Retention of educators through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's theory

by

Krystal Ann Young

B.S., Emporia State University, 2004
M.S., Emporia State University, 2006

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the retention of teachers through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. The research aimed to understand the multifaceted factors influencing teacher retention by examining the interplay between individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal levels within the teaching environment. Twelve teachers, six novice and six veteran, were interviewed to gather in-depth insights into their professional experiences and the various ecological systems that contributed to their decisions to stay in the teaching profession.

Bronfenbrenner's theory provided a comprehensive framework for analyzing the dynamic interactions between teachers and their environments. The study employed interviews as the primary data collection method, allowing participants to share their narratives and perspectives. Themes emerging from the interviews were analyzed to identify patterns and connections within the microsystem (individual factors), mesosystem (interpersonal relationships), exosystem (organizational influences), macrosystem (societal factors), and the chronosystem (changes over time) that impacted teacher retention.

The research concluded that the mesosystem, which encompasses relationships within the school system, had the most significant impact on teachers remaining in their careers. This finding was exhibited by both the novice and veteran groups, highlighting the critical role that interpersonal relationships play in teacher retention. Supportive relationships with colleagues, administrators, and the broader school community were consistently identified as key factors influencing teachers' decisions to stay in the profession.

By utilizing Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework, this research contributed to the existing knowledge on teacher retention by offering a holistic understanding of the

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Approved by:

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Dedication

To Payne and Hunter, you two have my heart and always will be my number one priority. Thank you for always supporting and loving me. You are my "why" for working hard, doing hard things, and never giving up.

To my mother, thank you for your unwavering support and encouragement throughout this journey. Your love, wisdom, and sacrifices reminded me that I could overcome challenges. You were my inspiration for completing this final degree.

To my sister, thank you for your constant support and gentle push to keep moving forward. Your belief in me made a difference.

I deeply appreciate those who challenged me, asked about my progress, and encouraged me to think critically. Many may go unnamed, but their influence was invaluable.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Teachers are leaving the profession at high rates nationally and locally and this impacts the education we provide our students. The national annual teacher turnover rate is 16% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). This shortage is not uniform; certain regions, particularly in urban and rural areas, are more acutely affected and can happen anywhere. The shortage extends across elementary, middle, and high schools. Subjects like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (Hutchison, 2012) and special education are experiencing particularly severe deficits (Ingersoll et al., 2014) .

Teacher retention is a critical issue in the field of education with far-reaching implications for student learning outcomes, school culture, and the overall quality of education. Maintaining a stable and effective teaching workforce is a key to success in education (Johnson, 2006). School administration, compensation, professional development, resources or work-life balance, are some of these key factors when it comes to retaining teachers. Many strategies and interventions have been put in place to increate retention rates like comprehensive mentoring and induction programs for new teachers can provide them with support, guidance, and professional development (Ingersoll et al., 2014). However, teachers are still leaving the profession at a rapid rate (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

This study added a new layer of research as it investigated whether Bronfenbrenner's theory on environmental impacts and influences affected the success and retention of educators based on the environment in which they worked daily. The results of this study indicated that school culture is the most critical factor in teacher retention.

Teacher Shortage

Teacher shortage has a range of understandings. Teacher shortage could be viewed from a supply and demand perspective, indicating less supply increases the demand (Berry & Shields, 2017). Teacher shortage could be viewed as teachers that completed their education and are teaching daily, but not teaching in specific much needed content areas (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Teacher shortage could be viewed as a relationship between shortage and retention/attrition of educators (Kelchtermans, 2017). Overall, teacher shortage refers to a situation in which the number of qualified teachers available is insufficient to meet the demand for teaching positions within a given educational system or geographic area (Berry & Shields, 2017; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Kelchtermans, 2017).

Global Teacher Shortage

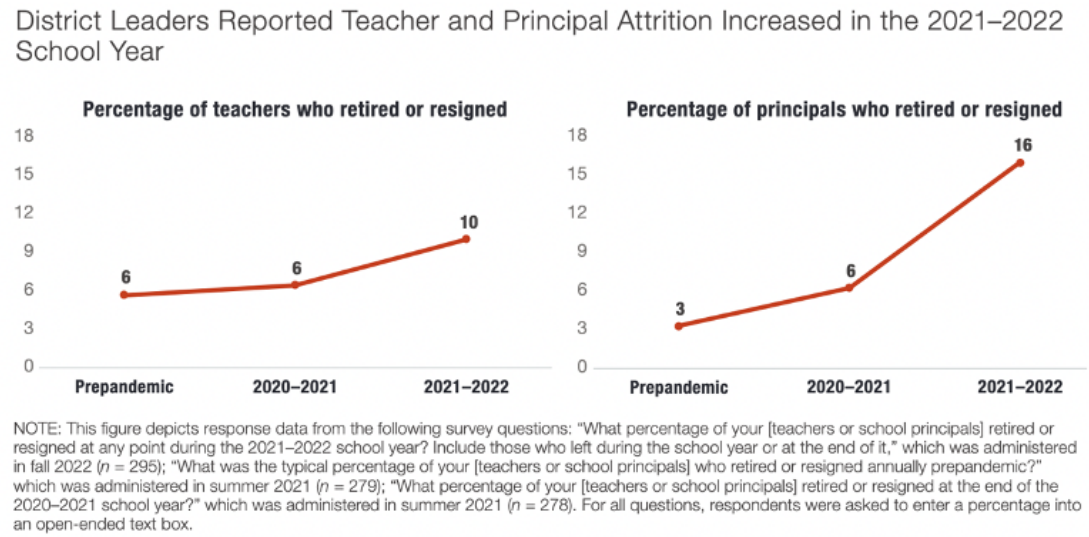
The national annual teacher turnover rate is 16% and this is evenly divided between those who leave voluntarily and those who move between schools (Swanson & Mason, 2018). Teacher supply is greatly impacting geographical areas, schools and disciplines in diverse ways (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). As the number of students going into education dwindles, the availability of educators is adversely affected and this limits the quantity of qualified candidate (Looney & Lusin, 2019). According to estimates produced by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2016, the world needs nearly 69 million more teachers by 2030 to achieve universal basic education (Edwards, 2023), yet current trends see this deficit increasing.

National Teacher Shortage

The national teacher shortage in the United States is a multifaceted challenge that has garnered increasing attention over the years. The nation is grappling with a shortage of qualified

educators, and the ramifications are felt across the educational landscape (Edwards, 2023; Swanson & Mason, 2018). This shortage is not uniform; certain regions, particularly in urban and rural areas, are more acutely affected. The shortage is not limited to specific grade levels but extends across elementary, middle, and high schools. Subjects like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (Hutchison, 2012; Kelchtermans, 2017) and special education are experiencing particularly severe deficits (Ingersoll et al., 2014). While there are many key factors like leadership, compensation, professional growth opportunities, resources and lack of appreciation, contributing to the shortage, the impact on students, schools and communities is debilitating (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). The consequences of the teacher shortage extend beyond the staffing challenges faced by schools (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Students in classrooms with consistently changing or inexperienced teachers may not receive the continuity and quality of education they need. The shortage exacerbates educational inequities, with schools in low-income areas disproportionately affected (Johnson, 2006). The national teacher shortage is a complex and pressing issue that demands comprehensive, collaborative solutions. As education stakeholders, policymakers, and communities come together to address the root causes and implement strategic interventions, there is hope for creating a more sustainable and vibrant teaching profession for the benefit of students nationwide (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2022). Figure 1, below, from a research report from Schwartz and Diliberti (2022) depicts teacher turnover increased 4 percentage points above prepandemic levels, reaching 10% nationally at the end of the 2021–2022 school year. Principal turnover increased too, reaching 16% nationally going into the 2022–2023 school year.

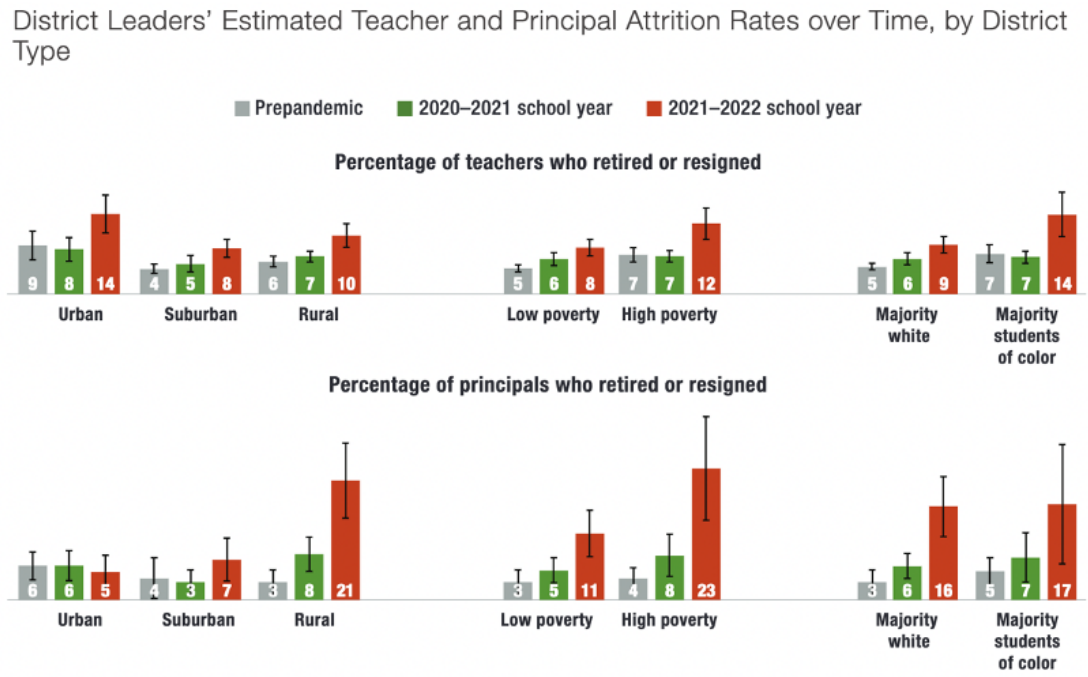
Figure 1
Principal and Teacher Attrition



Note. From "Districts continue to struggle with staffing, political polarization, and unfinished instruction," by Diliberti and Schwartz, 2022, RAND Cooperation (https://doi.org/10.7249/RRA956-13). CC by 4.0.

Also, from research conducted by Schwartz and Diliberti (2022), Figure 2 shows teacher turnover in 2021–2022 was highest (around 12% to 14%) in urban districts, high-poverty districts, and districts serving predominately students of color. Meanwhile, principal turnover was highest (around 21% to 23%) in high-poverty districts and in rural districts.

Figure 2
Estimated Teacher and Principal Attrition over Time



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey questions: "What percentage of your [teachers or school principals] retired or resigned at any point during the 2021–2022 school year? Include those who left during the school year or at the end of it," which was administered in fall 2022 (n = 295); "What was the typical percentage of your [teachers or school principals] who retired or resigned annually prepandemic?" which was administered in summer 2021 (n = 279); and "What percentage of your [teachers or school principals] retired or resigned at the end of the 2020–2021 school year?" which was administered in summer 2021 (n = 278). For all questions, respondents were asked to enter a percentage into an open-ended text box. The vertical black bars represent the 95 percent confidence interval for each estimate.

Note. From "Districts continue to struggle with staffing, political polarization, and unfinished instruction," by Diliberti and Schwartz, 2022, RAND Cooperation (https://doi.org/10.7249/RRA956-13). CC by 4.0.

State Teacher Shortage

At the end of the 2022-2023 school year, there were 1628 vacancies in the state of Kansas. That is about 4% of the 38,353 teachers in the state of Kansas (Garcia, 2022). At the end of the 2023-2024 school year, this number increased to 1954 and then a current number of over 2000 vacancies. These numbers do not include the 1918 underqualified people, another 5%, employed as teachers (Garcia, 2022). In addition to vacancies and underqualified staff, the

average leave rate in the state of Kansas is 10.61%. This number has drastically increased since 2019, leaving the state of Kansas in a state of emergency when it comes to the teacher shortage.

One County Teacher Shortage

Even examining at the county level, there are similar concerns as the state of Kansas (Baker & Staff, 2023). In one county, there are four school districts in the county and all are experiencing similar concerns of multiple openings with very few applicants. Of the districts, one has a much lower turnover rate than the other three and one has a much higher turnover rate than the other three. For the past two years, there have been multiple positions filled with unqualified teaching staff as a result of the teacher shortage (Baker & Staff, 2023).

Retention of Teachers

Teacher retention is a critical issue in the field of education with far-reaching implications for student learning outcomes, school culture, and the overall quality of education. Maintaining a stable and effective teaching workforce is essential in order for ensuring the long-term success of educational institutions (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Whether it is school administration, compensation, professional development, resources or work-life balance, research shows that there may be a correlation between some of these key factors and retention of teachers (Kelchtermans, 2017).

The turnover rate among teachers has been a persistent concern in educational systems worldwide. High rates of teacher attrition not only disrupt the continuity of instruction but, also create substantial financial costs for schools and districts (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023).

Strategies and Interventions

Many strategies and interventions have been tried and tested to see the impact on retention. Comprehensive mentoring and induction programs for new teachers can provide them

with support, guidance, and professional development, increasing their job satisfaction and retention (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Another intervention is to provide high quality professional development. Access to learning opportunities is associated with higher retention rates (Johnson, 2006). Strong and focused leadership also might impact retention (Tran et al., 2023; Watlington et al., 2004). When teachers see a clear purpose and direction for their work, they are more likely to stay and contribute to their school's success (Leithwood et al., 2004). In addition, teachers who receive competitive salaries are less likely to leave the profession for higher-paying opportunities in other fields because there is less financial incentive for teachers to seek alternative careers (Hanushek et al., 2004). And lastly, teachers who work collectively to support student success, reduce the feeling of isolation and enhancing job satisfaction (Hord, 1997).

Teacher Input

There is a need for a deeper understanding of long-term retention. Developing an understanding of why teachers leave the profession from the perspective of teachers might help schools and districts address the root causes of attrition (Johnson, 2006). In addition, understanding why teachers stay, through the lens of teachers, could help schools and districts have a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and solutions.

Theoretical Framework

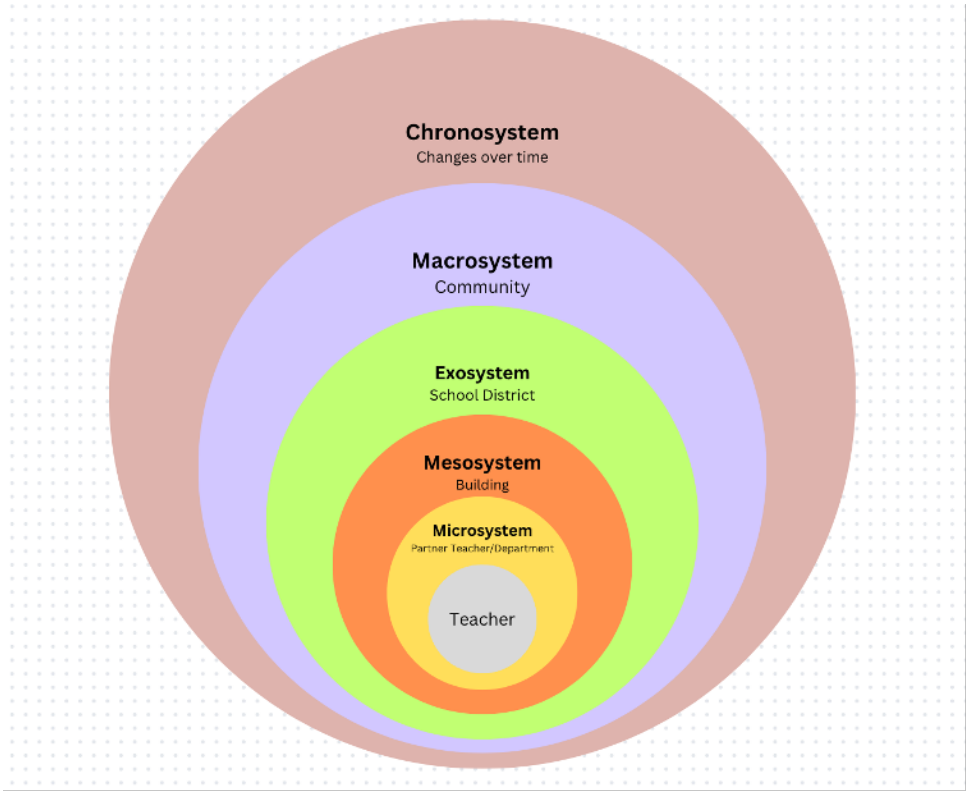
Research is based on the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1977). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is one of the most accepted explanations regarding the influence of social environments on human development (Guy-Evans, 2024). Bronfenbrenner's theory argues that the environment in which one is raised affects every facet of life and how social factors determine how one thinks, feels emotions, and likes and dislikes

(Guy-Evans, 2024). Essentially, the theory suggests if one changes environment, then every facet of life will shift. Bronfenbrenner separated the environment into systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The microsystem is made up of the groups that have direct contact with the individual. The mesosystem is the relationships or connections between the groups from the first system. The exosystem are the factors or environment that affect an individual's life but, the elements of this system do not have a direct relationship with the individual. The macrosystem contains those cultural elements that affect the individual and everyone around them. The chronosystem is the stage of life that the individual is in regarding the situations they're going through (Guy-Evans, 2024).

