants stepped into lead teacher or department head role within the teaching season.	God opened doors of opportunity.
Subtheme	Previous teachers and education leaders modeled behaviors both inspiring and encouraging throughout the journey.	Experience as a classroom teacher was preparatory for leadership role with an understanding of students, parents and teaching responsibilities.	Being a recipient of grace and in return extending grace to others.
Subtheme			Desire for excellence in personal journey as well as leading others to excellence as a reflection of their faith.

Table 3*Subtheme Supporting Theme 7*

Theme 7	
ASCI affiliation	
Subtheme	Being a model of Excellence in the Christian Education Community.
Subtheme	Networking with other Christian Schools was beneficial personally and for the school.

Theme 1: Desire to Serve

Whether it was recalling a memory as a child, teaching their dolls or younger siblings, or being influenced by a great teacher as a child, over half of the participants shared an early childhood desire to be a teacher. Many attributed the recognized interest and desire to teach to their mom who was a teacher. The desire to teach was not hindered by outside circumstances such as Participant 9 who stated there were many difficulties that prevented her from pursuing this dream for many years. However, an encounter with the Lord changed her life and resurfaced the desire to serve and teach. Participant 9 stated, “I made a vow to God and I said, ‘God if you will save me, I will serve you till I die’ and the Lord saved me” (Transcript of Interview P9JT

6.1.2020, Pos. 4). Participant 14, despite the early desire to be an educator, was advised against it. As a college student she stated, "People were telling me you can't get a job. There are too many teachers, they've saturated the market. You're never going to be able to find a job" (Transcript of Interview with P14RN 6.17.2020, Pos. 3). The participant shared the desire to serve others was so compelling that she chose to pursue social work. However, after a brief experience in that field she determined that was not her calling. When the Lord opened the door for her to step into education, she went back to school and began her career as a teacher and eventually an administrator.

The desire to serve, and specifically teach, is a powerful force early in the journey of many of the participants who are women in Christian education leadership. Participant 15 shared a desire to follow in her mother's footsteps as a teacher who was the first and primary influence in her life. Her mother only experienced public education, which set the stage for her desire to be an educator. However, Participant 15 described her introduction to Christian education later as an adult as an epiphany. She stated, "I don't know that I have ever experienced before in my life where the educator in me sparked with the believer in me and I was like, 'Oh my gosh! This is what I've always known education should be.' I have just never seen it executed in that way it's just...beautiful" (Transcript of Interview with P15LL 6.10.2020, Pos. 3). This participant describes an alignment of faith and desire to teach was perfectly found in Christian education. Participant 7 expressed a desire to teach from a young age, but her parents did not hold the profession in high regard. However, following her surrender to Christ and seeking Him in prayer that desire resurfaced and she pursued a second degree to serve as an educator.

Given the desire to teach and serve, many participants described an innate and rich desire to help students. They expressed love, joy, and deep longing for their students to learn, grow, and

prosper. Participant 12 felt the mantra of always putting students first was not only her commission by the Lord but also the motivation on hard days. As an administrator she always tried to keep in mind that all the work was for the benefit of the students. Participant 17 expressed such a deep desire to serve students that early in her career she stepped out of the classroom for one year for personal reasons but found herself within a few months volunteering at a local school to fulfill that desire to serve students. She shared that her journey included stepping back into the classroom as a teacher, which led to her current role as an administrator. Her desire to serve students was summarized with her statement, “Sometimes in my difficult days I always hear this still voice of God saying, ‘Who is the prize?’ and asking me - it is our children. Keep your eyes on the prize” (Transcript of Interview P17KR 7.24.2020, Pos. 12). Participant 2 described her desire to serve and lead was similar to Moses and his commission to lead and serve the children of Israel. She stated, “I believe as a Christian leader it's my responsibility to be humble and to recognize they are His kids, His teachers, and His parents. They are not mine, for me to hoard things and lord over but, to treat them with respect and honor” (Transcript of P2VB 4.23.2020, Pos. 16).

The desire to serve as an educator to students was carried over into the role of administration for many of the participants. That was manifested for several participants when they saw an opportunity to serve their teachers and those under their leadership, specifically implementing the principle in God's Word recorded in the gospel of Matthew. The scriptures state that the Lord instructed the believers on how to respond when there is strife between each other (Matthew 18:15). Participant 8 stated a desire to follow and enforce this principle when parents were disgruntled as she stated it conveyed support for teachers (Transcript of Interview with P8SW 5.20.2020, Pos. 9). Participant 4 said enforcing the instruction of the Lord as listed in

the eighteenth chapter of the gospel of Matthew was “a plumb line for me” (Transcript of P4EH 4.29.2020, Pos. 16). This commission reflected her previous experience as a classroom teacher and recalling times when the parents would go directly to the administrator with an issue rather than come to her first. She shared this priority to serve her teachers by supporting them to speak with parents first before she would get involved was of great importance.

The desire to serve was manifested as many of the participants carried the responsibilities of many jobs within the school beyond the scope of their work as an administrator. They would literally do whatever was needed to serve their teachers and students including covering a class for a teacher with a sick child as Participant 4 described and cleaning the school as Participant 11 shared. Ultimately the desire to serve is summarized as Participant 4 stated, “My desire was to serve, because I think a servant’s heart recognizes needs and figures out a way to meet those needs” (Transcript of P4EH 4.29.2020, Pos. 6). She continued by saying the desire to serve must be greater than the financial compensation but rather as she stated, “You go into Christian education knowing you're going to do whatever it takes for the children to succeed and for God to be honored” (Transcript of P4EH 4.29.2020, Pos. 6).

Ultimately the first theme present in the narratives of the journey of women in Christian educational leadership is a desire to serve students and teachers. The participants expressed an overwhelming desire to serve, with 53 notations within the data related to the context of serving in the field of education, serving students, and serving their teachers.