Bronfenbrenner's theory informed this study by thinking about how factors of teacher turnover and retention directly relate to environment among individuals in the education system (Guy-Evans, 2024). Environment plays a crucial role in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as it serves as the backdrop against which human development unfolds. The theory emphasizes that individuals do not exist in isolation; rather, their development is influenced by a complex interplay of various environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner's theory takes a holistic approach to human development, considering the individual within multiple interconnected systems. It acknowledges that understanding development requires examining the broader context in which it occurs (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). The ecological systems theory highlights the dynamic interactions between the individual and different environmental systems. These systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem) are interrelated and influence each other, shaping the individual's experiences and outcomes. The theory recognizes both proximal influences (close, immediate environments like family and peers) and distal influences (more distant environments

like cultural values and historical events) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). These influences collectively impact development. Bronfenbrenner's model views development as an ongoing process. The environment is not static; it changes over time, and these changes can have significant effects on individuals. The chronosystem specifically addresses the role of time and historical context in development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). For this research, Figure 3 takes Bronfenbrenner's theory and directly connects it to the educational system. Specifically looking at the microsystem as working with partner teachers or department teams, mesosystem as the school in which one works, exosystem as the district, macrosystem as the community, and chronosystem as how these are viewed over time, novice educators compared to veteran educators.

Figure 3
Bronfenbrenner's Theory through the lens of the Education System



Problem Statement

The research problem addressed is the high rate of teacher turnover, which impacts the globe, nation, state and local educational systems. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization estimated that the world needs nearly 69 million more teachers by 2030 to achieve universal basic education (2016). Teacher turnover increased 4% above prepandemic levels, reaching 10% nationally at the end of the 2021–2022 school year (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2022). In addition, there were 1628 vacancies in the state of Kansas at the end of the 2022-2023 school year, that is about 4% of the 38,353 teachers in the state of Kansas (Garcia, 2022).

There is substantial research on key factors of teacher retention that include school administration, compensation, professional development, resources and work-life balance and the possible correlation between some of these key factors and retention of teachers (Carver-

Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Shuls & Flores, n.d.; Swanson & Mason, 2018; Tran et al., 2023). There is also a vast amount of research on various strategies and intervention to increase teacher retention that include mentoring programs, professional development, strong school leadership, compensation and professional learning communities (Hanushek et al., 2004; Hord, 1997; Ingersoll et al., 2014; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Johnson, 2006). One area that has not been explored in research is the key factors of retention, from the lens of the teacher, and the connection to Bronfenbrenner's theory.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate teacher retention and how it relates to one of the ecological systems based from Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. This research is critical as the global, national, state and local teacher turnover is impacting the education (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2022). It is imperative to explore this research from the lens of both novice and veteran educators so school administrators and district administrators can work to increase teacher retention in their schools (Shuls & Flores, n.d.).

Research Questions

There is one main research question and multiple sub-questions that are guiding this study.

RQ 1: How do novice and veteran teachers perceive the factors of retention through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory?

SQ 1: How does the microsystem, partner teacher/department, directly influence retention for novice and veteran educators?

SQ 2: How does the mesosystem, school building, directly influence retention for novice and veteran educators?

SQ 3: How does the exosystem, school district, directly influence retention for novice and veteran educators?

SQ 4: How does the macrosystem, local community, directly influence retention for novice and veteran educators?

SQ 5: How does the chronosystem, changes over time, directly influence retention for novice and veteran educators?

Overview of the Research Design (Basic Qual)

A qualitative design is used for this research. Qualitative research focuses on understanding a research query as a humanistic or idealistic approach (Pathak et al., 2013). A qualitative method is used to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions. Qualitative research can be broadly categorized into three main approaches or traditions, each with its own set of principles, methodologies, and underlying philosophies. These three broad categories are phenomenology, grounded theory and ethnography (Pathak et al., 2013), none of which are appropriate for this study and will be furthered examined in chapter 3. This basic qualitative research design included interview studies as a way to give voice to the participants in the study. This provided the research with the flexibility to gain a deeper understanding of the participants experiences' (Tracy, 2019).

In this study, twelve educators were interviewed, six novice educators and six veteran educators. Novice teachers are classified as those that have taught less than three years and veteran teachers are those that have taught more than ten years (Tsui, 2003; Zientek, 2007). The researcher chose less than three years for the classification of novice educators based on research indicating that a significant number of new teachers leave the profession within the first three to five years (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Ingersoll et al., 2021). The researcher chose ten years

or more for classification of veteran teachers because of the average years of experience in the district and the National Education Association statements. The average years of experience, excluding novice teachers, in Small Town District is thirteen years and the median years of experience is ten years. In addition, data from the Gallup Poll and the National Education Association show that teachers with less than 10 years of experience are more likely to leave the profession than those that have 11-21 years of experience (Lorenz & Gibbon, 2024; Walker, 2022). Interview questions included demographic questions and open-ended questions. Educators were asked to bring an artifact that motivates him/her to continue teaching. Interviews as a data collection method offer rich and detailed insights, allowing the researcher to gather nuanced information directly from participants (Tracy, 2019). In-person interviews enable personal interaction, fostering a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives and allowing for rapport building (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Participants were selected based on basic demographic information including number of years of overall teaching experience and wiliness to participate in the research. Interview data and artifact were analyzed and coded to identify patterns and themes, commonalities and differences and then compared based on novice and veteran (Pathak et al., 2013; Tracy, 2019).

Limitations of the Research

Basic qualitative research, while valuable for exploring and understanding complex phenomena, has its limitations. Subjectivity is a limitation. Qualitative research relies on the interpretation of researchers, introducing the potential for subjectivity and bias in data collection and analysis (Bowen, 2009). In addition, findings from basic qualitative research are often context-specific, limiting the generalizability of results to broader populations (Stake, 1995). Basic qualitative research typically involves rich, descriptive data, but lacks the quantifiable

measures often associated with quantitative research (Maxwell, 1996). Time is also a limitation to basic qualitative research. The in-depth nature of qualitative research, including data collection and analysis, can be time-consuming and resource-intensive (Morse et al., 2002). Moreover, the subjective nature of qualitative research can make it challenging for other researchers to reproduce the study and obtain similar results (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Qualitive research also leaves room for interpretation errors. There is a risk of misinterpreting or overlooking important aspects of the data due to the reliance on researchers' interpretations (Smith, 2015). Additionally, ethical challenges may arise, especially when dealing with sensitive topics, and maintaining participant confidentiality and privacy can be complex (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

Limitations of this research study included time it takes to conduct interviews, individuals opting out of the in-person interview, honesty of the participant, malfunction of the recording device used and transferability of the research (Baxter & Jack, 2015; Pathak et al., 2013; Tracy, 2019). To combat each of these limitations, the researcher put additional measures in place like the participant booking their own time for the interview as opposed to being assigned a time and use of a backup device for recording and clear and precise procedures and protocols for the study. Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings (Trochim, 2024). This study had a sample size of twelve educators, six novice and six veteran teachers, and was limited to an urban school district in Kansas. A larger sample size may produce different results.

Researcher Background

As the primary researcher for this study, and I believe it is essential to acknowledge my positionality, background, and potential biases that may have influenced this research. First and

foremost, I come from a long background in education. I have served as a classroom teacher, an Instructional Coach, an Assistant Principal, an Elementary Principal, Director of Redesign and Special Programs, Director of Human Resources and currently serve as the Deputy Superintendent of Schools. In addition, I have a bachelor's degree, a Masters in Curriculum and Instruction and a Masters in School Leadership. This academic background has shaped my perspective and approach to the research questions explored in this study. My years of experience in this field has given me valuable insights into the practical aspects of the subject matter.

Furthermore, it is important to note that my own cultural and social background may have an impact on the way I interpret and analyze the data. I am a white, female leader in the education system raised in a high poverty, low education-based household and I acknowledge that my experiences and identity may influence my understanding of the issues under investigation.

Throughout this research, I made a conscious effort to minimize bias and maintain objectivity. I have been transparent about my data collection and analysis processes. I have also engaged in relexive practices, regularly reflecting on my own positionality and its potential implications for the research.

Significance of the study

Teacher retention and development is important for all school districts. Johnson (2006) explains how working conditions which support teachers are the best practices for ensuring teacher retention. Teacher retention can by bolstered by schools and their leaders developing a culture of trust, openness, and academic freedom in which teachers are respected and valued both inside and outside of the classroom. A key component of this is allowing teacher voice to shine

by being both heard and influential (Shuls & Flores, 2020; Tran et al., 2023; Watlington et al., 2004).

Over the past five years, the average number of certified teachers that leave Small Town School District is 57 or 13%. This is much higher than the surrounding district which turnover an average of 8% of certified staff yearly. Of the 59 teachers who left in 2022, 29 or 49% retired, 4 or 7% left education, and 26 or 44% left to teach in another school district. For the past two years, there have been multiple positions filled with unqualified teaching staff as a result of the teacher shortage. This study is significant because there is a need to retain teachers. Understanding the experiences of both novice and veteran teachers regarding connection and environment, based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and its direct relationship to educator retention, provided a new avenue of research.

Definitions

Attrition – Teacher attrition is a component of teacher turnover in which teachers exit the teaching profession altogether due to natural events such as retirements, deaths, and/or resignations, as opposed to reductions planned by management such as discharge, layoffs, retrenchments, or early retirements (Watlington et al., 2004)

Chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory) - The chronosystem is the outermost level of the model, accounting for the role that time plays in influencing individual development. This includes personal experiences that occur over the course of life, the various life transitions that people experience, historical events, and societal changes.

Exosystem (Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory) - The exosystem refers to environments in which the individual is not an active participant but still impacts development. This

level encompasses the social context in which a person lives and other aspects of the environment, including government policies, social services, community resources, and mass media.

Macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory) - The macrosystem involves the broader society and cultural forces that contribute to individual development. Important components of this level of Bronfenbrenner's theory include values, social norms, customs, traditions, ideology, and cultural beliefs.

Mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory) - The mesosystem is the next level of the model, comprised of all the relationships and interactions between the microsystems. Examples of mesosystems in a child's life include the interactions between their family and school or between their friends and family.

Microsystem (Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory) – The microsystem is the innermost level, composed of an individual's immediate environment. It includes the people the person interacts with daily, including their family members, friends, classmates, teachers, and others.

Novice Teacher – A novice teacher is a teacher education program graduate entering the teaching profession (Tsui, 2003). Educators who have been teaching in a classroom for less than three years (Zientek, 2007). For the purpose of this study, the researcher will consider a novice teacher to be a teacher that has completed less than three years of teaching post graduation.

Retention – Teachers who move to other schools in the same district, or to other districts, or to private school (Watlington et al., 2004)

Veteran Teacher – For the purpose of this study, the researcher will consider a veteran teacher to be a teacher that has completed ten or more years of teacher post-graduation. Surveys from the Gallop Poll and the National Education Association show that teachers with less than 10 years of experience are more likely to leave the profession than those that have 11-21 years of experience.

Chapter Summary

Teacher attrition and retention is a concern in the nation, state, and in SmallTown School district (Baker & Staff, 2023; Edwards, 2023; Garcia, 2022). While there are many factors of retention and strategies to improve, there is a need for additional research. The framework that guided this research is Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, which directly relates to the educational system and how individuals are influenced by their environments. The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate teacher retention and how it relates to one of the ecological systems based from Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

Teacher retention is a critical issue in the field of education with far-reaching implications for student learning outcomes, school culture, and the overall quality of education. Maintaining a stable and effective teaching workforce is essential in order for ensuring the long-term success of educational institutions (Johnson, 2006).

The turnover rate among teachers has been a persistent concern in educational systems worldwide (Edwards, 2023). High rates of teacher attrition not only disrupt the continuity of instruction but, also create substantial financial costs for schools and districts (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). A comprehensive literature review on teacher retention is essential to identify the underlying factors contributing to this issue and explore potential solutions. This literature review examined the key factors influencing teacher retention, including personal, professional, and contextual elements (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Johnson, 2006; Kelchtermans, 2017; Shuls & Flores, n.d.). Literature was reviewed in order to analyze the impact of teacher turnover on students, schools, and communities and evaluate strategies and interventions that have been proposed or implemented to enhance teacher retention. Essentially, leading to identify gaps in current research and suggest avenues for future studies.

Given that the theoretical framework of this research is based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, it is critical to view teacher retention through that lens. Bronfenbrenner's theory argues that the environment in which one is raised affects every facet of life and how social factors determine how one thinks, the emotions felt, and likes and dislikes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Thus, the theory is critical in explaining why teachers behave the way they do. Bronfenbrenner (1979) indicated that the various environmental systems highlighted by

the theory include microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. This literature review will go more in depth in each system.

Key Factors Influencing Teacher Retention

Teacher retention is a critical issue in education, as retaining experienced and effective teachers can have a positive impact on student learning outcomes and school culture (Kelchtermans, 2017; Shuls & Flores, n.d.). There are several key factors which influence teacher retention including school administration (Tran et al., 2023), compensation (Springer et al., 2016), professional development (Ingersoll et al., 2014), resources (Johnson, 2006), appreciation (Maslach et al., 2001) and work-life balance (Blackburn et al., 2017).

School Administration

The connection between school administration and teacher retention is well-documented in educational research (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Shatzer et al., n.d.; Shuls & Flores, n.d.; Tran et al., 2023). Administrators, including principals and superintendents, play a critical role in shaping the working conditions, culture, and overall environment within a school or district; this, in turn, significantly influences whether teachers choose to stay or leave (R. Shatzer et al., 2013; Tran et al., 2023). According to the American Association of Leadership, visionary and supportive leaders create a positive school culture, improve teacher job satisfaction and ultimately enhance teacher retention (Shuls & Flores, 2020). To take it one step further, an administrator who demonstrates transformational leadership and practices positively impact retention and job satisfaction (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). *Educational Management Administration and Leadership* published an analysis of the effects of instructional leadership, transformational leaders and transactional leadership, and came to the conclusion that

instructional and transformational leadership far outweigh transactional research (R. H. Shatzer et al., 2014).

These cited texts and studies collectively demonstrate that effective school administration, characterized by supportive leadership practices, clear communication, and a positive school culture, is closely linked to teacher job satisfaction and retention (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023, 2023; Johnson, 2006; Tran et al., 2023). When administrators prioritize these factors, they are more likely to retain experienced and committed teachers.

Compensation

In addition to school leadership, compensation and teacher retention are directly correlated in research and are considered a critical faction that influences whether teachers remain or leave their position (Springer et al., 2016). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) specifically examined how salary changes influenced teacher turnover rates, finding that increasing salary reduced the teacher turnover rate, particularly in high poverty schools. In 2019, the U.S. Department of Education provided a report of teacher salaries and how these levels compare to other professionals and federal employees (Newburger & Beckhusen, 2022). Newburger and Beckhusen (2022) highlighted the importance of competitive compensation to ensure teacher recruitment and retention. The state of Tennessee, experimented with teacher bonuses as a strategy for providing financial incentives to retain teachers in high-needs schools (Springer et al., 2016). Competitive and fair teacher compensation is closely related to teacher retention. When teachers receive adequate pay and benefits that align with their qualifications and experience, they are more likely to remain in the profession, which can lead to a higher

retention rate and increased teacher satisfaction (Bueno & Sass, 2018; Hanushek et al., 2004; Newburger & Beckhusen, 2022).

Professional Development

Professional development also has a significant impact on teacher retention. When educators are provided with meaningful and relevant opportunities for professional growth, they are more likely to stay in their positions and remain committed to their schools and students (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Professional development helps teachers improve their instructional skills and classroom management techniques (Kelchtermans, 2017). Research highlights that ongoing professional learning positively affects teaching practices and, subsequently, teacher retention (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). In addition to improving instructional skills and classroom management techniques, strong professional development also increases self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy, or a teachers' belief in their ability to positively impact student learning, is crucial (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). According to the National Center of Education Statistics (Merod, 2023), new teachers require increased amounts of professional growth and when provided this, they are more likely to remain in the teaching profession. The impact of professional development on teacher retention is well-documented (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Providing teachers with meaningful, relevant, and ongoing opportunities for growth and support can lead to increased job satisfaction, improved teaching skills, and, a stronger commitment to their schools and students (Berry & Shields, 2017; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Rosser, 2004). This, in turn, contributes to lower teacher turnover rates, ultimately benefiting the educational system as a whole (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023).

Resources

Adequate resources and materials have a significant impact on teacher retention (Johnson, 2019). When educators have access to the tools, materials, and resources they need to effectively teach and support their students, they are more likely to stay in their positions (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Hanushek et al., 2004). Having access to up-to-date and relevant teaching resources and materials can enhance a teacher's ability to deliver high-quality instruction (Rosser, 2004). As a result, their job satisfaction and motivation to stay in the profession can increase (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). On the other hand, a lack of essential teaching materials and resources can lead to increased stress and burnout among teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). Adequate resources can alleviate this stress and contribute to teacher well-being and retention (Swan et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Schools that provide a wide range of resources and materials are better prepared to support teachers in addressing the needs of diverse learners (Shuls & Flores, 2020). Teachers feel more capable and fulfilled when they can meet the varied needs of their students, which can positively affect their retention (Swan et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Access to resources that align with curriculum standards and educational goals can make it easier for teachers to meet the expectations of both their school and their district. This alignment can reduce the likelihood of teachers feeling overwhelmed or out of sync with their teaching responsibilities thereby contributing to teacher retention (Meyer et al., 2015). Adequate resources is about more than supporting academics (Hanushek et al., 2004). Having the right materials and resources for classroom management and organization can significantly impact a teacher's experience (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Ample supplies and materials can help maintain an effective learning environment, reducing teacher frustration and enhancing job satisfaction

(Stronge, 2018). In addition to curricular and classroom management materials, access to technology and digital resources can enhance instruction and provide teachers with the tools necessary for personalized learning (Stronge, 2018). Teachers who feel comfortable and supported in their use of technology are more likely to stay in their roles (Ertmer, 2005).