Theme 2: Called and Equipped by the Lord

In addition to the participants expressing a desire to serve in the field of education, the desire was fueled by what was described as a calling and equipping from the Lord. Participant 4 stated, “for me the guiding question of influence was I had a call from God and my desire was to

serve” (Transcript of P4EH 4.29.2020, Pos. 6). This calling and equipping was expressed thirty-eight times throughout the data with many participants specifically feeling they were created with the talents and gifts to fulfill their calling as administrators. Participant 5 affirmed specifically being equipped by God as she stated, “God is giving me natural giftings and talents to be able to lead” (Transcript of P5TP 4.30.2020, Pos. 5). Participant 17 stated, “That's what gets me through every day. It's the passion that God is giving me for the field, so my ultimate advice is this, with God's calling you to give it 100%” (Transcript of Interview P17KR 7.24.2020, Pos. 12). Most participants did not pursue administration but rather evolved into that role whereas two participants shared a distinct calling and equipping to administration. Participant 10 felt a distinct calling into administration with a consistent gift for seeing the whole of the education realm beyond simply the teaching component. She affirmed her specific calling as she stated:

I really like the administration part. In teaching I could teach little ones to read and own the classroom room but in administration, I could look around and see even more. I could say, “Hey, the athletic Department ought to be doing this,” or “We could do this with parents and get more kids in the school” and I liked the whole big picture. (Participant 10, personal communication, May 28, 2020)

Likewise, participant 16 shared a love for the students and being a head of a small school, she often worked in dual roles as both teacher and administrator. However, the desire to lead teachers was her primary love.

One of the requirements for participation in this study was a master’s degree. Although the level of education was a prerequisite for all participants the interesting point in the research is that most participants did not pursue the higher level of education to open the door for

administrative roles. Rather, continuing their education was a reflection of the value placed on personal learning and continued education. Participant 15 stated while she was teaching, “I just quietly pursued my master’s degree...and I completed a master’s degree in Educational Administration” (Transcript of Interview with P15LL 6.10.2020, Pos. 3). Her choice to pursue the field of study of educational leadership was influenced by the current administrator and not in pursuit of the administrative position, but rather in admiration for her work. Fourteen of the seventeen participants completed their master’s degree while they were serving in roles as classroom teachers with only the remaining participants pursuing the master’s degree immediately following the bachelors.

There was a common theme expressed that being called and equipped by the Lord for the role of an administrator was confirmed throughout their journey. Participants shared that many life experiences prior to their administrative roles were designed by God for a ministry purpose. Participant 14 described a cleaning job she had in college to help her financially and a supervisor who was a great motivator and created a teamwork mentality that has served her well as an administrator. She said, “I just I can’t think of one experience that I haven’t had in life that God has not taken it and used that in what I do now, and I’m so thankful for that” (Transcript of Interview with P14RN 6.17.2020, Pos. 3). This sentiment was shared by many participants whose experiences as children, adolescents, and young adults were evidenced as intentionally ordained by the Lord for their current work as Christian education leaders.

Theme 3: Empowered by Others

Every participant interviewed attributed their success to being empowered, encouraged, and influenced by a mentor or leader. Many shared about a leader seeing something in them that they did not necessarily see in themselves. Of the 17 participants, 12 spoke of a strong male

mentor as a pastor or school leader that was critical in their journey and provided opportunities for them to lead. In addition, all 17 participants identified women leaders who were influential in their lives. When asked to share the salient point of their journey following the interview in the discussion board forum, the overwhelming common submission regarded a person who positively influenced and empowered them in their journey. In the discussion board forum Participant 1 shared:

The main component that came to mind was the influence of other people in my life that was the common thread. My pastor used to say we are influenced by the people we meet and the books we read. That is truth, plain and simple. I am not a great reader, but I love meeting and working with strong people. I have always enjoyed sitting and listening to Godly men and women and learning from them. (Participant 1, Transcript from Discussion Board, June 22, 2020)

The exceptionality that created and substantiated this theme was the scope of the inspiration that spanned the lifetime of the participant and was not limited to professional peers, mentors, and leaders. The influences were across the years and included parents, grandparents, teachers experienced as young children, personal and spiritual influences outside their professional circle. Participant 16 at the beginning of her narrative shared, “My parents were very influential, in addition to several teachers in high school. As I reflected on this lately, they were the ones I would say changed the trajectory of my life” (transcript of interview P16DD, Pos. 2). She shared the tremendous value her parents placed on education was instilled from an early age. Specifically, her mother hired a Latin teacher to supplement the course options at school as an example of the premium placed on education with Latin as was a valuable component.

Participant 9 shared specifically being empowered by a fourth-grade teacher. She articulated the inspiration of the teacher when she stated, “she had such a positive impact on my life during the civil rights movement” (Transcript of Interview P9JT 6.1.2020, Pos. 8). She described this teacher, who was Caucasian and serving in a school primarily consisting of African American students, who had an understanding and consideration for racial diversity. Participant 9 described an instant when, “She put a book in my hand, and it was the first time that I had read a book that was about black children and a black family” (Transcript of Interview P9JT 6.1.2020, Pos. 8). She shared about the day of Dr. Martin Luther King’s funeral, following his assassination, and the teacher brought a small black and white television to school for the children to watch the service of such an incredible leader. Participant 9 continued the narrative of her journey by sharing that although she had an early desire to be a teacher, years passed, and life circumstances prevented her from moving forward to fulfill this desire until she met a local college professor while she was working at a local non-profit organization. She shared, “by the time I was 40, I had met a lady who was a college professor at a local college and she just kept wooing me. Finally, I went over to the college one day to see what they had to offer” (Transcript of Interview P9JT, Pos. 4). The influence of teachers from her primary years coupled with the encouragement of a local college professor steered her journey. She attributed this to the hand of the Lord as she stated, “God was with me very early in this venture. I believe that it was God who literally gave me back the aspiration to become a teacher” (Transcript of Interview P9JT, Pos. 4).

Although many of the people who empowered the participants were within the personal sphere of the participant as a professional or ministerial leader, the influences within the Christian community were substantial. Participant 13 shared in her account by describing a

moment as she was attending a summer module for her Master's degree when she received a phone call from her current administrator asking if she would consider submitting her name for an administrative position that became available. It was a peer in the program who the Lord used to encourage her as she was deliberating on this decision. She was uncertain of her decision until he gave her the advice, "It has always been my practice that if the Lord opens the door, I keep walking through the doors until He closes the door. So, make yourself available, and if it's not the Lord's will, then that door will close" (Transcript for Interview of P13DB 6.3.2020, Pos. 2). The Lord used this peer to motivate her as she stated, "so I called back and I said okay, I am willing to be considered" (Transcript for Interview of P13DB 6.3.2020, Pos. 2).

Participant 4 continued the narrative of being empowered, inspired and taught by those within her faith community as she identified a youth leader in her church whose influence was both substantial and quantifiable as she stated:

When brother R came in our youth group, we had about 50 people and he had such an influence on all of us that out of that 50, 25 of us are in full-time Christian service either as missionaries, pastors wives, Christian School educators, and the other 25 are active lay people (Transcript of P4EH 4.29.2020, Pos. 8).

In a similar fashion, the influence within the church was also affirmed by Participant 10 who described her church as, "a powerhouse of a church" (Transcript of Interview with CDP10 5.28.2020, Pos. 5). Together with her Christian school where she had, "many Christian ladies in my life" (Transcript of Interview with CDP10 5.28.2020, Pos. 5). Participant 10 shared quantifiable results from her ministry influence as she shared, "There are approximately 300 preacher boys out of my home church, and then us girls in Christian education or ministry. I

never thought you could do anything else; it was the Lord saved and everyone owes Him in ministry” (Transcript of Interview with CDP10 5.28.2020, Pos. 5).

It was even the unlikely influences of others that the Lord would ordain such as shared by Participant 1. She shared about a group of lifelong girlfriends who have been constant sources of encouragement and have specifically empowered her when she considered pursuing higher education and advance into educational leadership. She stated, “everybody in that group of people, of my close friends, they're all strong women. We just urge each other on and push each other on” (Transcript of P1PG 4.20.2020, Pos. 6). For Participant 15, the Lord used her daughter to confirm her path to leadership. As a mom of young children, she was concerned about the time commitment needed in an administrative role. She shared her daughter was unaware of the concerns and long conversations with her husband, when one night at the dinner table the family was discussing the elementary teacher leaving the school and someone would be needed for her job. Her daughter, “looked at me and said, ‘Mommy, you should do it.’ It was just that sweet affirmation that the Holy Spirit gives and that is when I became the elementary principal” (Transcript of Interview with P15LL 6.10.2020, Pos. 3).

In the midst of sharing about many great men and women of faith who inspired their journeys, these successful leaders in the field of education who have all acquired high levels of educational training with master’s degree and some with PhD degrees, shared in great detail the positive influence of their mom. Many whose moms had sacrificed for their success, who modeled excellence, hard work, compassion and unconditional love. It was that first voice they ever heard, the voice that was consistent on the easy days and the hard days that overshadowed all the voices that followed. The participants shared about moms who were highly educated and motivating professionals, as well as moms who struggled in poverty and with disadvantaged

circumstances. Regardless of the characteristics or circumstances of their mother, it was secondary to the fact that they were a strong voice of inspiration for many participants to be leaders of godliness and excellence.

The inspiration and empowerment experienced by Participant 12 spanned many years. She shared her journey was inspired by her first-grade teacher with whom she has maintained communication over the years. The teacher became a friend and subsequently a mentor when she began her teaching career. Thus, the encouragement, empowerment, and positive influence of others regardless of the gender, age, or circumstance of the relationship was a substantial component of the journey for every participant.

This theme serves as an acknowledgment of the providence and provision of the Lord to have strategically placed people in the lives of the participants from a young age to guide, encourage, and steer them to serve as an educational leader. As Participant 13 shared in her discussion board submission the prominent component of her journey was recounting the people who positively influenced her journey. She stated:

One of the critical pieces for me is the Godly heritage of others who have traveled this path of leadership before me, male or female. Hebrews talked about the fact that we are ‘surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.’ As I looked back, the character and love that several of those ‘witnesses’ demonstrated were critical in my willingness to accept the challenge of leadership. (Participant 13, Transcript from Discussion Board, June 22, 2020)

Those who guided them into their role as a leader were specifically valued and affirmed within the narratives shared by participants. The indication that mentors and people of inspiration are crucial to the advancement and success of others was substantiated in the data acquired.

Theme 4: Modeled Behavior

The participants in the study affirmed the extrinsic motivation of verbal affirmation, empowerment, and spoken encouragement throughout their journey. In addition, they also visually witnessed modeled behavior indicative of servant leaders who they subsequently desired to emulate. Participant 9 shared the actions and modeled behaviors of her first three teachers in elementary school of great value. She stated, “They impressed me so much, they had what I wanted, not as far as material possessions. I liked what teachers did” (Transcript of Interview P9JT 6.1.2020, Pos. 4). The behaviors modeled often went beyond the components of instructional methods as described by Participant 6 who identified two high school teachers as great influences in her life due to their care, intentional nurturing, and encouragement. When speaking of one of the teachers she stated, “She taught me about leadership. It was by her example, that my coaching style and my teaching style came from her influence” (transcript of P6LR 5.5.2020, Pos. 3).

The participants witnessed many within the community of faith who demonstrated servant leadership such as Participant 2 who said as a young married woman, she was inspired by her Pastor’s wife whose godly service, which influenced her to understand the blessing of serving others. In addition, Participant 10 shared specifically within her church served the principal of her Christian school. She described her by sharing, “From the time I was born, she was always at my home church and she was our Christian school principal. She was godly, I mean it's like it oozed out of every pore, her countenance was beautiful” (Transcript of Interview with CDP10 5.28.2020, Pos. 7). She described the model as,

All my life I saw a godly pastor, that was definitely in charge, and I saw this lady that ran the whole school. I always saw women in ministry. I saw men and women both really

used for the Lord, it was just a good mentorship for me (Transcript of Interview with CDP10 5.28.2020, Pos. 7).