Appreciation

Another factor impacting teacher retention is recognition and appreciation for educators (Maslach et al., 2001). When educators feel valued and acknowledged for their hard work, dedication, and contributions to their schools, they are more likely to remain in their positions (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Kelchtermans, 2017; Maslach et al., 2001). Recognition and appreciation from school administrators, colleagues, and students can all boost a teacher's job satisfaction (Tran et al., 2023). When teachers feel that their efforts are acknowledged and valued, they are more likely to be content in their roles (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Feeling appreciated and recognized can positively impact a teacher's emotional well-being as well. It can reduce stress, burnout, and feelings of isolation, contributing to their overall job satisfaction and retention (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Recognizing and appreciating teachers for their hard work and accomplishments can motivate them to continue striving for excellence and committing to their students and schools (Maslach et al., 2001). In addition to personal recognition and appreciation, establishing a culture of recognition and appreciation can foster a sense of community among educators. When teachers feel valued and supported by their peers and administrators, they are more likely to collaborate, share best practices, and remain committed to their schools (Hargreaves & O′Connor, 2018). Recognizing and appreciating teachers for their professional development achievements can encourage them to continue

seeking growth opportunities. When educators feel that their development is valued, they are more likely to invest in their own growth and stay in their positions (Khan et al., 2019).

Effective teachers are often in high demand, and recognizing their contributions can prevent them from seeking positions elsewhere. Recognition can act as a tool for retaining highly effective educators (Johnson, 2019). Feeling valued and appreciated can enhance a teacher's sense of self-worth and professional identity. Teachers who feel that their work is respected are more likely to stay in the profession (Hargreaves & O′Connor, 2018). Additionally, overall recognition and appreciation can positively impact student-teacher relationships. When teachers feel valued, they are more likely to be engaged and invested in their students' success, which can contribute to teacher retention (Noddings, 2013). Studies show recognition and appreciation have a profound impact on teacher retention. A culture of appreciation not only enhances job satisfaction and motivation but also fosters a sense of belonging, professional growth, and commitment among educators. Recognizing and appreciating teachers' contributions is a cost-effective and powerful strategy to retain and support the teaching workforce (Kelchtermans, 2017; Khan et al., 2019; Shuls & Flores, n.d.; Tran et al., 2023; White, 2023).

Work-Life Balance

In addition, maintaining a healthy work-life balance is crucial for teacher well-being (Blackburn et al., 2017). School administration that understands and prioritizes the importance of this delicate equilibrium are more likely to retain their teachers (Sudibjo & Suwarli, 2020). When educators can strike a stable state between their professional responsibilities and personal lives, they are more likely to remain committed to their teaching careers. A healthy lifestyle can reduce the risk of teacher burnout, which is a leading cause of attrition in the profession (Taie & Lewis, 2023). Teachers who are not overwhelmed by excessive work-related stress are more likely to

remain in their positions (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Maintaining a balance between work and personal life contributes to better mental and physical health. Teachers with good well-being are more likely to stay in the profession (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Teachers who have time for personal pursuits and relaxation tend to experience higher job satisfaction. A balanced lifestyle enhances their overall contentment with their teaching careers (Maslach et al., 2001). A stable work-life schedule can directly impact teacher retention rates. Educators who feel that they can manage their professional and personal lives are more likely to continue teaching (Johnson, 2019). Teachers often have family and personal commitments outside of their work. A healthy balance allows them to meet these commitments, reducing the likelihood of leaving the profession to address personal or family needs (Noddings, 2013). A schedule that includes time for work and time for activities outside of work can positively affect teacher-student relationships. Teachers with less stress and more time for self-care are often more patient, empathetic, and effective in the classroom (Hargreaves & O′Connor, 2018). A mindful teacher that makes time for self and others can contribute to enhanced job performance. Teachers who are well-rested and less stressed are more likely to be effective in their teaching roles, which, in turn, can lead to greater job satisfaction and retention (Troesch & Bauer, 2017). Schools and districts that promote mindfulness and balance are more likely to attract and retain new teachers (de Carvalho et al., 2021). Young educators often seek a balanced lifestyle as they enter the profession (Johnson, 2006). A healthy balance reduces burnout, improves mental and physical health, increases job satisfaction, and supports the retention of both experienced and new teachers.

Impact of Teacher Turnover

Teacher turnover has a significant and multifaceted impact on students, schools, and communities. While small amounts of teacher turnover are natural and can bring fresh perspectives, excessive turnover can lead to a range of negative consequences. The overall impact of teacher turnover is recognized in three main areas; students, schools and communities (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019, 2017; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023).

Impact on Students

Teacher turnover can have a significant impact on students, both academically and socio-emotionally. Teacher turnover can disrupt the continuity of instruction, leading to gaps in students' learning experiences. Frequent changes in teachers can result in inconsistent educational experiences (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Research has shown that teacher turnover is associated with lower academic achievement among students. This is particularly true for low-income and minority students who are more likely to be affected by teacher turnover (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). High teacher turnover can lead to decreased student engagement and a lack of connection with their teachers. Students may become disheartened and less motivated to participate in class (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011). At-risk students, such as those with disabilities or English language learners, are especially vulnerable to the negative consequences of teacher turnover; they often require stable and consistent support that can be disrupted by frequent teacher changes (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). The negative consequences of teacher turnover can extend beyond the immediate school year. Ronfeldt et al.(2013) found that the negative effects on student achievement associated with teacher turnover can persist for several years.

Teacher turnover can also contribute to increased behavioral issues in the classroom, when students experience instability in their learning environment, they may act out or exhibit

disruptive behavior (Guin, 2004). Frequent teacher turnover can have an emotional impact on students leading to feelings of insecurity and instability. Students may feel neglected or abandoned when their teachers leave (Barnes & Crowe, 2007). Building strong relationships between teachers and students is crucial for effective education. High teacher turnover can weaken these relationships, making it more challenging for teachers to understand and meet the individual needs of their students (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Teacher turnover can have detrimental effects on students, including disruptions in learning, lower academic achievement, decreased engagement, and emotional impacts. These consequences are particularly pronounced among at-risk students and can persist over time (Barnes & Crowe, 2007; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Guin, 2004; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Troesch & Bauer, 2017).

Educational Environment

In addition to directly impacting students and their learning, teacher turnover can have a significant impact on schools in general and the educational environment (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Frequent teacher turnover can disrupt the established school culture and community, leading to instability and inconsistency in the learning environment (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). High teacher turnover can hinder the implementation of effective professional development programs while the constant influx of new teachers can make it challenging to sustain consistent school improvement efforts (Bryk et al., 2010).

High Cost to District

Teacher turnover is also very costly for schools as the recruitment and training of new teachers creates expenses related to advertising, interviewing, and providing orientation and professional development (Ingersoll, 2001). The remaining staff members often experience increased stress and burnout as they try to compensate for the absence of their colleagues. This

can result in higher staff turnover as well (Barnes & Crowe, 2007; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019, 2017).

Consistent Educational Programs

Maintaining a consistent and effective educational program becomes challenging when teachers are frequently coming and going. It can be difficult to align curriculum and teaching methods across the school (Ingersoll, 2001). The quality of education in a school can suffer due to teacher turnover (Stronge, 2018). High teacher turnover can negatively impact the effectiveness of instruction and overall educational outcomes (Bryk et al., 2010). Teacher turnover can weaken the sense of community and cohesion within a school. Students and staff may struggle with the changing cast of educators, affecting the overall school environment (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Frequent teacher turnover can lead to disruptions in the continuity of instruction and create challenges in classroom management (Zientek, 2007). Students may experience varying teaching styles and expectations with each new teacher (Meyer et al., 2015). In addition, frequent teacher turnover can have a detrimental effect on the reputation of the school as parents, students, and the community may perceive instability and question the quality of education provided (Guin, 2004; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Zientek, 2007).

Administrative Burden

High teacher turnover places an administrative burden on school leaders who must continually recruit, hire, and train new teachers, diverting resources and time from other critical school operations (Leithwood et al., 2004; R. Shatzer et al., 2013; Tran et al., 2023). Overall, frequent teacher turnover can have a wide-ranging impact on schools, including disruptions to the school culture, financial costs, challenges in maintaining staff cohesion, administrative burdens, and reduced educational quality (Bryk et al., 2010; Frahm, n.d.; Kraft et al., 2016).

Community Impact

Teacher turnover not only impacts students and schools, it can also impact communities in a variety of ways. High teacher turnover can result in a lower quality of education within a community, which may lead to reduced student achievement. This can affect the overall educational reputation of the community (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). A stable and well-functioning school system can contribute to the economic development of a community. High teacher turnover can disrupt this stability, potentially affecting economic growth (Guin, 2004). Families may choose to move out of a community with a high level of teacher turnover in search of more stable educational environments. This can lead to population mobility and community demographic changes (Hanselman et al., 2016). The reputation of a community's schools can be impacted by teacher turnover. A strong, stable teaching staff is often seen as a sign of a thriving community (Hanselman et al., 2016). A well-performing school district can attract businesses and contribute to local economic growth. In contrast, high teacher turnover can deter businesses and investments in the community (Watlington et al., 2004). Schools are a central component of community identity and high teacher turnover can both disrupt the identity and the cohesion of a community (Bryk et al., 2010).

A stable and engaged teaching staff is often more involved in community activities and initiatives. A high rate of teacher turnover can affect the level of community involvement by school staff (Bryk et al., 2010). The vitality and quality of life in a community can be linked to the quality of its schools. High teacher turnover can have a negative impact on the overall health and well-being of the community (Ingersoll, 2001). Schools play a significant role in community engagement and cohesion. High teacher turnover can disrupt the connections between families,

students, and the school, impacting the community as a whole (Bryk et al., 2010; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023).

Research by Downes (2003) has shown that high teacher turnover can be associated with lower property values in the community as a strong and stable school system is often a factor in property value. Generally, teacher turnover can have a far-reaching negative impact on communities affecting the educational quality, property values, the local economy, community engagement, and even the overall identity and well-being of the community. Efforts to reduce teacher turnover and promote teacher retention can help maintain stable and thriving communities (Baker, 2017; Downes, 2003)

Strategies and Interventions

Improving teacher retention is essential for maintaining educational stability and quality (Berry & Shields, 2017). Several strategies and interventions have been tried over the years to retain teachers.

Mentoring Programs

Comprehensive mentoring and induction programs for new teachers can provide them with support, guidance, and professional development, increasing their job satisfaction and retention (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Mentoring and induction programs have a substantial impact on teacher retention, these programs are designed to support and guide new teachers as they begin their careers in education (Morettini, 2016). Mentoring and induction programs provide new teachers with opportunities for professional development (Rodgers & Skelton, 2014). These programs typically offer guidance, coaching, and training, which can enhance the skills and knowledge of new educators (Odell & Ferraro, 1992). As teachers grow professionally, they are more likely to stay in the profession (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). New teachers who have

access to mentors and structured induction programs tend to have higher job satisfaction (Troesch & Bauer, 2017). They feel supported, receive feedback, and build their confidence in the classroom, which positively impacts their desire to continue teaching (Kardos & Johnson, 2010). Teaching can be a solitary profession, and having a mentor can provide emotional and instructional support, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Mentoring also helps new teachers become acclimated to the school's culture, policies, and practices. Understanding the school environment and expectations can lead to better job satisfaction and retention (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Effective mentoring programs often focus on classroom management and instructional strategies. This guidance helps new teachers maintain an effective and orderly classroom, reducing stress and frustration, and ultimately promoting retention (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

When novice teachers are supported and encouraged to develop their teaching skills, they are more likely to become successful, long-term educators within the school (Johnson, 2019). New teachers who experience successful mentoring and induction are more likely to become committed to the school and teaching profession and they are more likely to stay with the same school, further contributing to teacher retention (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Kardos & Johnson, 2010). Mentoring and induction programs have a significant impact on teacher retention by providing professional development, increasing job satisfaction, reducing feelings of isolation, enhancing classroom management, and fostering commitment to the teaching profession as well as the school community (Odell & Ferraro, 1992). These programs offer invaluable support to new teachers, ultimately leading to more experienced and effective educators who are likely to remain in the profession (Kardos & Johnson, 2010; Rodgers & Skelton, 2014).

Professional Development

Professional development is another area of research that provides a wealth of information regarding retaining strong teachers (Rodgers & Skelton, 2014). Offering ongoing professional development opportunities can keep teachers engaged and invested in their own growth (Huang & Cho, 2010) . Access to learning opportunities is associated with higher retention rates (Johnson, 2019). These opportunities not only help teachers improve their skills and knowledge but also contribute to their job satisfaction and overall commitment to the teaching profession (Watlington et al., 2004). Professional development opportunities, workshops, courses, and training programs, allow teachers to enhance their teaching skills and stay up-to-date with the latest instructional strategies and educational trends (R. Shatzer et al., 2013). Teachers who continually improve their skills are more likely to feel confident in their roles, leading to greater job retention (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Teachers who have access to professional development opportunities are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs (Guin, 2004). They appreciate the investment in their growth and the recognition of their professional needs. Higher job satisfaction is a key factor in teacher retention (Frahm, n.d.; Kelchtermans, 2017; Rodgers & Skelton, 2014).

Professional development helps teachers become more effective educators which translates to better student outcomes along with stronger classroom management, which can positively affect job satisfaction and retention (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Teachers value opportunities for career growth and advancement and professional development can provide clear pathways for that advancement as well as leadership roles within the school or district (Xuecheng et al., 2022). This prospect of growth can motivate teachers to stay in the profession and with their current employer (Blackburn et al., 2017). Teachers who engage in ongoing

professional development are more likely to be committed to their own continuous learning and improvement which can also positively affect retention (Rodgers & Skelton, 2014).

Tailored professional development allows teachers to focus on their individual needs and interests (Goldschmidt & Phelps, 2010). Teachers who have access to this type of personalized learning opportunities are more likely to feel supported and valued, contributing to their job satisfaction and retention (Armour & Yelling, 2004). High-quality professional development can lead to improved student achievement. When teachers see the positive impact of their professional development on their students, it reinforces their commitment to teaching and their desire to remain in the profession (Huang & Cho, 2010). Collaborative professional development can foster a sense of community and shared learning among educators (Garet et al., 2001). Teachers who collaborate with their peers are more likely to be satisfied in their roles and remain in the profession (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). In summary, professional development opportunities positively influence teacher retention by enhancing skills, increasing job satisfaction, and offering pathways for career growth. When teachers feel supported in their professional growth and see the positive impact of their development on students, they are more likely to remain committed to the teaching profession and their current positions (Armour & Yelling, 2004; Goldschmidt & Phelps, 2010; Guin, 2004; Hanselman et al., 2016; Rodgers & Skelton, 2014).

School Leadership

School leadership is another area which has profound impact on teacher retention (Xuecheng et al., 2022). Effective school leaders create a positive work environment, provide support, and offer opportunities for professional growth, all of which contribute to retaining teachers (Frahm, n.d.). Strong school leaders create a supportive and positive work environment

where teachers feel valued and respected (R. Shatzer et al., 2013). Teachers are more likely to stay in schools where they feel supported and appreciated (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). School leaders who create a shared vision and goals for the school can inspire and motivate teachers. When teachers see a clear purpose and direction for their work, they are more likely to stay and contribute to their school's success (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Effective school leaders communicate clearly with teachers, keeping them informed about school policies, goals, and expectations (Tran et al., 2023). Clear communication fosters a sense of trust and understanding, which can positively impact teacher retention (Leithwood et al., 2004). School leaders who involve teachers in decision-making processes and value their input can create a sense of ownership and commitment among the staff (Watlington et al., 2004). When teachers have a say in school decisions, they are more likely to be satisfied and remain in their roles (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018).

School leaders who prioritize professional development provide teachers with opportunities to grow and improve their skills (Garet et al., 2001). Effective school leaders are responsive to the needs of their teachers (Johnson, 2006). They are approachable and attentive to concerns, creating a supportive and nurturing work environment that encourages teacher retention (Leithwood et al., 2004). Effective school leaders are skilled in conflict resolution and can address conflicts and issues within the school environment promptly and fairly (R. Shatzer et al., 2013). Addressing conflicts and concerns in a constructive manner can help retain teachers (Leithwood et al., 2004).

School leadership has been proven to play a critical role in teacher retention. These leaders create a supportive, inspiring, and growth-oriented environment that values and supports teachers. When teachers are satisfied with their school leadership, they are more likely to stay in

their positions and contribute to the overall success of the school (Frahm, n.d.; Leithwood et al., 2004; White, 2023; Xuecheng et al., 2022).

Compensation

Offering competitive compensation is a powerful tool for attracting and retaining talented educators (Watlington et al., 2004). Competitive salaries provide teachers with financial security, reducing stress and concerns about meeting their basic needs (Berry & Shields, 2017). Financial stability can contribute to higher job satisfaction and a greater likelihood of staying in the teaching profession (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Competitive salaries make the teaching profession more attractive to potential educators as higher salaries are a strong incentive for individuals to pursue teaching careers, increasing the pool of qualified candidates (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Teachers who receive competitive salaries are less likely to leave the profession for higher-paying opportunities in other fields because there is less financial incentive for teachers to seek alternative careers (Hanushek et al., 2004).

Competitive salaries help schools retain experienced and effective teachers (Imazeki, 2005). Experienced educators bring valuable expertise to the classroom and are often sought after by other schools or districts (Imazeki, 2005). Teachers who feel adequately compensated are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs which is significant factor in teacher retention (Ingersoll, 2001). Schools and districts with competitive salary structures tend to have lower attrition rates among their teaching staff which contributes to the overall stability and quality of education (Bryk et al., 2010).