Participant 13 also shared specifically of modeled behavior within the church that influenced her journey. She described the group of missionaries in her home state and church who would gather young people in the community for Bible club. She said, “I just thought that's what I want to be when I grow up and their love for the Lord was so evident and they loved us” (Transcript for Interview of P13DB 6.3.2020, Pos. 2). That influence at a young age made a lasting impression on this participant not only to enter the field of education but also in the way they modeled preparation and loving students.

The modeled behavior of servant leadership from previous educators, ministry leaders, and various believers was influential in the journey for the participants. However, for many the modeled behaviors of godly parents was experienced early and highly valued.

Participant 15 shared the scope of the influence of her mother as she stated:

I think it started with my mother. Both as a strong Christian woman and a great parental authority, she was rooted in scripture. I saw her passion and love for education and knew that was something I wanted in my profession. She was so committed, and it was energizing to be with her. She was definitely a mentor. As I got into education our conversations turned into collegial exchanges and that was beautiful. She passed away from ALS in 2015. She was, and still is, very much on the landscape of a mentor and at some point, became a professional peer. It was a really beautiful evolution to our relationship (Transcript of Interview with P15LL, Pos. 9).

Participant 13 shared a similar experience as her father was a school administrator whose modeled behavior of leading his faculty and staff with humble service created an image and

example for her to follow. She shared as she became an administrator, her father became a confidant and mentor to help guide her through decisions in addition to her ability to have personally observed his godly leadership.

The providence of the Lord to provide many believers, leaders, and educators in the paths of the participant was a substantial component of the journey for the participants. They were witnesses to godly servant leaders who exhibited the art of leading others with humility, kindness, and care. This in-turn inspired and encouraged their journey to become leaders when the opportunity became available.

Theme 5: Teaching Experience is Valued

The next theme that emerged through the qualitative data analysis was the belief that experience as a classroom teacher was valuable in the journey to becoming a successful school administrator or leader. With fond reflection, the participants recounted their days as a classroom teacher. Many shared specific moments and experiences from catching frogs for a science experiment, to their first school being so close to the beach they could see the ocean. The root of the stories and memories was experiencing a love for students and teaching which provided valuable perspective, understanding, and wisdom to prepare them for future leadership responsibilities. Participant 4 shared a reflection and observation when recounting her journey regarding past classroom experience as she said:

I also observed the difference of principals and heads of school who did not have the classroom experience. Their decision-making process was totally different because they could not see the ripple effect on the classroom teacher. The result? Those with the classroom experience became advocates for the faculty as administrative decisions were discussed and made. (Participant 4, Transcript from Discussion Board, June 6, 2020).

Participant 6 echoed a similar response as she shared previous experience with leaders who did not have classroom teaching experience, which she described as, “they always seemed a bit off the mark with teachers” which drove her to practice the desire to “try to be in the classroom as much as possible when given the opportunity to teach English or Art History. It keeps me fresh and engaging with teachers” (Transcript from Discussion Board, Pos. 43-44).

In addition to valuing their classroom teaching experience, the journeys for many participants was scaffolded by stepping into roles, such as being the lead teacher within a team or department chair. The participants shared the value of learning and developing leadership responsibilities within their peer group, prior to administrative roles. The majority of participants in the study have principally acquired experience in small Christian schools where there is an expressed mentality and reality that all members of the staff do whatever is needed for the sake of the students, ministry, and ultimately for the glory of the Lord. Many participants shared about volunteering to assist their principals. Participant 11 shared a common theme when she shared about her principal:

She was extremely supportive in any idea I had and that was good for me. So, when she needed some help with something that was on an administrative level, then I wanted to help her out. Even as a classroom teacher I began helping her with the scheduling for the classes, began helping her with ordering of curriculum, those types of things. We had transition of headmaster and she was fulfilling some other roles, so I volunteered to go around and check lesson plans for the teaching staff at the school. Those types of things, just to be helpful. You know in a small Christian School you end up doing all sorts of stuff. I have cleaned toilets, washed dishes, taken out trash, worked gates. (Participant 11, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020)

From volunteering, teaching, to leading grade level teams, the participants shared a common theme of valuing each experience as a vital component of their story and paving the road that lead them to be successful leaders and administrators. As Participant 4 affirmed the value of classroom experience in the discussion board forum, when reflecting on the women leaders she has been blessed to know during her twenty years of tenure, “They led from experiential knowledge which shaped decisions affecting the classroom teacher” (Transcript from Discussion Board, Pos. 8).

There was also a shared belief that experience as a classroom teacher provided wisdom regarding the teacher and parent relationship. As previously mentioned, the Matthew 18 principle was valued and implemented in times of conflict, primarily based on the understanding the leader acquired during their time as a classroom teacher. As a previous teacher they understood the value for a parent to always begin conversations and seek clarification with the teacher before the administrator. The participants shared having served in that capacity as a teacher also aided in comprehending the array of responsibilities teachers must maintain thus, making their role to serve teachers a priority. Participant 4 stated, “I believe a call from God to serve children and parents is the foundation for success in education generally, but especially in Christian education” (Transcript from Discussion Board, Pos. 8). Throughout the data the desire, compulsion, and aspiration to serve was acknowledged, affirmed and included in the narratives of the participants 53 times. The leaders served their teachers, families, and students no matter the need.

Theme 6: Obedience to the Lord

As the narratives of the journeys of the 17 participants were analyzed the fifth theme that emerged was the commitment to obedience to the Lord as a priority. Participant 11 shared in

great detail about her journey, that at many junctures of changes in her career, taking on more responsibilities, and ultimately serving as head of school that it was not a personal goal or desire for those positions but that the driving force was solely acts of obedience. She stated:

God showed me through the students, he had a purpose for me there in the classroom.

While I haven't always understood it, I have grown to appreciate the fact you trust the fact that God has a plan. I learned a long time ago that if I am not in obedience with what he wants me to do, I'm miserable. Things are not going to go well. There's going to be frustration beyond frustration and stress more than I want because I'm out I'm out of alignment with what he wants. (Participant 11, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020)

Participant 13 shared a similar desire as she stated, "I never even asked what the salary was, I never even asked because it really was just about doing what the Lord wanted me to do"

(Transcript for Interview of P13DB 6.3.2020, Pos. 2). Likewise, Participant 3 shared when the opportunity was presented to her to become a principal her response was, "Lord, if this is what you have for me, I know there will be a blessing and I don't want to miss the blessing"

(Transcript of P3ML 4.24.2020, Pos. 3). In addition, Participant 5 shared the desire to live in obedience to the Lord was a commitment as a junior high school student when she said, "I was a willing vessel, I loved him, and I just wanted to work somehow in his Kingdom" (Transcript of P5TP 4.30.2020, Pos. 19) she continued by encouraging others with confidence, "If you are a willing vessel, God's going to work out in you what He's got for you to do" (Transcript of P5TP, Pos. 17).

Participant 11 went on to share that it was obedience that led her to trust every move and advancement believing that the Lord would bless and equip her to do what He had called her to do. She concluded her journey by stating:

But it has really only boiled down to one thing for me...obedience. Obedience to the One who has my life...God. I fully realize I am nothing without God. All that I have done has been under His power, not my own. I have been surprised over and over again by the next thing He asks me to do and scared to death that I won't be able to accomplish it.

Obedience. Trying to hear God's voice above all others and doing what He wants. To others, my life may look like a jumbled, meandering path to some uncertain destination. Sometimes, from the worldly perspective it can feel that way. However, God's voice is the one voice that brings focus and direction in the midst of worldly rubble. (Participant 11, Transcript from Discussion Board, July 7, 2020)

Not only was there the emergence of the theme of obedience but also that the obedience was a response to doors of opportunity opened and presented by the Lord. Participant 8 shared as she continues in her leadership journey, “So it's been just a blessing. I'm finishing year 2 and they named me Assistant Head of school in January. I just continue to see God opening doors and closing doors and working and it's all being open to Him” (Transcript of Interview with SWP8 5.20.2020, Pos. 5). She shared the steps of obedience are not always easy as she was happy in her previous position however, “If God hadn't nudged me and turned all the lights green, then I probably would have stayed there until I retired. But, He had more for me and so some of that is just being obedient and taking risks” (Transcript of Interview with SWP8 5.20.2020, Pos. 5). Participant 10 frequently attributed her experiences to the provision and guidance of the Lord. She served an array of experiences in the field of education from a college professor to the head of school and she said even from her childhood growing up under the influence of her father who was a teacher, “The Lord opens the doors” (Transcript of Interview with CDP10 5.28.2020, Pos. 19). Participant 9 shared no matter the obstacles in the journey or

timeline, in His time and according to the provision and providence of the Lord her current role as a principal can be summarized as, “It was like God literally catapulted me into this principal position” (Transcript of Interview P9JT 6.1.2020, Pos. 4). Participant 14 was serving as the preschool director when she was asked by the school board to take the role of the elementary principal. She responded in obedience by saying, “If the Lord is enlarging my territory to include being the elementary principal, then I will go. That was 17 years ago. I have been at my school for 29 years and have loved every minute of it” (Transcript of Interview with P14RN 6.17.2020, Pos. 3). Participant 13 concluded her interview with advice to the next generation of educational leaders by saying, “Depend on the Lord for all of it and then, as He opens His doors then you go through them” (Transcript for Interview of P13DB 6.3.2020, Pos. 16).

Being a recipient of grace and in return extending grace to others was a subtheme of the choice to walk in obedience expressed by the participants. Participant 1 described the understanding to extend grace and mercy as a leader as a reflection of the influences of great leaders in her journey. She also shared that extending grace as a leader is something, in hindsight, would have been extended with greater freedom and more frequently. Participant 2 also shared how she was influenced by a great mentor to be a leader rooted in grace as a reflection of her walk of obedience. Specifically, grace should be a tool in moments of controversy and crisis. Within the data acquired through the discussion board, the acknowledgement of the grace of the Lord through the journey to leadership was evidenced. It was attributed that not only does the Lord open doors and bless obedience, but is full of grace to those who trust in Him.

The final subtheme under the heading of obedience was shared by the majority of participants was a desire for their life’s work to be characterized by excellence. The desire for

excellence in their personal choices as well as leading others to excellence was a reflection of their faith and guiding principle in their journey. Participant 7 stated:

I think in God's world I don't see a lot of room for less than excellent. I think He expects us to be excellent at what we do, at what he's called us to do. So, if my calling is to make a difference in the lives of children to reach and teach children for the Kingdom, then I choose Christian school to do that then I need to be the best that school has to offer.

(Participant 7, Personal Communication, May 6, 2020).

Participant 4 echoed the theme of excellence as she stated, “we have to do what we do with excellence” (Transcript of P4EH 4.29.2020, Pos. 13) when describing her role as an educational leader. Participant 16 expanded the dialogue on excellence as not only a personal pursuit and keystone of her journey, but also that she felt she was commissioned by the Lord to instill and help those she leads to pursue excellence. She said, “If you expect a high standard of excellence, you should live it. Be an example of that, but also you help others achieve it. You don’t just demand it, you show how it's done” (Transcript of Interview P17KR 7.24.2020, Pos. 8).

Participant 10 has over 20 years of experience in Christian education as an administrator. She has served in several different schools however she stated the theme of excellence spans the demographics and culture of the school. She stated, “Everywhere there is a different flavor, but you could still do things with excellence” (Transcript of Interview with CDP10 5.28.2020, Pos. 13). Ultimately, as shared in the discussion board, the pursuit and modeling of excellence was a manifestation of a desire to honor the Lord. Regardless of the position within the field of education or the stage of the journey, participants expressed the characteristic of excellence as a significant internal motivator. Not only did the participants desire excellence in their leadership they desired to influence teachers to excellence. As Participant 15 stated, “The hallmark of a

good leader is too work yourself out of a job. Choosing people and having confidence in them. Empowering them and their spheres of excellence to soar” (Transcript of Interview with P15LL, Pos. 9). The pursuit of excellence was modeled by mentors and previous leaders, thus instilling it as a personal and professional attribute of significance.