Competitive salaries convey a message of respect and recognition for the important work teachers do (Borman & Dowling, 2008). This can foster a sense of commitment to the school and the teaching profession, leading to higher retention rates (Johnson, 2019). Teachers who receive

competitive salaries are less likely to experience financial stress which is often a significant factor in decisions to leave the profession (Johnson, 2006). Reduced financial stress can positively impact teacher retention (Watlington et al., 2010). Offering competitive salaries to teachers is a key strategy for retaining and attracting educators; helps schools maintain a stable, experienced teaching staff and creates a more attractive and financially secure environment for teachers, which ultimately contributes to teacher retention (Hanushek et al., 2004; Imazeki, 2005; Watlington et al., 2010; Xuecheng et al., 2022).

Class Size

Reducing class sizes may have a positive impact on teacher retention by improving the overall teaching and learning environment (Isenberg, 2010). Smaller class sizes allow teachers to manage their classrooms more effectively (Yinger, 2007). Teachers can give more individualized attention to students, leading to better classroom discipline and a more manageable workload which can reduce teacher stress and burnout (Pate-Bain et al., 2002). With fewer students in each class, teachers can build stronger, more meaningful relationships with their students (Barnes & Crowe, 2007). These relationships can lead to higher job satisfaction and a deeper sense of fulfillment, contributing to teacher retention (Yinger, 2007).

Smaller class sizes enable teachers to tailor instruction to the specific needs of each student (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). This individualized approach can improve student outcomes and make teaching more rewarding for educators, furnishing them which another reason to stay in the profession (Loeb et al., 2017). Smaller class sizes have been linked to improved student achievement. When teachers see their efforts directly translating into their students reaching their goals, it can be a motivating factor to stay in the profession (Pate-Bain et al., 2002; Zientek, 2007).

Teachers in smaller classes often experience less stress (Johnson, 2006). Fewer students mean fewer grading assignments, fewer discipline issues, and a more manageable workload (Sudibjo & Suwarli, 2020). Reduced stress can improve teacher well-being and retention (Molnar et al., 1999). Smaller class sizes are associated with higher levels of teacher job satisfaction as teachers tend to be more content when they can provide quality instruction and maintain positive relationships with their students (Johnson, 2006). This job satisfaction can contribute to teacher retention (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Yinger, 2007).

Smaller classes can allow teachers to have more autonomy in their teaching methods and instructional decisions. Teachers who have opportunity and flexibility to adapt their instruction to student needs are often more satisfied with their jobs and less likely to leave (Zientek, 2007). Smaller class sizes can reduce the risk of teacher burnout, which is a significant factor in teacher attrition (Maslach et al., 2001). Reduced stress and more manageable workloads can help teachers maintain their enthusiasm for teaching and stay in the profession (Pate-Bain et al., 2002).

Reducing class sizes can have a positive impact on teacher retention by improving classroom management, teacher-student relationships, personalization of instruction, and overall job satisfaction (Rosser, 2004; Sudibjo & Suwarli, 2020). When teachers have the opportunity to work in smaller classes, they are more likely to stay in the profession and continue to positively impact their students (Isenberg, 2010; Kraft et al., 2016; Yinger, 2007).

Professional Learning Communities

Strong professional learning communities (PLC) also have a positive impact on teacher retention by providing support, collaboration, and ongoing professional development (Hord, 1997). PLCs often serve as a platform for mentoring and peer support (Rodgers & Skelton,

2014). Experienced teachers can provide guidance to newer colleagues, helping them acclimate to the school environment and the teaching profession (Hord, 1997). In strong PLCs, teachers work together to solve instructional challenges and share effective teaching strategies (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Rodgers & Skelton, 2014). Collaborative problem-solving can lead to increased job satisfaction and professional growth, contributing to teacher retention (Vescio et al., 2008). In strong PLCs, there is a shared sense of accountability for student outcomes (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Teachers work collectively to support student success, reducing the feeling of isolation and enhancing job satisfaction (Hord, 1997).

Teachers who are part of a PLCs often experience more significant professional growth (Garet et al., 2001). They have access to valuable feedback and resources that help them improve their teaching, which can contribute to job satisfaction and teacher retention (Vescio et al., 2008). PLCs offer additional opportunities for continuous professional development (Guin, 2004). Teachers engage in collaborative learning, which helps them improve their skills and knowledge (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). The access to ongoing development can increase job satisfaction and teacher retention (Johnson, 2006).

Collaborative work in PLCs can enhance teachers' sense of efficacy; they develop a belief that their work makes a difference, which is linked to higher job satisfaction and retention (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006). Strong PLCs foster a sense of belonging and community within the school (Vescio et al., 2008). When teachers feel connected to their colleagues and share a common purpose, they are more likely to remain in their positions (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

Teaching can oftentimes feel as if they are isolated in their profession (Maslach et al., 2001). Strong PLCs can reduce these feelings by providing teachers with a network of colleagues with whom they can share ideas and challenges (Hord, 1997). Being a part of a strong

professional learning community can have a significant impact on teacher retention by providing mentoring, support, collaborative problem-solving, ongoing professional development, and a sense of belonging and efficacy. Teachers who are part of such communities tend to experience higher job satisfaction, which contributes to their retention in the teaching profession (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Hord, 1997; Huang & Cho, 2010; Odell & Ferraro, 1992).

Summary of Teacher Retention

Teacher retention is a highly researched area and one that encompasses many key factors including, but not limited to, school administration, compensation, professional development, resources, appreciation and work-life balance. Research has connected those factors to the impact on students, schools, districts and communities. Retaining teachers is essential for long term success of a school district (Blackburn et al., 2017; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll et al., 2014; Johnson, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001; Springer et al., 2016; Tran et al., 2023).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is a developmental psychology framework that explains how various environmental factors influence an individual's development (Guy-Evans, 2024). Proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977), the theory consists of nested environmental systems, each with its own unique influence on an individual. The key components include the microsystem, the immediate environment where an individual lives; the mesosystem, this involves the connections between various microsystems; the exosystem, which is external environments that indirectly affect the individual; the macrosystem which is connected to societal norms and the chronosystem, the dimension of time in the individual's life, including life events, transitions, and historical context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory emphasizes the dynamic interplay

between these systems and their impact on an individual's development over time. It highlights the importance of considering multiple levels of influence when understanding human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Guy-Evans, 2024). This system is used as the theoretical framework and will be discussed more in depth in chapter 3.

Microsystem

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the microsystem constitutes the direct environment that people spend their lives. In this regard, family, friends, teachers, schoolmates, neighbors and individuals who are in direct contact come into mind. The system reflects the environment where people have direct social relationships with various persons (Guy-Evans, 2024). Based on the theoretical framework, individuals are not simple recipients of experience, but important contributors to the making of the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). At the microsystem level, relations have two-directional effects. On the one hand, the individual is affected, while on the other hand, the individual influences the environment. The theory holds that bi- directional influences are the most influential ones on a growing person. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that factors from outside the environment can still influence an individual's behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Guy-Evans, 2024).

Bronfenbrenner's microsystem is the innermost level of his ecological systems theory, representing the immediate environment that directly influences an individual's development. This system includes the people and institutions with whom the individual has direct, face-to-face interactions. Families play a crucial role in shaping a child's development within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Bronfenbrenner, family dynamics, parenting styles, and the quality of parent-child relationships significantly impact a child's cognitive and socioemotional development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). In addition to family, the school

environment is a key component of the microsystem, influencing a child's academic and social development (Guy-Evans, 2024). Bronfenbrenner highlights the importance of teacher-student relationships and peer interactions in shaping a child's learning experiences within the school microsystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Peers also contribute significantly to a child's social development within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Bronfenbrenner emphasizes the role of peer interactions in shaping social skills, identity development, and the establishment of social norms within this immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

Community, cultural influences and socioeconomic status also play a part in this level. The community within which an individual resides is also part of the microsystem, impacting the availability of resources and support networks (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner suggests that the neighborhood environment can affect a child's opportunities for extracurricular activities and access to community services, influencing development (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Cultural influences are integral to the microsystem, shaping values, beliefs, and social norms within the immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Socioeconomic status affects the availability of resources and opportunities, influencing an individual's developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Bronfenbrenner's microsystem is a complex and dynamic environment that encompasses various elements, including family, school, peers, community, and cultural factors. Understanding the interactions within this immediate context is crucial for comprehending an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005)

Mesosystem

Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem is the second level of his ecological systems theory, and it focuses on the connections and interactions between the various components of the microsystem.

The mesosystem explores how different microsystem elements collaborate and influence each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For instance, the association between a parent and a child's teacher or between the church attended and the neighborhood constitute the environment. In other words, one's family experiences might be connected to school or church experiences. As an illustration, a teacher who is neglected by his or her administrators, will have a higher chance of leaving then a teacher that is supported by school leadership (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Bronfenbrenner emphasizes the importance of strong communication and positive relationships between parents and teachers, as these interactions can impact a child's academic and socioemotional development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The mesosystem involves the connection between a child's peer group and their family microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Bronfenbrenner suggests the quality of family relationships can influence a child's social interactions with peers, and vice versa, contributing to their overall social development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). In addition, interactions between the community or neighborhood microsystem and the school microsystem are integral to the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner discusses the impact of community support and involvement in education on a child's academic success, highlighting the importance of collaborative efforts between schools and local communities (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). The mesosystem also considers the connection between cultural influences (macro-level) and educational systems (micro-level) (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Cultural values and norms can shape the educational practices within a community, influencing the learning experiences and outcomes for individuals (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem underscores the importance of examining the interconnectedness between different microsystem components. Research provides insight into

how these interactions within the mesosystem contribute to the overall ecological systems perspective on human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

Exosystem

Bronfenbrenner's exosystem is the third level of his ecological systems theory, and it consists of external environments that indirectly influence an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These are settings in which the individual may not be directly involved, but they still have an impact on their life. The workplace, as a component of the exosystem, indirectly affects the individual's development through its impact on family life (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Bronfenbrenner discusses how conditions at a parent's workplace, such as job stability or stress, can influence family dynamics and, consequently, a child's development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The exosystem includes educational policies that may influence the school environment and, consequently, the individual's learning experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Changes in educational policies can have indirect effects on students, teachers, and the overall school climate (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The exosystem also involves extended family members and social services that may impact the individual indirectly (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner discusses how support from extended family or the availability of social services can affect the well-being of the family unit and, consequently, the individual's development (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Mass media, representing a broader cultural context, is part of the exosystem and can shape societal values and norms (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner emphasizes the role of media in transmitting cultural information and influencing attitudes and behaviors, which can indirectly impact individuals (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). This level also includes access to community resources, such as extracurricular activities or healthcare

services, can have implications for an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000).

Macrosystem

Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem is the fourth level of his ecological systems theory, representing the broader cultural context and societal influences that shape an individual's development. The macrosystem encompasses the overarching values, customs, laws, and cultural ideologies that influence the other ecological levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The macrosystem includes cultural values and beliefs that shape the overall societal context (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner emphasizes the role of cultural factors in influencing parenting styles, educational practices, and societal expectations, which collectively impact individual development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The macrosystem plays a crucial role in setting societal norms and expectations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner suggests that individuals are influenced by societal norms related to gender roles, education, and career choices, impacting their life choices and development (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Political systems and policies are part of the macrosystem and can have profound effects on individuals and families (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner discusses how changes in political systems or policies, such as welfare programs or educational reforms, can influence the opportunities and challenges individuals face (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Economic conditions are a significant aspect of the macrosystem, impacting individuals' socioeconomic status and access to resources (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Socioeconomic status is linked to various developmental outcomes, including educational attainment, health, and overall well-being (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The macrosystem considers cultural changes and technological advances that shape the

overall societal landscape (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem emphasizes the significance of broader cultural and societal influences on individual development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Chronosystem

Bronfenbrenner's chronosystem is the fifth and final level of his ecological systems theory, focusing on the dimension of time in an individual's life. The chronosystem incorporates life events, transitions, and historical contexts to understand how changes over time influence development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The chronosystem accounts for significant life events and transitions that individuals experience throughout their lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner highlights events such as parental divorce, relocation, or the birth of a sibling as factors that can impact an individual's development, considering their timing and the individual's life stage (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The chronosystem considers the historical context in which an individual lives, recognizing that societal changes can shape development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Historical events, such as economic recessions or technological advancements, can influence opportunities and challenges faced by individuals in different generations (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Cohort effects, representing the influence of being born and growing up in a particular historical time period, are part of the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner discusses how individuals belonging to the same cohort may share unique experiences and perspectives due to the historical context in which they came of age (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The chronosystem recognizes that individuals follow different developmental trajectories over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Understanding the timing and sequence of life events is crucial for predicting and explaining developmental outcomes across the lifespan (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The chronosystem considers how

individuals and families adapt to changes over time and the role of resilience in navigating life's challenges (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Bronfenbrenner emphasizes that individuals demonstrate resilience by adapting to changing circumstances and that this adaptation influences their developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Overall, Bronfenbrenner's chronosystem highlights the importance of temporal factors in understanding human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Summary

While there is a substantial body of research on teacher retention and on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, further investigation is to be had on the connection between the environment in which one works, as it related to Bronfenbrenner's theory and the impact that connection might have on teacher retention. Developing an understanding of why teachers leave the profession, from the perspective of teachers, and understanding how the different levels of Bronfenbrenner's theory directly relate to the factors might help schools and districts address the root causes of attrition. In addition, understanding why teachers stay, from the perspective of teachers, and understanding the connection to environment could help schools and districts have a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and possible solutions.

Therefore, a study is needed to investigate the possible connection between environment, as it related to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, and teacher retention. This qualitative study is designed to provide additional research in the area of teacher retention as it relates to the environment. The methodology and design for this study is elaborated upon in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Introduction

The issue of why teachers are leaving education has been a growing concern in recent years. With teacher turnover rates increasing and both novice and veteran teachers leaving the profession, it is important to understand the factors that are contributing to this trend (Berry & Shields, 2017; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Hutchison, 2012). This research explored the reasons why teachers are leaving education by examining the perspectives of both novice and veteran teachers. By conducting interviews with teachers, this study explored the factors of retention from the perspective of novice and veteran teachers. Additionally, this study investigated the possible correlation of environment, as it relates to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977), on teacher retention. This chapter reviews research design and process.

Research Questions

There is one main research questions with additional sub-questions that guided this study.

RQ 1: How do novice and veteran teachers perceive the factors of retention through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory?

SQ 1: How does the microsystem, partner teacher/department, directly influence retention for novice and veteran educators?

SQ 2: How does the mesosystem, school building, directly influence retention for novice and veteran educators?

SQ 3: How does the exosystem, school district, directly influence retention for novice and veteran educators?

SQ 4: How does the macrosystem, local community, directly influence retention for novice and veteran educators?

SQ 5: How does the chronosystem, changes over time, directly influence retention for novice and veteran educators?

Rationale for Basic Qualitative Research

Qualitative research focuses on understanding a research query as a humanistic or idealistic approach (Pathak et al., 2013). Qualitative research design is used to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions in a specific context (Pathak et al., 2013; Tracy, 2019). It is well-suited for achieving in-depth understanding due to its focus on exploring a topic in a holistic and context-rich manner (Tenny et al., 2023). It uses a variety of rich and flexible data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, participant observation, analysis of artifacts, and open-ended surveys. These methods allow the researcher to collect detailed information directly from participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Denzin et al., 2023). Qualitative data is often unstructured and open-ended, allowing participants to express themselves freely (Tracy, 2019). This openness enables researchers to capture unexpected insights and delve into areas that might not have been anticipated (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Qualitative researchers prioritize detailed and rich descriptions of the topic being studied. This emphasis on detail helps capture the complexity and depth of the subject matter, providing a comprehensive picture (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Tenny et al., 2023). Qualitative research is the best method for examining the interconnectedness of various factors. This approach is suited for understanding the complexity and interchange of different elements within an area of study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It also can help researchers to access the thoughts and feelings of research participants, which can enable development of an understanding of the meaning that people attribute to their experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015) and is geared toward understanding social contexts (Patton, 2014). n addition, qualitative research emphasizes the importance of

understanding the context in which a phenomenon occurs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative research allows the researcher to have flexibility within the process (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Researchers can adjust their approach based on emerging findings, enabling them to explore areas of interest in greater detail as the study progresses (Creswell & Poth, 2016). It provides a unique look from the perspective of the participant (Sutton & Austin, 2015) and allows the researcher to explore subjective experiences and personal perspectives, providing insights into how individuals make sense of their world (Tenny et al., 2023). By directly engaging with participants, researchers can gain insights into their beliefs, values, motivations, and experiences, contributing to a more profound understanding of the studied phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2015; Denzin et al., 2023; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Overall, qualitative research's emphasis on rich data collection methods, open-ended data, contextualization, and a participant-centered focus contributes to its ability to provide in-depth understanding while also allowing for flexibility within the research (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Denzin et al., 2023; Tenny et al., 2023).