Theme 7: ACSI affiliation

The final theme that emerged from the data analysis was an appreciation and acknowledgement of the affiliations and acquaintances in the Association of Christian School International (ACSI) as significant contributors in the leadership journey. ACSI is an organization, which to the participants, exemplified more than just an agency of accreditation and certification but also a network of encouragement, support, and collaboration. Christian schools do not work within a geographical district such as public institutions where there is a fluid network of administrators. However, ACSI provided that for many of the participants as they found opportunities to collaborate and confer with other likeminded leaders. Participant 5 shared the benefit of ACSI as a supportive organization when she stated, “Networking with other administrators and seeing how other people are doing it, that is helpful” (Transcript of P5TP 4.30.2020, Pos. 11).

The theme of ACSI was seen as the accreditation process often was immersed with encouragement for the leader and their leadership initiatives. Participant 14 attributed key influences in her journey were met through ACSI when she stated, “So many wonderful women that I have met either with ACSI who have taken up the mantle of leadership...and God's been able to use them and work through them to just help me move along” (Transcript of Interview with P14RN 6.17.2020, Pos. 3). Participant 2 shared about two particular leaders with the association which she said, “That really opened the door for me in that ministry” (Transcript of

P2VB 4.23.2020, Pos. 8) in which she found relationships, support and camaraderie with other leaders. Participant 3 attributed relationships in ACSI as a significant part of her journey. Participant 4 described the people she has met within the ACSI organization as those who “encouraged and challenged” (Transcript of P4EH 4.29.2020, Pos. 12) but also collaborated for global success and momentum in Christian education. Participant 2 affirmed the role of school accreditation as influential in her journey as she stated, “ACSI is a huge network, ...but accreditation, my involvement in accreditation, helped me to meet people (Transcript of P2VB 4.23.2020, Pos. 23). The accolades of other participants for the ACSI organization regarded leadership training, mentor relationships, and collaboration as just a few of the significant contributions of ACSI. Participant 4 summarized the role of the ACSI network as she stated, “as I think about ACSI's role, I worked with all of those schools and interacted with boards...for which I've been very grateful” (Transcript of P4EH 4.29.2020, Pos. 12). The data supported the affiliation with this network of the schools and leaders to positively have contributed to their advancement and subsequent leadership achievements. Participant 3 shared the affiliation with ACSI as a need for support for the journey of a Christian education leader (Transcript from Discussion Board, Pos. 29).

The participants shared the benefit of the network of ACSI as not only a support in their journey as they modeled excellence but also as they worked through the accreditation process their school was positively affected. The accreditation process allowed support and encouragement for the leader. Participant 16 shared the accreditation process with ACSI supported the development of the school which as the head of school was important. It also brought in someone that would support the leader and affirm her work. Leadership for many of

the participants was described as an isolated role with affiliations with ACSI provided for that specific need.

Evaluation of Findings

The findings of the data indicated for women in K-12 Christian education leadership the similarities in their stories are not found in circumstances, events, or specific educational goals that were achieved as a recipe or a prescription. Rather their journeys are a reflection of personal and genuine commitments and decisions aligned with their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as the divine director of their lives to which they would live and follow in sincere obedience. Within the journey of obedience, they found value and purpose in every circumstance and event which was later used in service to those whom they lead. The data indicated the voices of many people empowered leaders and they were not limited to those within the educational realm but is expanded to include family members, peers, and ministry leaders. Not only were they empowered by others they witnessed modeled behavior that influenced their performance and desire to emulate. The data indicated biblical precepts and principles included in the scripture were significant characteristics of their leadership and their influence. These biblical principles were modeled by various leaders and schools within the network of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). Ultimately as Participant 5 said, “It’s just that, my God story” (Transcript of P5TP 4.30.2020, Pos. 5). This statement echoes the sentiments of the participants as a whole, a narrative which acknowledges and attributes God as the author and divine director of their journeys.

Summary

In summary, the data acquired was triangulated between the transcripts of interviews and the discussion forum transcript to emerge six themes based on code frequency. The themes

represented both internal motivations and desires of the participants, as well as external supports and influences. The themes which reflect internal aspirations were a desire to serve, compulsion for obedience to the Lord as a devoted Christian, and recognition of a calling and equipping from the Lord as a recognition of His sovereignty. The remaining four themes represented external influences, which guided and pivoted the participants throughout their journey. The two themes, which represented external stimuli, was found in the encouragement and modeled behaviors of people such as mentors, spiritual leaders, and parents shared by the participants. In addition, the knowledge attained through their personal experience as a classroom teacher was perceived as preparatory for the role of leadership. Finally, the network of opportunities and experiences within the Association of Christian Schools International and modeled in the organization motivated the participants to step into leadership roles.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Discussion, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to gather the narratives of women educational leaders in K-12 Christian schools in a search for understanding of the similarities in their journeys. The rationale for research was the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in comparison to the saturation of women in the field of education. The similarities in experiences, people, and conjunctures in their journeys contributes to the field of knowledge and enriches the training for women who will serve in these roles in the future. The research question that framed the study was, what are the factors that influence women in K-12 Christian school leadership and the pathways that lead to their achievement? The narratives were collected via online interviews with additional data collected in a discussion forum to support triangulation during analysis. The analysis of the data included field notes, memos, coding, and quantifying the codes to identify subsequently emerging themes.

Chapter one provided the rationale and purpose for the research including the background of the study and the theoretical framework. Chapter two provided a review of the literature regarding the topic including the conceptual framework and specific characteristics of women leaders in the field of education. Chapter three described the methodology for acquiring participants as well as data. The fourth chapter presents the seven themes from the data analysis, as well as the details for each theme. This final chapter includes discussion of the specific findings in light of the research question, in addition to recommendations for future study and the conclusions drawn from the research project.

Discussion

The following discussion is the summary of findings related to each of the questions, which guided the interviews and narratives provided by the 17 participants.

1. *Tell me about those who have influenced you from peers, mentors, or leaders who played a role in your journey to become an educational leader?*

The influence of others is a significant component in the journeys of the participants. The people in their lives often were voices of recognition, encouragement, and support as they stepped into leadership positions. The positive correlation attributed to the positive influence of experienced leaders aligns with contemporary research regarding the benefit of mentorship (Gümüő, 2019). The previous research included in the literature review affirmed a benefit when the mentorship was comprised of like genders (Kogovőek & Ograjenőek, 2019). However, just as the study by Kogovőek & Ograjenőek, 2019 supported the correlation of gender in mentor relationships, it also included the recommendation for further longitudinal study to determine if the common interest within the mentorship relationship may be equally valued. The participants in this study shared authentically and with great gratitude the gift of colleagues, mentors, and leaders in their life without regard to the gender of the person. There were both men and women that were equally used by God to guide the participant along the way. Although this does not perfectly align with the literature, it also does not discredit. The overarching result was a value of wisdom and influence overshadowed the gender of the person.

In addition, those who were identified as influential to the participants, spanned the generational timeline of their lives. The participants were empowered by their parents as young children, teachers during primary education, to current leaders and colleagues who modeled servant leadership qualities. The impact of witnessing authentic servant leadership inspired the

participants to emulate those characteristics as a leader. The participants described a lifetime journey being guided by many people placed by the Lord in their lives to influence their journey to be an educational leader. The influences were not limited to the professional relationships, but also personal and spiritual leaders were used throughout the course of their journey to speak biblical truth into their lives.

2. *Please share how the precepts of the Christian faith are involved in your journey to becoming an educational leader?*

The precepts of the Christian faith were not simply truths that were exhibited by the leader, but also the foundation for their desires and guidance for their life choices. The participants shared a deeply rooted commitment to the surrender of their lives to the Lord and a life of obedience to His word. Their commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord prompted the participants to accept positions of leadership. The participants shared a devotion to the Lord and the scripture following their personal surrender to Jesus Christ. This commitment is clearly evident not only in their journey with obedient choices but also in their selfless service to the ministries and teachers they lead. The participants expressed a desire to honor the Lord in all roles, as well as modeling the precepts of their faith in all their relationships and leadership opportunities. This internal desire and motivator of obedience to the Lord align with the research of women being inspired by a sense of passion and purpose (Longman, Lamm Bray, Liddell, Hough, & Dahlvig, 2018). The participants in the study articulated the passion for scripture and biblical purpose as their motivator and guide. The participants made decisions at various junctures in their journey based on their surrender to the Lord and opportunities and doors attributed to His sovereignty over their lives.

3. *Please describe your leadership style and how it has developed within your journey as a woman in K-12 Christian School Leadership.*

The participants were humble in their responses regarding their leadership. They clearly stated within the narratives, a commitment to obedience to the calling of the Lord on their lives as educators. The participants exemplified their calling and equipping by the Lord as educational leaders with servant leadership. The pursuit of excellence was a common pursuit in their leadership, as well as leading with genuine love for the students, teachers, and families under their care. Their leadership displayed compassion and appropriate emotional responses to circumstances. The evidenced emotional intelligence portrayed, aligns with contemporary research which determined the emotional intelligence of educational leaders as significant to the stability of teacher and thus the success of the leader (Berkovich & Eyal, 2018).

The responses from the participants support the biblical framework listed in the literature review of women who exemplified servant leadership such as Amy Carmichael and Lottie Moon (Murray, 2015; Benge, 2000). Emulation of the characteristics of servant leadership typifies the research of active listening and collaboration as a demonstrated strength in women leaders (Sax, 2018; Spataro & Block, 2018; Kreidy & Vernon, 2018). Servant leaders place emphasis on the needs and service of others above themselves (Blanchard & Hodges, 2003). The narratives of the participants consistently and quantifiably demonstrated self-less service in their leadership. The demonstration of servant leadership exemplifies the words in the New Testament, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another” (Hebrews 10:24-25a). The example of servant leadership provided by the participants supplies an example and encouragement for leaders serving in all sectors of education and as organizational leaders.

Summary

The findings of this research indicate the journeys of women in Christian education leadership in K12 Christian schools is characterized by seven themes. Three of the themes encompassed serving others with excellence as a response to a calling and equipping of the Lord in an act of obedience. In addition, there were three themes which were centered on external influences such as, leaders, pastors, and colleagues within the ACSI organization who spoke into the lives of the participants' guidance and encouragement throughout their journeys. Finally, there was the theme which attributed value for their experience in the classroom as preparatory for their leadership role. The themes support the literature on the value of women in the field of education and advancement of the gospel. Thus, they are great influences and contributors in the realm of Christian education. Just as the research shared the strength for women in the internal locus of control in passion and purpose in their professional lives, this research affirms this precept. Likewise, the research aligns and supports the literature which stated the value of emotional intelligence and the leadership style of women contributes to the organizational health of the school (Valenzuela-Santoyo & Portillo-Peñuelas, 2018).

Recommendations

This study was a holistic view of the journeys of the 17 participants, therefore, it presented an overview of the key moments, people, and junctures they experienced. Seven themes emerged which evoke additional opportunities for further research. There were four recommendations for further research based on additional questions to be considered.

- 1- Given the empowerment of others within the relationship sphere of the participant, it would be beneficial to study the particulars of mentorship relationships. The participants in the study primarily identified those of influence to be organic models of leadership

characteristics from pastors or professional leaders within their personal and professional sphere. Only one participant experienced structured and strategic mentorship which was acknowledged and attributed value. A consideration for further research would be a comparison of naturally occurring organic mentorship and leadership modeling within the school community versus strategic and structured mentorship as a positive influence for women serving in Christian leadership positions.