The justification for selecting a qualitative rather than a quantitative research design was based on the desire to increase the amount of data gathered from the research questions while recording and reflecting on the lived experiences of the participants as opposed to gathering numerical data (Britten, 1995). A qualitative approach focuses on data collection in the participant's natural setting to gain meaning in perspective, while the researcher collects data along the way (Baxter & Jack, 2015). Researchers also seek to understand people's explanations of their experiences in a qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Furthermore, qualitative studies utilize words, whereas quantitative studies focus on quantity, and data is presented numerically through statistical procedures me (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Qualitative and quantitative studies differ further in their characteristics. Qualitative studies focus on quality with roots in phenomenology and constructivism. In contrast, quantitative studies focus on quantity having roots in positivism and realism (Sutton & Austin, 2015; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Terms associated with qualitative research are fieldwork, naturalistic, and ethnographic, whereas terms associated with quantitative research are experimental and statistical (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Wallwey & Kajfez, 2023). The goal of qualitative research is generally discovery, and quantitative research is usually hypothetical (Tenny et al., 2023). Qualitative design is generally flexible and evolving with small, nonrandom sample sizes, whereas quantitative designs are structured with large random sample sizes (Denzin et al., 2023). Qualitative research is highly descriptive, and quantitative research is numerically accurate (Tracy, 2019). There are numerous qualitative research designs, but Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Merriam and Grenier (2019) focus on six common designs: basic qualitative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, narrative analysis, and qualitative case studies. In education, basic qualitative research studies are regarded as the most common form of qualitative research, with interviews, observations, and document evaluation as the data collection sources (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Phenomenology, another qualitative research design, studies the soul or composition of people's life experiences (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Phenomenology was not selected for this study because it aimed to gather information from the participants based on their lived experiences and while that is a component of this study, it is not the basis for research. Ethnography focused on culture and human civilization (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Again, this study has a cultural and human civilization aspects, however, it is not the lens in which the research will be analyzed. Grounded theory, another qualitative research

design, results when a theory manifests from the data (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Grounded theory design was not selected because the desire is not to develop another theory from the data. The narrative inquiry design, one of the most used qualitative research designs, analyzes people's stories (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The narrative inquiry design was not chosen because this is less about telling a story or writing a narrative and more about reflecting on how each participants story connects to the overall theory as to why the participant continues to teach. The final qualitative research design examined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) was case studies. Case studies comprehensively explain and evaluate an entity within specific boundaries (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Case studies were not selected because the study focused on the overall connection between the reason a participant remains in education and the environment in which they are working and not the participant as an individual. The applied social sciences, such as education, social services, and healthcare, usually utilize qualitative research for data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Therefore, a basic qualitative approach study was selected based on the nature of the study and the use of interviews and artifacts will be the main form of data collection.

A basic qualitative design was used for this research. A basic qualitative study is defined as an intensive study about a person, a group of people, or a unit that is intended to generalize over several subjects (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A basic qualitative study has also been described as a systematic investigation of a single individual, group, community, or some other unit in which the researcher collects and examines data relating to several variables (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). A basic qualitative design was chosen for multiple reasons including the researchers desire to gather an in-depth understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), thoroughly

understand social contexts (Tenny et al., 2023), have flexibility with the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2016) and gather personal perspectives from participants (Denzin et al., 2023).

Epistemology

Qualitative research and constructivism go hand in hand. The connection between the complexities of the human experience and the idea that any one facet of life intertwines with some other facet (Barbosa da Silva, 2008). Human beings are naturally connected to each other and their experiences and environments are intricately woven together to construct meaning and understanding (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

Constructivism is an epistemology, known as theory of knowledge, a learning or meaning-making theory that offers an explanation of the nature of knowledge and how human beings learn (Abdal-Haqq, 1998). Constructivism argues that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas (Tobias & Duffy, 2009). Adams (2006) mentions that constructivism refers to the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves, each learner individually and socially constructs meaning, as he or she learns. It maintains that individuals create or construct their own new understandings or knowledge through the interaction of what they already know and believe and the ideas, events, and activities with which they come in contact (Adams, 2006).

Social constructivism is a theoretical perspective within the broader framework of constructivism that emphasizes the role of social factors in the construction of knowledge (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Social constructivism assumes that individuals actively engage with their social and cultural environments to create and understand meaning and make sense of it (Amineh & Asl, 2015). It emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding (Kim & Bonk,

2006) and builds upon the foundational constructivist idea that individuals actively construct their knowledge and understanding of the world. Yet, it highlights the social context as a crucial element in the knowledge construction process (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). While also highlighting the importance of social interaction, collaboration in the learning process and how the environment of everyday life creates meaning (Berger & Luckmann, 1996; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). As a theory of learning, epistemology, social constructivism is relevant to this basic qualitative study as the researcher establishes how participants describe how their experiences and environment connect to their desire to remain in education by using interviews and artifacts for data collection.

Population and Sample

Smalltown School District is comprised of about 3800 students and 980 employees, 430 of which are certified employees. Of the 430 certified teachers, 375 are classroom teachers. Over the past five years, the average number of certified teachers that leave is 57 or 13%, this is much higher than the surrounding district which turnover an average of 8% of certified staff yearly. Of the 59 teachers that left in 2022, 29 or 49% retired, 4 or 7% of them left education and 26 or 44% left to teach in another school district.

Smalltown District is facing budget cuts due to declining enrollment over the last five years. The district is also in the midst of a facility study as the number of physical buildings and square footage well outweigh the number of students and staff. The district is on the cusp of a decline in staff given this information.

The researcher utilized a criterion-based sampling method to ensure participants met specific characteristics relevant to the study. Criterion sampling involves selecting individuals who meet predetermined criteria that align with the research objectives (Patton, 2015). In this

study, the primary criterion for participation was years of teaching experience, with educators classified as novice (less than three years) or veteran (ten or more years). Additionally, a preliminary phase of the study involved a convenience sampling approach, in which the researcher selected four educators, two novice and two veteran, to pilot the interview questions. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that allows researchers to select participants who are readily accessible and willing to participate (Etikan, 2016). This preliminary phase ensured that the interview format effectively elicited the intended data and provided an opportunity to refine questions as necessary before proceeding with the full set of interviews.

Twelve educators were interviewed, six novice educators and six veteran educators. Novice educators are classified as those that have taught less than three years and veteran educators are those that have taught more than ten years (Tsui, 2003; Zientek, 2007). The researcher chose less than three years for the classification of novice educators based on research indicating that a significant number of new teachers leave the profession within the first three to five years (Ingersoll et al., 2021; Sutcher et al., 2016). The researcher chose ten years or more for classification of veteran teachers for multiple reasons. The average years of experience, excluding novice teachers, in Small Town District is thirteen years and the median years of experience is ten years. In addition, data from the Gallup Poll and the National Education Association show that teachers with less than 10 years of experience are more likely to leave the profession than those that have 11-21 years of experience (Lorenz & Gibbon, 2024; Walker, 2022). Interviews followed a preset protocol (Appendix A). Participants were selected based on basic demographic information (Appendix B) including number of years of overall teaching experience and wiliness to participate in the research.

A sample size of twelve educators, with an equal distribution of six novice and six veteran teachers, was intentionally chosen to balance depth and breadth in data collection while maintaining feasibility within qualitative research parameters. Qualitative research often relies on smaller, purposefully selected samples to allow for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In particular, research suggests that data saturation, the point at which no new themes or insights emerge, can often be reached with as few as six participants per group in studies using in-depth interviews (Guest et al., 2006). This approach ensures that the study captures meaningful patterns while avoiding unnecessary redundancy in the data.

Additionally, prior research indicates that six participants per subgroup is often sufficient for identifying common themes within a relatively homogenous group (Hennink et al., 2017). Given that the participants in this study were selected based on their years of teaching experience, a key variable relevant to the research questions, this sample size allows for meaningful comparisons between novice and veteran educators while ensuring that the findings remain manageable and analytically rigorous. The inclusion of an equal number of novice and veteran teachers strengthens the study's ability to draw insights into differences and similarities in their experiences, ultimately supporting the study's objectives in a structured yet comprehensive manner.

Participants were recruited for this study. Certified teachers were sent an email with a summary of the study, including the criteria for participation and how much of their time was needed, the demographic form and the informed consent form (Appendix C). Once the demographic form and signed consent form are returned, participants were chosen. Using the letters at the beginning and end of the alphabet, pseudonyms were assigned based on novice

(beginning) and veteran status (end). Novice participants are Ace, Bailey, Carson, Drew, Ellis and Finley and veteran participants are Urban, Vale, Wynn, Xen, York and Zane. All interview notes and recordings are saved by pseudonym.

There were fourteen volunteers for the veteran group. Six of the fourteen were chosen. The veteran participants in this study brought a wealth of teaching experience, having spent between sixteen and over twenty-seven years in the profession. Three of the six veteran educators had more than twenty years of teaching experience, while the remaining three had between sixteen and twenty years. This range of experience allowed for a deep understanding of the profession, with insights from those who had spent decades in education, as well as those who had surpassed the critical mid-career threshold. Their extensive teaching backgrounds positioned them to reflect on long-term trends, challenges, and shifts in the field of education.

The participants varied in their tenure within their current district. Three of the six had spent their entire teaching careers in the same district for over twenty years, indicating strong ties to their schools and communities. One participant had also spent sixteen-twenty years in the same district, reinforcing a level of stability and institutional knowledge. In contrast, two participants had only been in their current district for one to three years, suggesting they had transitioned later in their careers. These differing lengths of tenure provided a valuable perspective on how veteran educators integrate into new environments compared to those who have remained in the same district long term.

Community ties among veteran teachers also varied. Four of the six participants had lived in their community for over twenty years, demonstrating deep-rooted connections that likely influenced their teaching philosophy and engagement with students and families. Another participant had lived in the community for one to five years, indicating a more recent move,

while one educator did not live in the community at all. The presence of both long-term and newer community members provided insight into how educators' sense of belonging and familiarity with their surroundings shaped their professional experiences and perspectives.

The veteran educators also represented a range of grade levels, with three teaching at the elementary level and three teaching at the secondary level. This balance allowed for insights into the experiences of teachers across different developmental stages of student learning. Additionally, their ages ranged from 35 to over 55, with the majority falling between 45-54 years old. This distribution reflected a mix of mid-career and later-career educators, providing perspectives from those still navigating their professional growth and those approaching the culmination of their teaching careers.

In terms of educational attainment, five of the six veteran teachers held a master's degree, indicating a strong commitment to professional development and advanced learning. One veteran educator held a bachelor's degree, highlighting that while advanced degrees were common, they were not universally required for longevity in the profession. The high number of master's degree holders suggests that continued education played a role in their teaching practices, instructional strategies, and leadership within their schools. This variation in degree attainment, combined with the differences in grade levels, tenure, and district experience, provided a well-rounded representation of veteran educators' backgrounds and perspectives.

Multiple attempts were made to gather six novice participants. This included multiple emails to district leaders, personal connections reaching out to individuals and open-ended posts asking for volunteers that met the criteria of the study. The researcher successfully recruited six volunteers through these measures.

The novice participants in this study were all in the early stages of their teaching careers, with each having between one and three years of total teaching experience. This aligns with the study's classification of novice educators as those with fewer than three years in the profession, a period often characterized by high attrition rates and significant professional growth (Ingersoll et al., 2021; Sutcher et al., 2016). Given their limited experience, these educators were still developing their instructional practices, classroom management strategies, and professional identities. Their insights provided a valuable perspective on the challenges and successes faced by early-career teachers, particularly within the context of adapting to new professional environments.

Unlike the veteran participants, who represented both elementary and secondary levels, all six novice educators in this study taught at the elementary level. This lack of grade-level variance was not intentional but rather a result of the difficulty in securing volunteers from a broader range of teaching assignments. While the study originally aimed to include both elementary and secondary novice educators to provide a more comprehensive view of early-career teaching experiences across grade levels, the reality of recruitment challenges limited participation to elementary educators.

The novice participants also varied in terms of their educational attainment, with five holding a bachelor's degree and one having earned a master's degree. Additionally, while two had experience in more than one district, the majority had only worked in one district since beginning their careers. This suggests that while some novice educators may seek opportunities elsewhere early on, others remain in their initial placements as they navigate the complexities of teaching.

Community ties among the novice educators were less established compared to their veteran counterparts. Two participants had lived in their respective communities for one to five years, while two had recently moved to the area, having lived there for less than a year. Notably, two participants did not live in the community where they taught. These variations highlight the transitional nature of the novice teaching experience, as many early-career educators are still in the process of establishing their professional and personal roots.

The majority of novice educators in this study were between the ages of 25 and 34, with two younger participants falling into the 18-24 age range. Their age range, combined with their limited years of experience, suggests that these educators were still refining their teaching styles, learning to navigate the demands of the classroom, and building their confidence as professionals. Their perspectives shed light on the realities of being a new teacher, particularly in terms of the supports they found helpful and the challenges they encountered in their formative years.

Once selected, all participants were contacted and scheduled their individual interview at the location of their choice. Any participants that volunteered and were not selected were notified.

Pilot Study

A pilot study is a preliminary investigation conducted prior the main research to assess the viability, effectiveness, and potential issues associated with the planned research design and methods. A pilot study helps the researcher refine their research design by testing and refining elements such as the research questions, hypotheses, variables, and procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Conducting a pilot study allows the researcher to identify and possible issues related to data collection, instrumentation, and logistics. This helps in avoiding potential

problems during the main study (Denscombe, 2014). A pilot study also assesses the practicability of the research, helping the researcher determine whether the planned methods and procedures are sensible and achievable within the constraints of time, resources, and ethical considerations (Bowen, 2008). Researchers often use a pilot study to test and evaluate research instruments, such as surveys, questionnaires, or interview guides, to ensure that they are clear, valid, and reliable (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Engaging in a pilot study provides the researcher with an opportunity to become familiar with the study population, research setting, and potential challenges, contributing to improved research execution (Denscombe, 2014). A pilot study plays a crucial role in refining research designs, identifying practical issues, assessing feasibility, testing instruments, determining sample sizes, and enhancing researcher familiarity, ultimately contributing to the overall success of the main research project (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Denscombe, 2014; Denzin et al., 2023).

The pilot study for this research consisted of the researcher connecting with multiple school districts across the state of Kansas regarding their retention, process for gaining insight from novice and veteran teachers, sample interview or questionnaire questions, organization of data and reflections on interviews of teachers. The researcher interviewed two novice teachers and two veteran teachers, that met the criteria for participation, as a way to test the interview tool and use of the artifact as part of data collection.

As a result of these interviews, it became evident that additional background information about the participants was necessary to provide greater context for their responses. While the original interview questions were designed to explore educators' reasons for staying in or leaving the profession, it did not fully account for the personal experiences and motivations that shaped their journeys into teaching. To address this gap, two interview questions were added: When did

you know you wanted to be a teacher What led to that decision? and Describe your student teaching experience. How did you experience influence you as a teacher? These questions allowed participants to reflect on their early aspirations and training, providing the researcher with a richer understanding of their foundational experiences.

These modifications were made after hearing participants discuss their artifacts, which often represented significant moments in their careers. By incorporating questions about their initial motivations and student teaching experiences, the researcher was able to establish a stronger connection with participants and build rapport before delving into more emotionally charged questions about retention and attrition. Research indicates that building trust and connection in qualitative interviews is crucial for eliciting authentic and reflective responses (Seidman, 2019). Establishing common ground through shared experiences and allowing participants to reflect on their early career trajectories created a more comfortable and open interview environment.

Additionally, prior research suggests that the decision to remain in or leave the teaching profession is often influenced by early career experiences, including teacher preparation and induction programs (Ingersoll et al., 2014; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). By exploring participants' student teaching experiences, the researcher was able to gain insights into how their initial training influenced their current perceptions of teaching. Positive student teaching experiences have been linked to higher retention rates, while negative experiences can contribute to early career challenges and dissatisfaction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Including these questions allowed for a deeper exploration of how participants' formative teaching experiences shaped their long-term commitment to the profession.

Ultimately, these additional questions served as important relationship building tool, fostering an environment where participants felt valued and heard. By giving educators and opportunity to share personal stories about their entry into teaching, the interviews became more conversational and reflective, rather than purely data driven. This approach aligns with best practices in qualitative research, where establishing a connection between researcher and participant can enhance the depth and authenticity of the data collected (Creswell & Poth, 2016). These modifications strengthened the study by providing a more holistic view of participants' experiences while also ensuring that the researcher could better contextualize their responses about career decisions.

Protection of Human Subjects

Protecting human subjects and maintaining the confidentiality of interview documents is crucial in research, particularly when conducting interviews that involve sensitive information. Before any research is completed the Kansas State University Institute Review Board will approve the design. Participation is voluntary. All participants were assured that their identity would not be shared and each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Pseudonyms were assigned based on novice and veteran status.

Interview notes, documents and recordings are saved and categorized by pseudonym and will be stored on a password protected computer. Any personally identifiable information was removed from interview documents. All responses will be coded and the pseudonym will be used to protect participant identities.

Only the researcher had access to the files. All documents and recordings will be kept on file for three years on a password protected device and any hard copies will be kept in a locked cabinet. After that date, all documents and recordings will be destroyed.

Data Collection

Qualitative research often involves a combination of data collection methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Tracy, 2019). For this research, data was collected through semi-structured interviews and documents.

Semi-structured interviews are a commonly used data collection method in qualitative research (Tracy, 2019). Interviews provide a balance between the flexibility of open-ended conversations and the structure needed to address specific research questions. Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful when exploring complex phenomena (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). They allow researchers to delve into participants' experiences, perspectives, and interpretations in-depth (Patton, 2014). The use of interviewing was a chosen method for data collection in order to see rich, contextualized and participant centered insight.

Document analysis involves the systematic examination of written, visual, or audio materials as sources of data. Documents, also known as artifacts, can include official records, letters, reports, memos, newspapers, and any other relevant materials (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis is employed to provide insights into social, cultural, or organizational phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

Qualitative researchers often use multiple data sources and collection methods, combining interviews and document analysis. This approach allows for triangulation, providing a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Interviews and document analysis may be used in tandem to cross-verify findings, enhancing the validity and trustworthiness of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative research often benefits from the complementary use of interviews and document analysis (Patton, 2014). Interviews provide rich, personal insights, while document analysis allows

researchers to examine existing records and contextualize their findings. The combination of these methods enhances the depth and breadth of qualitative research (Bowen, 2008, 2009; Denzin et al., 2023).