- 2- Given the acknowledgment that classroom experience and modeled behavior is valued and can be leveraged as a motivator for leadership success, the second recommendation is research if practicum hours should be immersed into higher degree programs. Just as student teaching is immersed into undergraduate education programs of study, one question would be if parallel practicum hours would be valuable for students who pursue higher degrees directly following undergraduate training.
- 3- Given the theme of a strong internal desire to serve as a valued component for the participants, further research on servant leadership training is recommended.
- 4- The study was limited to women leaders serving in ACSI schools, therefore, a recommendation is to expand the participant qualification. The participant expansion to women of faith in both public and non-public schools has the potential to determine if there is a correlation based on faith regardless of the school represented.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the qualitative data credited the journey of the participants as opportunities created by God, which have been experienced as a product of grace and divine provision. The narratives and written submissions did not describe deterrents, obstacles, or difficulties but rather were saturated with accolades to the Lord and His goodness. They found satisfaction, joy, and

fulfillment in serving and obedience to the Lord. The participants highlighted the Lord's provision of opportunity, financial blessings, and guidance. There were consistent attributions of the influences of others as significantly motivating and encouraging advancement into leadership positions. These influences were often found within the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) organization, however, the influence of others was also common within their faith community and schools. They felt every role within the education journey was valuable and was used in preparation for their leadership position. The 17 women participants voiced humility and honor to be chosen by God to serve others through their leadership, all for the Glory of God. As Participant 14 stated, "It is not about me, it is about my ease, it is not about my glory; It is about His. It is about His glory" (Transcript of Interview with P14RN 6.17.2020, Pos. 9).

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Appendix A: Participant Criteria

1. A woman in an administrative position, which includes principal, assistant principal, superintendent, dean of students, curriculum director, or assistant superintendent. The study acknowledges there are various synonyms and titles that contain similar job descriptions and responsibilities, all of which align with administrative leadership.
2. Certified administrator through the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) which requires a Master's Degree or higher in education as well as a minimum of ten years of experience as a leader in an ACSI Christian School.
3. A willingness to carefully consider the questions being asked with honesty and integrity for the benefit of future generations of women in Christian educational leadership.

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form

Title of the Study: Exploring the Personal Journeys of Women Leaders in K12 Christian School

Researcher: Mrs. Mika B. Edwards

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Roger Stiles
John Wesley School of Leadership, Piedmont International University

Invitation to Participate: I invite you to participate in the above-mentioned research study conducted by Mrs. Mika B. Edwards, supervised by Dissertation Chair, Dr. Roger Stiles.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to acquire narratives of personal experiences for women who are in leadership positions in K-12 Christian Schools. The hope is through comparisons of the narratives a revelation of similarities will unearth concerning the pivotal moments for the participants while pursuing a leadership position. Thus, the ultimate purpose is through analysis of the potential similarities, a knowledge and understanding regarding the phenomena of gender discrepancies for leaders in K-12 Christian schools will transpire and information for mentorship of future women leaders will be achieved.

Participation: My participation in this study will consist of thoughtful and prayerful responses to five semi-structured leading questions concerning my personal story as a leader in a Christian school. I understand the recorded interview could be either in-person or via online conference depending on location and scheduling. I am willing to contribute approximately 60 to 90 minutes to the interview as well as an undesignated time committed to thought and prayer prior to the interview to ensure key components of my story are not inadvertently omitted. In addition, I agree to join and contribute in an online discussion board with fellow participants in the study where I will post at minimum two components of my narrative journey. The discussion board will be open for two-weeks post the collection of interviews in which I will contribute within the time period. I also agree to recommend a potential participant from my network of colleagues and fellow professionals. I understand I will receive a transcript of my interview to verify accuracy.

Risks: My participation in this study will include honest and accurate details of the years leading to attaining the position of an educational leader in a Christian school. I understand sharing my story and journey may dictate remembrances and recounting difficult events, relationships, and circumstances which encompass a range of emotions and memories. I understand my participation includes the risk of time and scheduling adjustment which may encroach on personal responsibilities. All of which, may result in fatigue and difficulty; however, I understand the researcher will be cognitive and sensitive to all risks and will limit these as much as possible.

Benefits: My participation in this study has the potential to contribute to the understanding and knowledge specific to women leaders in Christian school. I understand my participation could assist and expedite achievement for future generations of women.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received confirmation from the researcher that my personal identity will be protected with strict confidentiality measures through the use of a pseudonym as well as non-disclosure practices for my school, geographical location, position and all demographical information. The researcher has also confirmed confidentiality for my story and interview responses through layers of pseudonyms applied within the dialogue. I understand my story is utilized for research purposes only and will be compiled and coded alongside other participants for research gains only.

Conservation of Data: The data collected through the interview process will be encrypted and stored in a secure manner on a password protected device for a minimum of three years.

Voluntary Participation: I understand I am under no obligation to participate in this research study and possess the ability to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. This ability is available on the large scale to remove myself completely from the study as well as on a small scale by omission of response from a specific guiding question. At any time, my refusal to participate will result in all data and information provided being discarded.

Rights as a Research Participant: I understand if I have questions about my participation or rights as a participant, I am provided access to the researcher, dissertation chairperson, or representative from Piedmont International University Institutional Review Board for confidential communication and clarification of all concerns. These concerns include but are not limited to my rights, complaints, or any issue as a participant which affects my participation and subsequent data provided.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the qualitative research study titled, *A Qualitative Study on The Journey of Women Educational Leaders in K-12 Christian Schools* by Mika B. Edwards of the John Wesley School of Leadership Department at Piedmont International University, under the supervision of Dr. Roger Stiles.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher.

Researcher: Mika B. Edwards
Tel: 704-242-3648
Email: edwardsmb@piedmontu.edu

Chair: Dr. Roger Stiles
Tel: 336-725-8344
Email: stilesr@piedmontu.edu

By checking the box to the left, you agree to the above criteria represented on this form.

By checking the box to the left, you request a copy of the final dissertation for your personal library.

Participant's signature: _____

Appendix C: Semi-Structure Interview Questions

1. Tell me about those who have influenced you from peers, mentors, or leaders who played a role in your journey to become an educational leader?
2. Please share how the precepts of the Christian faith are involved in your journey to becoming an educational leader?
3. Please describe your leadership style and how it has developed within your journey as a woman in K-12 Christian School Leadership.