Interviews

Interviews are a valuable qualitative research method for data collection, allowing researchers to gather in-depth information directly from participants (Tenny et al., 2023). The researcher will be using a semi-structured interview, following the preset interview protocols (Appendix A) with a predetermined set of questions (Appendix D) asked in a standardized manner and the flexibility to probe or reword a question as needed. Semi-structured interviews provide consistency for all participants and allow for in-depth exploration of a research topic (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to adapt their questions based on participants' responses. This flexibility allows for a more dynamic and responsive exploration of the research topic and therefore, a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, perspectives, and motivations (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

On average, the interviews lasted approximately 44 minutes, with notable differences between veteran and novice educators. The average interview length for novice participants was 35 minutes, while veteran participants' interviews averaged 51 minutes. This disparity in interview length suggests that veteran educators provided more extended responses, likely due to their extensive career experiences and deeper reflections on their time in the profession. Their additional years in education may have allowed them to articulate more detailed insights about long-term trends, professional challenges, and the evolution of their teaching philosophies.

In contrast, the shorter interview duration among novice educators indicates that they had fewer experiences to draw upon or were more concise in their reflections. Given that they are

still in the early stages of their careers, their perspectives may be more focused on immediate challenges and initial impressions of the profession rather than long-term trends. Additionally, veteran educators may have felt more comfortable elaborating on their responses due to their greater familiarity with professional discussions and reflection. The difference in interview length highlights the varying depths of experience between the two groups and provides insight into how career stage influences the way educators discuss their professional journeys.

Interviews, in general, provide a context-rich understanding of the research topic (Seidman, 2019). Participants can elaborate on their responses and express their views in their own words, which contributes to the authenticity and richness of the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In an in-person interview participants can seek clarification on questions they find unclear (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). This ensures that researchers and participants share a common understanding, reducing the risk of misinterpretation (Rubin & Rubin, 2005)

Establishing a rapport with participants is crucial for obtaining accurate and honest responses. Interviews, particularly in a qualitative context, provide an opportunity for researchers to build rapport, trust, and a comfortable environment for participants to share their thoughts openly (Patton, 2014). Interviews are especially effective for capturing participants' emotions and feelings. In-person interviews allow for the researcher to take note of the body language and reaction of the participant throughout the interview (Seidman, 2019).

While interviews have many strengths, it is essential to acknowledge that they also have limitations, such as potential biases introduced by the interviewer and the time and resource-intensive nature of conducting interviews (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Saturation of data is a crucial concept in qualitative research (Charmaz, 2014). Saturation refers to the point in data collection when new information or data ceases to provide additional insights or alter the understanding of the research topic (Guest et al., 2006). Saturation is essential for the development of robust and comprehensive theoretical frameworks (Saunders et al., 2018). As researchers collect more data, patterns and themes begin to emerge. Saturation ensures that these patterns are thoroughly explored, leading to the creation of more nuanced and well-grounded theories (Charmaz, 2014). When researchers reach saturation, it indicates that they have thoroughly explored the depth and breadth of the phenomenon under investigation, enhancing the trustworthiness and reliability of the study (Guest et al., 2006). Saturation is particularly important in qualitative studies that aim for in-depth exploration rather than broad generalization (Bowen, 2008). It ensures that the research is focused on understanding the complexity and richness of a specific phenomenon rather than striving for exhaustive coverage (Charmaz, 2014). For this study, there was a minimum of 12 participants, 6 novice teachers and 6 veteran teachers. There was no need to add additional participants as data saturation was evident in both the novice and veteran pool of participants.

Artifacts

The use of documents or artifacts in qualitative research is well known. Artifacts offer a glimpse into the perspectives, values, and meanings embedded in the context of the documents (Bowen, 2009). Each participant was asked to bring an artifact to the interview that acts as a motivator to continue teaching. The artifact was recorded and incorporated into the first interview question. Artifacts are any object made by humans, handmade or manufactured, or any object that can be touched or handled (Gibbs, 2018). The use of artifacts improves the quality of the interview, giving the participant a visual to describe and come back to as needed in the

interview (Wallwey & Kajfez, 2023). The use of an artifact adds a tangible dimension to the interview and increases the depth of knowledge shared (Bryans & Mavin, 2006).

For this research, the participant was asked to bring an artifact to the in-person interview that motivates him/her to continue to teach. The researcher took a photo of the artifact. The idea of bringing an artifact that reminded the participant of why they teach served multiple purposes. The item could evoke personal and emotional connections to the teaching profession, which allowed the researcher to get a glimpse of their motivations, passions, and aspirations as an educator. In addition, having a tangible reminder of one's teaching motivations can facilitate reflective practice, this allowed the researcher to examine their teaching philosophy, values, and goals. When the participant shared the significance of the item with the researcher, it fostered empathy and rapport and enabled deeper understanding of the participants' own motivations and experiences in teaching. The presence of the item prompted the researcher to reflect on their own biases, assumptions, and experiences, contributing to greater reflexivity in the research process. Overall, bringing an artifact that reminded the participant of why they teach deepened the researcher's engagement with the research process, enhanced participant rapport, and enriched the quality of qualitative inquiry in educational contexts..

Data Alignment

To assure that the research questions and data collection are in alignment, a data alignment table is included in Appendix E. Interview questions explored the primary factors influencing teacher retention and the possible connection to the social ecological system and continued service to the profession.

The questions used in the interview were designed specifically for this research. The researcher piloted these questions with four teachers to refine the wording and ensure that the

information gathered was valid and applicable to the research. Data alignment table is Appendix E.

Data Management

This study included procedures created to answer the research questions and accomplish the purpose of the research. Merriam and Grenier (2019) stated that the researcher is the key instrument for data collection and data analysis when conducting a qualitative study. The researcher asked each participant 12 open-ended questions (Appendix D), designed to help explore their personal thoughts and discuss their beliefs concerning their motivation to teach and how their experiences and environment influence the desire to stay in the education field. At the conclusion of the interviews, the researcher obtained verbatim transcriptions, via Otter Ai, of each audio-recorded interview session within 10 days. The researcher reviewed each document and codes the transcripts by hand.

Metadata

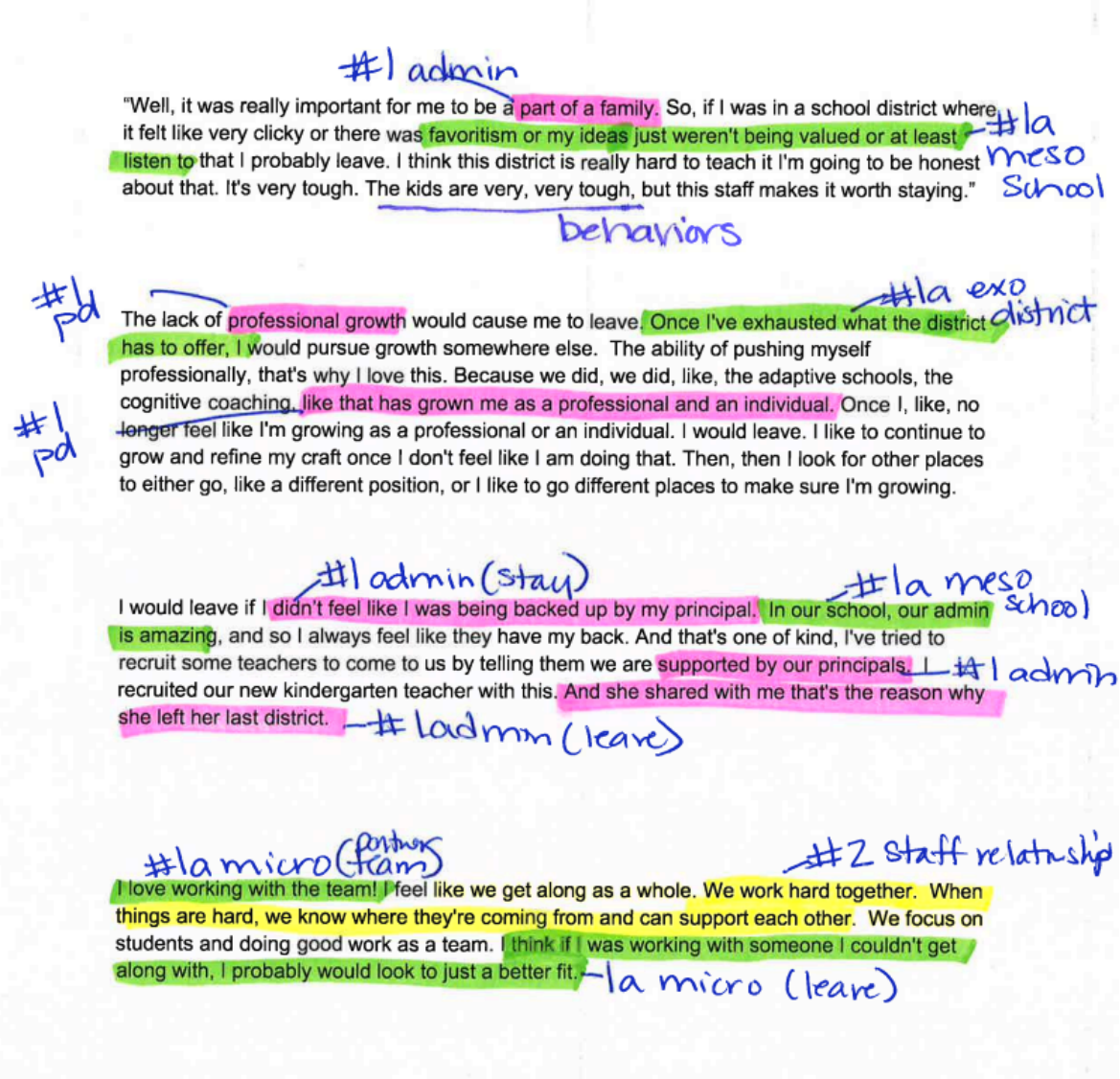
Metadata collected included age, education earned, total number of school district taught in, years of teaching experience, years of teaching experience in Smalltown School District, attendance of Smalltown School District as a child and years lived in community, if applicable and stored by pseudonym. Metadata was recorded in a spreadsheet for purposes of generalizing the data and connected with codes, categories, themes and subthemes.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, the coding process assigns meaning to the data through a word or phrase that explains or describes what is present in the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Codes represent the first step in assigning meaning to data from an interview transcript. Rubin and Rubin (2012) found that codes can be based on what is central to the research questions, what is

raised by the interviewees, and what is suggested by prior research. The researcher used this three-prong approach when coding. Data was hand coded to categorize the responses into themes or topics. Coding will include two cycles of deductive coding. Deductive coding in qualitative research involves applying predefined categories or concepts to the data based on existing theories or prior research (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Unlike inductive coding, which allows themes and categories to emerge from the data itself, deductive coding starts with a predetermined coding framework (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Researchers begin with a pre-existing theoretical framework or set of categories derived from prior research. Data is analyzed by applying codes that align with the predetermined categories (Patton, 2014). Coding follows a structured and predetermined set of codes that correspond to the theoretical framework. Deductive coding provides a more efficient and consistent approach to data analysis, especially when researchers have specific research questions in mind (Ridder, 2014). Deductive coding may limit flexibility in the analysis process, as it adheres closely to predefined categories (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). During the first coding cycle the researcher coded based on previous research on retention, using the following categories that are relevant in prior research; school administration, compensation, professional development, resources, appreciate and work-life balance. Then the researcher coded based on the environment in which one works, through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory; the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem. Once the data was initially coded, it was analyzed to identify patterns and themes, commonalities and differences and coded again based on those patterns and themes.

Figure 4
Sample Evidence of Coding



The themes and patterns was aligned with existing research on retention and the role connection and environment, as it related to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, influence continued service in education. In addition to this, data was analyzed for novice and veteran groups to further analyze how years of service impact thinking over time. Throughout the process of data analysis, data was captured, sorted and analyzed using Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Otter Ai, and Google Docs.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of a study refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation and methods used to ensure the quality of the study. In a study, the researcher established protocols and procedures to be considered trustworthy by readers (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Lincoln and Guba (1985) established four criterions for trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. One way to establish credibility is through triangulation of data (Amankwaa, 2016). In this research study, the researcher used meta-data, the interview data and the individual artifacts to code, categorize and establish identifiable patterns. Dependability is having a system in place to ensure reliability (Avizienis et al., 2001). In the case of this research, dependability refers to the processes and data collection being in alignment with the research study. The researcher provided detailed information regarding data collection, data analysis and data interpretation. Confirmability are steps taken to ensure that the data and findings are not due to participant or research bias (Avizienis et al., 2001). While the researcher understands a possible bias, data analysis including coding, categorizing and identification of patterns will ensure that data is interpreted as it is presented. Data saturation occurred when there was enough data to answer the research questions from the perspective of both novice teachers and veteran teachers. Qualitative research does not aim for replicability, however patterns and research design can be taken from one context to another (Anney, 2014) also known as transferability. The researcher provided detailed procedures and information from research design, data collection, data analysis and findings to ensure that a reader could take this research and apply it to another setting or context.

Summary

This qualitative study was organized to gather data from novice and veteran teachers and will provide the most in depth look at the current concerns with teacher retention and how they directly relate to environment, as viewed through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. This chapter provided a detailed roadmap of the methodology and details of the study for others to replicate similar research in order to provide valid data pertaining to their own school district and the retention of teachers. Chapter 4 will provide the findings of this study.

Chapter 4 - Findings

The findings from this study provide a comprehensive exploration of the factors influencing teacher retention and satisfaction through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. By examining teachers' experiences across the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, key themes emerge that highlight the intricate and interconnected nature of the teaching profession. The themes are listed by ecological system with comparison of novice and veteran as shown in Table 1.

At the microsystem level, relationships with partner teachers, students, and families emerged as foundational to teachers' sense of purpose and daily experiences. The mesosystem emphasized the critical role of school culture and administrative support in shaping collaboration, fostering a sense of community, and addressing challenges. Within the exosystem, district-level policies, professional development opportunities, and the alignment between district and school initiatives had a significant impact on teacher satisfaction and performance. The macrosystem points out the influence of community relationships and societal perceptions of the teaching profession, revealing how external validation and expectations shape teachers' identities and decisions. Finally, the chronosystem illuminated how teachers' needs, values, and priorities evolve over time, with appreciation and adaptability serving as essential elements for sustaining long-term commitment.

Together, these findings paint a holistic picture of the factors that contribute to these participants' satisfaction and retention, offering insights into the multi-layered systems that influence the profession and strategies for creating supportive environments that allow educators to thrive. The themes for both novice and veteran are listed in Table 1.

Table 1
Themes List

System	Novice Themes	Veteran Themes
Microsystem	Positive Relationships Fulfillment from Connection Negative Impact from Insufficient support	Positive Staff Relationships Relationships with Students and Staff Supportive Environments
Mesosystem	School Culture and Leadership Accountability and Follow-Through Collaboration Opportunities	School Culture School Administration Collaboration Opportunities
Exosystem	District Leadership and Policy Administrative Follow-Through	Professional Development Alignment of District Policy Resource Availability
Macrosystem	Community Support Cultural Alignment Challenges	Community Engagement Cultural Alignment Public Perception of Education
Chronosystem	Long Term Impact Cultural Shifts	Long Term Impact Cultural Shifts Sustained Motivation

Microsystem

The microsystem represents the closest level of influence on an individual, encompassing direct interactions and relationships that shape daily experiences. For both novice and veteran teachers, this includes the connections they form with those around them, such as grade level

partners, peer teachers and department teams. These relationships play a crucial role in shaping their professional experiences, job satisfaction, and overall retention within the field.

Novice

The novice teacher group highlighted the significance of relationships and support in their early years of teaching. They emphasized the impact of positive relationships**,** particularly with colleagues and mentors, in fostering a sense of belonging and professional growth. Additionally, they found fulfillment through connections with students and staff, which contributed to their motivation and commitment to the profession. However, they also expressed challenges related to insufficient support**,** noting that a lack of guidance, resources, or administrative backing negatively affected their confidence and overall experience in the field.

Positive Relationships

Novice teachers consistently emphasized the vital role of strong relationships with partner teachers, students, and families in shaping their experiences and commitment to their roles. Bailey described how a "family-like" atmosphere among staff, "That's your second family... If you have a positive school culture, it encourages you to come in every day." This cultivated a sense of camaraderie, creating a supportive network that helped mitigate the stresses of teaching. This collaborative environment, where trust and teamwork thrived, made the school a place where they felt valued and connected. Carson echoed this sentiment, "I felt very supported whenever administration or colleagues would come in and make me feel like I was being heard." They explained that positive relationships with colleagues provided a sense of community and stability, which significantly influenced their desire to remain in their position. According to Drew, "A teaching partner that is super supportive and someone that you can plan with and bounce ideas off of is really important." For the novice educators interviewed, the

bonds formed with their peers went beyond professional collaboration, offering emotional reassurance and a sense of shared purpose.

Equally impactful were the relationships formed with students and their families. Ellis shared the follow about the dress she brought as her artifact,

> I have a dress that I had my kiddos made for me when I did student teaching. They all made this for me, and it's just a lot of different things. Each child added what they wanted. They wanted to draw, like, I have a Yoshi on here. This kid loves drawing little things, so he made that. But then I have some things that are, like little inside jokes, like, there's a Burger King Whopper on here, because a student was obsessed with the Burger King Whopper song, and he would sing it, and it would drive me crazy, but by the end of it, it was like a funny thing that we would do. I wanted to find something that was from the students, because ultimately that's the reason that I wanted to be a teacher and that I continued teaching into this next year, is just because of the students and the impact that I know that I will have on them.

That dress symbolized the strong emotional connections they had cultivated, serving as a reminder of the appreciation they received from students and the impact they can have on students. Similarly, Finley brought a picture of the first class of students,

> I brought it because when I look at the picture, there's so much. It's much bigger than just a picture. Like, each one of those kids has so much going on in their lives, and yet they still show up and be happy. But it just really showed me, even if I have a bad day, I can still show up and be the best for them. So, I will always choose each one of them.

This provided ongoing validation and encouragement for Finley. These are examples of relationships, grounded in mutual respect and care, reinforced the participants' sense of purpose

and fulfillment. For many novice teachers interviewed, the connections with students and families not only validated their hard work but also motivated them to navigate the challenges of teaching with renewed commitment.

Fulfillment from Connection

The personal satisfaction derived from meaningful connections with students and families was a recurring theme among novice teachers. Finley reflected on how a photograph of their first class served as a powerful reminder of their impact as a teacher and the relationships they had built. Finley shared, “And I just want to do the best I can do for my kids each and every day. But they're so special.” This connection gave many novice teachers a sense of pride and reinforced their dedication to their work. Similarly, Drew emphasized that engaging with families fostered a deeper collaboration in supporting students, which added another layer of purpose to their role. This has become relevant for Drew as it was a missing element during student teaching. Drew shared,

> My student teaching was during covid, so I student taught online. It was a very interesting experience...it was interesting because parents were there, in the room during my teaching. That was really it was really awkward at first, and it made me nervous, but I got used to it pretty quickly. But I wasn't able to really build a lot of relationships with those kids or their families because everything was on the computer.

Drew has since been able to foster strong relationships and connections with families and feels the power of that in her work, “partnering with parents is invaluable in my role.” These connections became a wellspring of motivation, affirming the value of their contributions in ways that extended beyond academic outcomes.

For novice educators who came from teaching families, this sense of connection was particularly profound. Bailey explained that their family's long-standing legacy in education deepened their understanding of the importance of building relationships and creating a lasting impact on students,

> I just always kind of knew in the back of my head and never really thought about anything else, to be honest. And it helped having family of teachers, my aunts, uncles, grandparents, mom, everyone is teachers...I knew at a young age I was going to be a teach and impact students.

Ace shared, "my mom and aunt were teachers and I knew I was going to be a teacher like them. Both Bailey and Ace were influenced by their family of teachers and that influenced their professional identity, fostering a commitment to meaningful connections with students and families. For these participants, teaching was not just a profession but a personal calling, rooted in a broader vision of community and shared responsibility.

Negative Impact from Insufficient Support

While positive relationships bolstered novice teachers' commitment, the absence of consistent support within the school environment often led to dissatisfaction and challenges in sustaining their roles. Drew noted that a lack of collaboration and administrative follow-through created a "poor culture," which undermined their morale and sense of effectiveness. Similarly, Carson described how negative interactions with colleagues kept them from connecting with them, asking for support, or even wanting to be supported by that colleague. "That really turned me off for a while" was something Carson stated when speaking about a colleague. This negative relationship eroded their confidence and made it difficult to feel successful. Without a foundation

of trust and support, these participants experienced heightened stress and a diminished sense of connection to their school environment.

Veteran

The veteran teacher group emphasized the importance of strong relationships and a supportive work environment in sustaining their commitment to the profession. They highlighted the value of positive relationships with staff**,** noting that collaboration and camaraderie with colleagues contributed to job satisfaction and professional longevity. Additionally, they found deep meaning in building connections with students and their families**,** recognizing these relationships as a key factor in their continued dedication to teaching. Furthermore, they stressed the necessity of a supportive environment**,** where administrative backing, opportunities to collaborate, and a positive school culture played a crucial role in their long-term retention.

Positive Staff Relationships

Across veteran participants, the quality of relationships with colleagues significantly influenced job satisfaction and retention. Urban emphasized that "positive relationships among staff" and a culture that "feels like family" were essential for their success, noting they "cannot stay in a position without a good partner/team." For Urban, collaboration and camaraderie created a sense of belonging that sustained their commitment to teaching.

Similarly, Xen highlighted the value of strong peer relationships, describing their work environment as a "sense of community" that functioned like a family. They noted that positive staff dynamics directly contributed to their success. Wynn also pointed to the importance of staff relationships, stating that "teamwork and mutual support shaped their ability to thrive" in their role. Zane echoed these sentiments, "working with people I respect and like is everything to me"

emphasizing that collaboration and supportive peer connections were central to their sense of success, particularly in creating a family-like atmosphere that fostered trust and alignment.

For York, the quality of staff relationships had a "high influence" on their decision to stay, with peer support and teamwork described as vital components of their professional satisfaction. Vale, while valuing administrative support, also highlighted the importance of team collaboration, reinforcing the pattern that strong, supportive relationships among colleagues create environments where teachers can thrive.

Relationships with Students and Staff

Veteran participants consistently cited their relationships with students and families as a cornerstone of their professional fulfillment. Wynn reflected on the “impact I make as a teacher,” sharing that a thank-you note from a student was a powerful reminder of the difference they make. Similarly, Zane cherished their “jar of kind notes” from students, which served as an ongoing source of motivation and reinforced their sense of purpose.

Vale underscored the importance of building connections with students and families, sharing their practice of creating a scrapbook with individual pages for each student as a way to honor their growth and commemorate the bond they shared.

> I brought one of my scrapbooks. I had done one of these for each class that I had, and I'm a few years behind...its fun going through and looking at it, because there are several the kids I'm still in contact with. For me, it's those relationships, those long-term relationships with the families and the staff. We still refer to each other as a family, especially when things happen, like when a staff member lost their mom, we're still there for each other, and we know we can count on each other.

This gesture highlighted their commitment to nurturing personal connections and investing in their students' futures.

York, who noted strong ties to both students and families, described teaching as a calling, shaped by their "deep connection" to education and their passion for working with children. Their focus on relational aspects suggested that building meaningful connections with students and families not only brought fulfillment but also reinforced their professional identity.

Xen similarly highlighted the importance of relationships with diverse students and families, "I'm here for the students. I want them to know that I care, even when things get tough. It's that connection that keeps me going." Noting how their experience working with students of varied academic and behavioral needs deepened their appreciation for inclusivity and adaptability. Urban shared, "You help everybody as a teacher, you have such a huge chance at impacting a student in so many good ways. And if you don't take the time, even for somebody that you think can't do it, they're never going to do it. This is my reminder of the impact I made as a teacher." This helped shaped their sense of purpose and fulfillment.

Supportive Environments

Supportive environments emerged as a recurring theme among veteran participants, with participants emphasizing the role of collaboration and team-based work in fostering professional growth and satisfaction. Vale noted that teamwork was an essential factor for success, describing a work culture where collaboration was highly valued. "You can feel it just walking into a building, and you could feel the difference in walking into school this year compared to the previous year." They appreciated environments where staff could rely on each other for guidance and problem-solving, which created a sense of shared purpose.

Zane emphasized the role of collaboration in creating a positive work environment, noting that strong teamwork fostered a sense of belonging and unity. “If we're all headed the same way, we don’t have to believe the same way by any means, but if we're collaborating together, I think that sets us up for success as a building.” For Zane, this collaborative spirit was critical to their success, as it ensured that challenges were addressed collectively rather than in isolation. Wynn shared, “It’s just really been helpful to have finally be on a team to actually collaborate with, and that is interested in collaborating and sharing resources and experience and expertise." Wynn highlighted the importance of collaboration, explaining that opportunities to work closely with peers enhanced their sense of connection to their role and made the school environment feel like “family.”

Urban reflected on the importance of a supportive culture, describing how positive relationships among staff created an atmosphere conducive to success. However, Urban also shared, “I had such an unhappy experience for the school year. I mean, I had a great time with my kids, but the school year was just so traumatic...it was an unhealthy culture and very negative.” This experience indicated that a lack of connection and negative culture could diminish their motivation and satisfaction, underscoring the importance of fostering strong and inclusive school environments. Xen and York similarly stressed that school culture directly impacted their success, Xen stated, “As a veteran teacher, I’ve seen the impact of school culture on my ability to thrive. A positive, supportive environment makes all the difference.” York expressed “I have done this long enough to know that I will not work in a building with a bad culture, I will find a different place to work before staying there.” Both participants indicate they could not remain in positions where the culture was negative or unsupportive.

Addressing Research SQ #1

The microsystem, particularly through relationships with partner teachers or departments, and the broader school environment, plays a pivotal role in teacher retention by fostering a sense of belonging, emotional support, and professional fulfillment. As described by both novice and veteran teachers, positive relationships within the school create a "family-like" atmosphere that serves as a buffer against the stresses of the profession. This camaraderie and mutual trust among colleagues help mitigate challenges and enhance job satisfaction, which in turn increases the likelihood of teachers staying in their positions.

For novice teachers, these relationships with partner teachers are especially important, as they provide not only professional collaboration but also emotional reassurance. When the participants interviewed feel supported by their peers, they experience a greater sense of community, which reduces feelings of isolation and stress.

Veteran teachers also emphasized the importance of positive staff relationships and a collaborative, supportive culture. For them, strong relationships with colleagues contribute significantly to their job satisfaction and sense of success.

Moreover, the relationships teachers form with students and families are equally influential. The emotional connections with students, whether through personal tokens of appreciation or collaborative engagement with families, provide teachers with a deep sense of purpose and fulfillment. These connections not only validate their professional efforts but also reinforce their motivation to continue teaching, especially when combined with strong support from their colleagues.

In summary, the microsystem, defined by supportive relationships with partner teachers and colleagues, creates a foundation for teacher retention by fostering a positive, collaborative,

and emotionally fulfilling environment. These relationships reinforce the teachers' commitment to their roles.

Mesosystem

The mesosystem is the second layer of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and encompasses the interactions between different elements of a teacher's immediate environment. In the school setting, this includes the relationships and connections between teachers, administrators, students, families, and support staff. These interactions shape a teacher's daily experiences, influencing their job satisfaction, sense of support, and overall retention in the profession.

Novice

For novice teachers, the mesosystem, encompassing interactions within the school setting, plays a crucial role in shaping their early teaching experiences. Key factors such as school culture and leadership influence their sense of belonging and support, while accountability and follow-through from administrators and colleagues impact their confidence and professional growth. Additionally, collaboration opportunities with peer teachers and mentors provide essential guidance and encouragement, helping novice educators navigate the challenges of their first years in the classroom. These interconnected elements within the school environment significantly affect their job satisfaction and long-term retention.

School Culture and Leadership

A positive school culture, rooted in collaboration and respect, emerged as one of the most significant factors influencing teacher retention. Novice participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of a welcoming, inclusive environment where staff members supported one another. Bailey shared, "I think the family-like atmosphere is one of the biggest reasons to stay." The

environment creates a sense of belonging and encouraged collaboration, noting that such an environment was pivotal in their decision to remain in their role. Similarly, Carson reflected on how the culture of their school directly influenced their professional success, stating, "Culture impacts my success." For these novice educators, a positive culture not only fostered camaraderie but also provided the emotional support needed to navigate the demands of teaching.

In contrast, a toxic or unsupportive school culture was a primary source of dissatisfaction. Drew described experiencing a "lack of community in the building" and how the absence of a collaborative culture negatively affected their experience. This sense of isolation was echoed by Finley, who stated, “a toxic environment, negativity, will definitely make me want to leave. A positive environment just makes you want to go to work each day and a negative one just makes everything harder.” Explaining that poor culture and minimal peer collaboration created barriers to effective teaching and diminished their enthusiasm for the role.

Accountability and Follow-Through

Strong leadership characterized by consistent accountability and follow-through was another key theme among novice educators. Teachers valued leaders who not only communicated clear expectations but also ensured these standards were upheld across the staff. Drew emphasized the importance of administrative follow-through, stating, “unreliable or inconsistent leadership causes staff to be frustrated and start to not trust administration.” Conversely, when administrators followed through on commitments, it fostered a sense of stability and alignment within the school.

Bailey echoed this sentiment, "They’re there every day. They know what you’re going through because they’re helping the kids too." Drew, Bailey and Carson highlighted how

supportive administrators who actively addressed issues and maintained accountability contributed to a more cohesive school environment. Carson noted that strong leadership also set the tone for collaboration and equity. “When things weren't working, I did feel really supported whenever my administration or coach would come in and make me feel like I was being heard. When I said that there was a problem and it needed to be fixed. It usually got fixed...We usually had a meeting and we usually got things going so we can make a change because of whatever I was doing was not working. They would come in all the time...and write me little notes of reassurance of how I was doing, and they made me feel like I was doing really good for my first year.” This ensured that all staff members were held to the same standards. For these participants, effective leadership was essential to building trust and creating a culture of shared responsibility.

Collaboration Opportunities

Opportunities for collaboration emerged as a central factor in enhancing job satisfaction and teacher retention. Novice participants emphasized the value of working closely with colleagues to share ideas, problem-solve, and build supportive relationships. Ellis shared that having a "supportive partner/team" was essential to their success, explaining that collaboration created a sense of unity and reduced the feeling of isolation often associated with teaching. Carson also stressed that positive peer relationships made the school environment feel "like family," which contributed to their decision to stay in their position.

For some novice participants, collaboration was not only a source of professional growth but also a key factor in overcoming challenges. Finley shared, "It’s kind of nice to get to get all these ideas from them and use their techniques that they've been using for years." This highlighted how peer collaboration provided practical solutions to classroom difficulties,

particularly when addressing the needs of diverse learners. However, participants also noted that a lack of collaboration opportunities could have the opposite effect. Drew explained, “when I ask for help and do not get it or do not feel heard, it makes it really hard to come back to work each day.” That minimal teamwork and isolated working conditions diminished their sense of connection to the school, making it harder to remain motivated.

Veteran

For veteran teachers, the mesosystem, shaped by interactions within the school setting, plays a vital role in their continued commitment to the profession. School culture influences their overall job satisfaction, fostering either a sense of stability and belonging or frustration and disengagement. School administration impacts their experience through leadership decisions, communication, and the level of support provided. Additionally, collaboration opportunities with colleagues allow veteran teachers to share expertise, mentor new educators, and continue growing professionally. These factors collectively shape their daily experiences and long-term retention in the field.

School Culture

A positive, family-like school culture emerged as a key factor in fostering job satisfaction for veteran teachers. Participants like Vale and York emphasized that a cohesive and inclusive school culture is integral to their professional success. Vale reflected on the importance of a supportive and collaborative environment, noting that “positive relationships among staff” significantly contribute to a thriving school atmosphere. They highlighted how such a culture not only nurtures professional growth but also impacts the quality of relationships with students and families. Similarly, York reinforced the idea that a positive work culture, where staff members

share mutual support and respect, creates a sense of belonging that enhances their engagement and job fulfillment.

> I love working with my partner teacher... It's important. I think if I was working with someone I couldn't get along with, I probably would look to just a better fit....I think just my own experience...I always felt I was a very strong team, and I know that everybody's heart was in it for the right reasons."

York's decision to remain in their position is largely shaped by these strong interpersonal connections and a shared commitment to fostering a positive environment.

In contrast, Urban and Xen described the adverse effects of negative school cultures. Urban pointed to a "lack of community and poor culture" in their school, which undermined their motivation. This lack of a supportive environment was a major factor that led these participants to consider leaving their position. Similarly, Xen expressed frustration with a "negative culture" and emphasized how critical it is for teachers to feel supported by both their colleagues and the administration. The absence of a positive culture made it difficult for them to stay committed, underlining how deeply school culture can influence retention. Both participants highlighted how a toxic or isolating school culture eroded their enthusiasm for teaching and contributed to feelings of professional burnout.

School Administration

The role of administrative support was another prominent theme in shaping veteran participants' experiences. Zane shared, "I have to believe in a vision. I have to believe in where we're headed. I have to believe in leadership. I have to believe in the collective efficacy of a building or a district." This statement spoke highly of administrators who provided clear leadership and followed through on promises, fostering an environment where collaboration and

professional growth were encouraged. Zane emphasized that supportive administration not only positively influences school culture but also creates an environment where teachers feel valued and empowered.

On the other hand, Urban highlighted how insufficient administrative support directly contributed to the decline in school culture. In their experience, a lack of leadership presence and accountability created a "poor culture," which further fueled their dissatisfaction with the school environment. Similarly, Xen noted the negative impact of weak administrative leadership, “leaders that are not at present and supportive make it really hard to have a positive school culture. It all starts with leadership.” In contrast, when school leadership provided clear expectations, resources, and consistent support, participants like Zane and Wynn experienced a more positive and productive working environment. Wynn shared, “I just really feel like our administrative team understands that there they have to lead, you know, it's a trickle-down effect. So, if they are not supportive, and leading a positive culture... it doesn't make it to the teachers, and then it doesn't make it to the students.” Zane echoed this, “The belief of individuals, believing that the people next to them can teach and that we all are there for the kids, and that we all have the same vision of what a good education for kids should be, is good culture and working environment.”

Collaboration Opportunities

For veteran teachers, collaboration opportunities with colleagues were often described as essential to both personal and professional development. Wynn shared the sentiment that “positive professional relationships are crucial for success”, noting that their role as a teacher is significantly enhanced when they have opportunities to collaborate with others. Wynn emphasized, “I just want to feel supported. I want to feel that I'm heard. I want to feel like I am

valued as an educator." For Wynn, collaboration fosters a sense of belonging and mutual support, which enriches their professional journey and helps to create a more cohesive teaching environment.

Veteran teachers also emphasized that peer relationships were foundational to their decision to stay in their roles. Vale noted that collaboration with colleagues and the sharing of ideas were key drivers of success in their work environment, "the opportunity to learn from peers and engage in meaningful dialogue makes me a better teacher for my students and for all students." Similarly, York emphasized the importance of working alongside a supportive team, explaining that they could not imagine remaining in a position without a "good partner/team." The participants highlighted the central role that collaboration plays in maintaining morale and job satisfaction.

While Zane highlighted the positive outcomes of collaborative efforts, including a supportive atmosphere in the school, they also recognized that lack of collaboration or poor interpersonal relationships could lead to disengagement. For Zane, the lack of collaboration and learning could be a reason for leave, "Once I feel like I'm no longer growing as a professional or an individual, that's when I leave." Urban and Xen noted that when collaboration opportunities were scarce or hindered by interpersonal conflicts, they became isolated and disconnected from the team, diminishing their motivation. Xen in particular pointed out that collaboration was crucial for them to feel supported and stay connected with the broader school community, "Collaboration is key, when we meet as a team, we can make a bigger impact on our students, and it helps me stay motivated." This sentiment was echoed by Urban, "The people you work with are going to impact how you teach every day."

The Intersection of School Culture and Administrative Leadership: Novice and Veteran

The interplay between school culture and administrative support emerged as a central theme with both novice and veteran participants consistently noting that strong leadership was essential to fostering a positive and collaborative environment. Carson highlighted how their experience in a "family-like school culture" was directly tied to administrators who "prioritized teacher collaboration and facilitated a shared sense of purpose". By creating opportunities for staff to work together and addressing systemic challenges, these participants noted that the administrators cultivated an environment where teachers felt supported and valued.

Conversely, Drew shared that the lack of administrative involvement contributed to a fractured school culture, "not having supportive administration impacts everything I do in my classroom and makes me feel alone." Explaining that a poor culture could lead to teachers working in silos and struggling to build meaningful connections. For this participant, the absence of leadership intervention created a ripple effect, eroding trust and collaboration among staff. Finley noted that while external factors like compensation were considerations, "money is important but it doesn't matter if the culture is bad. A higher paycheck doesn't mean anything if I am miserable every day." Compensation was secondary to the culture and support fostered within the school. These participants see value in strong administration and a positive culture, which in turn drives teacher satisfaction and retention.

Both novice and veteran participants frequently described how administrators could strengthen school culture by engaging directly with teachers and creating opportunities for collaboration. Vale emphasized that "administrators who actively sought input from teachers and addressed concerns in real-time helped establish a culture of trust and mutual respect." Similarly,

Bailey noted that administrators “who worked alongside teachers” to align goals and expectations reinforced a sense of unity and shared purpose within the school.

Ultimately, participants underscored that school culture and administrative leadership are deeply interconnected. A positive school culture cannot thrive without effective leadership, and administrative efforts are most impactful when aligned with a culture of collaboration and inclusion. Carson encapsulated this connection, stating that "strong leadership creates a foundation for collaboration and community, which keeps teachers motivated and committed."

Addressing Research SQ #2

The mesosystem, particularly the school building's culture and leadership, directly influences teacher retention by shaping the work environment and providing the necessary emotional and professional support for teachers. Both novice and veteran educators consistently identified the interconnectedness between school culture, leadership, and collaboration opportunities as key factors that either foster or hinder their motivation and job satisfaction.

For both novice and veteran teachers, a positive school culture, marked by collaboration, respect, and inclusivity, emerged as a central factor influencing teacher retention. Teachers in environments that felt like a “family,” where there was mutual support, a sense of belonging, and camaraderie were more likely to stay in their roles. Bailey, a novice, described this atmosphere “as essential for job satisfaction”, while Vale and York, veteran teachers, emphasized how a cohesive culture nurtured not only their professional growth but also their engagement and relationships with students and families.

All of the participates, both novice and veteran, recognize that a positive school culture contributes to retention by providing an environment where teachers feel valued, connected to

their colleagues, and supported in their efforts. When teachers experience this kind of environment, they are more likely to stay committed to their work and the school community.

Leadership and administrative support are crucial in maintaining a positive school culture and influencing teacher retention. Both novice and veteran teachers highlighted the importance of administrators who demonstrate accountability, follow-through, and a commitment to supporting staff. Drew, a novice educator, noted that inconsistent leadership led to frustration, while Zane, a veteran educator, praised administrators who kept their promises and created an environment conducive to collaboration. Conversely, when administrative leadership is absent or inconsistent, as described by Urban and Xen, a negative school culture is often the result. Lack of support from leadership leads to disengagement and frustration.

The opportunity to collaborate with colleagues is another critical factor influencing teacher retention. Both novice and veteran teachers emphasized that collaborative work environments enhanced their job satisfaction and professional growth. For example, Ellis, a novice educator, mentioned that having a "supportive partner/team" was essential for overcoming challenges, while Wynn, a veteran educator, underscored the role of positive professional relationships in creating a cohesive school environment.

The participants described how the relationship between school culture and leadership is deeply interconnected. Carson, novice educator, described how strong leadership directly facilitated a collaborative and supportive culture, while Bailey praised administrators who actively engaged with teachers to ensure alignment and shared goals. Veteran participants like Vale also noted how administrators who consistently foster collaboration helped create a culture of trust and respect that supported teacher retention. In contrast, Drew, a novice educator, shared how the lack of "administrative involvement contributed to a fractured culture and a sense of

isolation." For these participant, effective leadership is fostered by a positive and cohesive school environment.

In conclusion, the mesosystem, or school environment, directly influences all of the participants. The participants shared how a positive school culture that emphasizes support, respect, and collaboration increases teacher retention by fostering a sense of belonging and professional growth.

Exosystem

The exosystem, as the third layer of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, includes external factors that indirectly influence a teacher's daily experience. In the context of education, the school district plays a crucial role in shaping policies, resources, and expectations that impact teachers' work environments. Decisions made at the district level, such as funding, professional development opportunities, curriculum mandates, and administrative support, can significantly affect teacher satisfaction, retention, and overall effectiveness in the classroom.

Novice

For novice teachers, the exosystem plays a critical role in shaping their early career experiences. District policies and leadership decisions impact the level of professional development available, influencing their growth and ability to meet the demands of the profession. Leadership and policy set expectations for support structures, mentorship programs, and teacher resources, while administration follow-through determines how effectively these initiatives are implemented. The extent to which the district provides consistent support and guidance can significantly affect novice teachers' job satisfaction and long-term retention.

Professional Development

Access to meaningful and relevant professional development emerged as a key factor in supporting novice teachers' growth and satisfaction. Novice participants valued opportunities that directly addressed their classroom challenges and enhanced their ability to meet diverse student needs. Ellis highlighted the importance of targeted training, “finding the balance of new learning versus foundational teaching knowledge, that’s been good for me as a young teacher.” Furthermore, stating that “workshops on supporting diverse learners were key in helping them refine their teaching strategies”. Similarly, Finley described how “non-traditional professional development” during their early teaching years, including adaptations for online learning during COVID-19, allowed them to build skills that were practical and immediately applicable to their work. For these participants, professional development served as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and real-world practice, helping them feel more confident and prepared.

However, novice participants also noted that professional development opportunities were not always effective. Carson expressed frustration, “district level professional development might not be what we need at our building.” The “one-size-fits-all sessions” felt disconnected from the realities of their classroom, explaining that training lacked the specificity needed to address the unique challenges of their school environment. Drew echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that “professional development was most impactful when it was tailored to their needs and followed up with actionable support.”

District Leadership and Policy

Novice teachers’ experiences with district-level leadership and policies varied widely, with many participants emphasizing how these broader systems shaped their day-to-day work. Bailey shared that district-led initiatives, “grade level meetings foster collaboration among schools and make a difference and allows all teachers across the district to learn from other

educators and share best practices." This sense of connection across the district reinforced their belief in a shared mission and helped them feel supported at a broader level.

Conversely, Finley described feeling frustrated by a "lack of alignment between district policies and the realities of the classroom." They shared that while district leaders often introduced well-meaning directives, these initiatives frequently failed to account for the "unique challenges faced by individual schools," leaving teachers to navigate implementation on their own. Carson similarly noted that "district policies around curriculum and assessment are rigid and realistic for the classroom," This limits their ability to adapt lessons to their students' specific needs. These disconnects not only added to novice teachers' workloads but also created feelings of disillusionment with district leadership.

Administrative Follow Through

Consistency and accountability from district leaders emerged as a recurring theme, with novice participants underscoring the importance of follow-through on promises and initiatives. Drew shared, "A new program without all the support and materials means nothing to teachers." This expressed a dissatisfaction with leaders who introduced programs or policies without providing the resources or ongoing support needed for successful implementation. This lack of follow-through undermined trust and left some novice teachers feeling unsupported. Carson described a similar experience, explaining that "inconsistent communication from district office leaders created confusion" and diminished their confidence in district leadership.

In contrast, Bailey shared how "consistent follow-through on district initiatives contributed to a sense of stability and alignment within their school and the district." "When district leaders communicated clearly and follow through with promised resources were." For Bailey, this reliability strengthened their relationship with the district and reinforced their

commitment to their role. For these participants, follow-through was critical in building trust and ensuring the success of district policies and programs.

Veteran

For veteran teachers, the exosystem significantly impacts their professional longevity and effectiveness. Access to professional development opportunities influences their ability to grow, adapt, and stay engaged in their careers. The alignment of district-level decisions with the needs of educators affects their sense of support and trust in leadership. Additionally, the availability of resources**,** including funding, instructional materials, and staffing support, plays a crucial role in their ability to maintain high-quality instruction. These factors collectively shape veteran teachers' job satisfaction, commitment, and long-term retention.

Professional Development

Veteran teachers consistently valued professional development that was targeted, relevant, and practical, allowing them to address real challenges in the classroom. Zane appreciated workshops designed to "enhance skills for managing diverse student needs, noting that such training enabled them to adapt their teaching strategies to better serve their students." Similarly, Vale highlighted the value professional development sessions focused on culturally responsive teaching and behavior interventions, "the sessions that help me learn how to work with students with behaviors are very valuable and help me feel more confident in working with high-risk students."

In contrast, Wynn expressed dissatisfaction when professional development lacked practicality or failed to align with the immediate challenges teachers faced. "Spending a day in professional development that does not connect with what I am doing every day is a waste of my time." Wynn described a particular instance in which a district-mandated training session

focused on theoretical frameworks rather than actionable strategies, leaving them feeling disengaged and unsupported. This lack of relevance not only created frustration but also diminished the perceived value of professional development as a whole.

For professional development to be effective, participants like York emphasized the importance of teacher input in shaping its content. “Asking teachers for input is very valuable, if the input is used for decision making.” York explained that when teachers were given opportunities to voice their needs, professional development became a meaningful tool for growth rather than a "check-the-box exercise."

Alignment of District Policies

The alignment, or lack thereof, between district policies and the realities of the school environment emerged as a critical theme among veteran participants. Urban described the disconnection they felt when district-level initiatives failed to address the unique needs of their school, explaining that policies often seemed designed with "one-size-fits-all" assumptions. This lack of alignment led to inefficiencies and created additional stress, as teachers were forced to navigate initiatives that did not align with the challenges they faced in their specific contexts.

Participants like Xen expressed concern about policy shifts that were implemented without adequate input from educators. “Teachers need to be a part of the conversation. They work directly with students and know the needs of students.” Xen goes on to described how “sudden curriculum changes and mandates” disrupted their ability to maintain instructional continuity, emphasizing the need for policies that take teacher perspectives into account.

Resource Availability

Access to adequate resources, both material and professional, was another key factor the emerged from the veteran participants. Xen shared, “Having the resources I need makes all the

difference. I can't teach without the tools, and when they're there, I feel like I can really make a difference." York emphasized the importance of having up-to-date teaching materials and technology, explaining that such "resources enabled them to better engage students and improve student outcomes...this makes me feel heard and valued as an educator." For York, a well-resourced classroom signaled that the district valued their work and was invested in their success.

Similarly, Xen highlighted the impact of having access to external support services, such as behavior specialists and mental health counselors, which allowed teachers to address student needs holistically. "Having supports in the building for teachers is really helpful. I have learned how to work with difficult students because I had strong leaders and support, our new teachers need that as well." Xen noted that these resources not only alleviated the "burden and pressure" on teachers but also enhanced their ability to create a positive learning environment.

Participants, Urban and Wynn, expressed frustration with resource inequities across schools. Urban described how limited access to classroom supplies and outdated technology created "unnecessary barriers to effective teaching", leading to feelings of disillusionment. Wynn echoed these concerns, "this year we do not have an instructional coach and teachers feel the loss of that role."

Addressing Research SQ #3

The exosystem, represented by the school district, directly influences teacher retention through its policies, professional development opportunities, resource allocation, and leadership practices. These factors affect both novice and veteran teachers in various ways.

The school district plays a pivotal role in designing and delivering professional development (PD) opportunities. For novice teachers, meaningful and targeted PD that addresses

classroom challenges and provides practical strategies helped build their confidence and preparedness. However, ineffective or generic PD sessions can lead to frustration and disengagement, negatively affecting retention. For veteran teachers, PD was most impactful when it aligned with their specific needs and provides actionable strategies. When teachers feel that the district invests in their growth and listens to their input, they are more likely to stay in their roles.

Macrosystem

The macrosystem, the outermost layer of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, encompasses the broader cultural and societal influences that shape a teacher's experience. In the context of education, the local community plays a significant role in shaping school culture, resources, and overall support for educators. Community values, socioeconomic conditions, and public attitudes toward education impact the level of support schools receive, affecting teacher retention and job satisfaction. A strong, engaged community can contribute to a positive teaching environment, while a lack of support may create additional challenges for educators.

Novice

For novice teachers, the macrosystem plays a crucial role in their early career experiences. The level of community support can influence their sense of value and belonging, while cultural alignment between their personal beliefs, school values, and societal expectations impacts job satisfaction. Additionally, challenges facing teachers, such as public perceptions of education, policy changes, and workload demands, can create added pressures. These external factors contribute to the overall environment in which novice teachers begin their careers, shaping their motivation, resilience, and long-term commitment to the profession.

Community Support

Novice teachers expressed that support and appreciation from the community significantly enhanced their sense of fulfillment and reinforced their commitment to their roles. Finley highlighted how positive interactions with families and local stakeholders provided a sense of encouragement, “hearing good things from parents and community members reminds me that they support me.” Ellis echoed this sentiment, “community volunteers in my classroom is one way I feel supported.” These moments of recognition helped them feel valued beyond the walls of the classroom.

However, participants also reflected on the challenges posed by inconsistent community support. Drew mentioned that while some businesses actively engaged with the school, others showed limited involvement, which created feelings of disconnect with the community. Carson elaborated on this disparity, “it doesn’t look good with one school has multiple community partners while another doesn’t have any.” Their comments revealed the dual role of the community, where active support can bolstered teacher satisfaction, but limited involvement created challenges in building strong school-community partnerships.

Cultural Alignment

Alignment between teachers’ personal values and the cultural environment of their school community emerged as a key factor of the novice group of participants. Bailey shared, “my family of teachers showed me how to love and teach.” Explaining how their family’s legacy in education shaped their belief in the importance of nurturing relationships and fostering student growth. Bailey also went on to say, “working with others that think like me matters.” They found working in a community that shared these values deeply fulfilling, reinforcing their commitment to their role. Similarly, Ace noted that the alignment between their personal

dedication to equity and the school's emphasis on inclusivity created a strong connection, making it easier to remain engaged and motivated.

Conversely, participants like Carson reflected on the challenges of working in communities where their values felt misaligned with those of the broader environment.

> I worked in a building where I didn't feel like I fit in. I didn't feel connected to others. I didn't have a good relationship with my partner teacher or really any of the teachers. We didn't work together and I didn't feel like I could go to them for support. I decided early on that year that I was not going to keep working there.

They shared that a lack of emphasis on collaboration and shared goals between the school and community often created frustration, as it impeded efforts to build cohesive systems of support for students. Drew further emphasized the importance of cultural alignment, "working with others that have the same values and beliefs makes the job of teaching fun...and we all like to have fun!" Essentially explaining that shared values between educators, families, and the community fostered trust and strengthened their overall experience.

Challenges

While societal perceptions of education and broader systemic issues were less immediately impactful than school or district-level factors, novice participants noted that they still played a role in shaping their experiences. Finley shared, "some people don't value the work we do as teachers and think it is our job to fix kids...that's hard to hear as we are all doing our best." Societal narratives about teaching, such as undervaluing the profession or focusing solely on test scores, contributed to moments of frustration and doubt. Ace also mentioned, "teaching is hard and people don't understand what we do each day...and when test scores are low, it's like

we are not working hard enough." These perceptions often made it difficult to feel fully appreciated for the complex and multifaceted work teachers perform.

Despite these challenges, novice participants also highlighted instances where community respect for educators bolstered their sense of pride. Bailey reflected on how being part of a family of teachers helped them see the "profession as a valued and respected cornerstone of society", which influenced their dedication to the role, even when others might not see it that way. Ace pointed out that while public criticism of the education system could be "disheartening", it motivated them to "advocate for their students and work toward meaningful change". For these novice teachers, the broader societal context was a mixed influence, while it occasionally posed challenges, it also offered opportunities to reaffirm their purpose and resilience.

Veteran

For veteran teachers, the macrosystem plays a significant role in their long-term commitment to the profession. Community engagement influences the level of support teachers receive, impacting resources, student success, and overall morale. Cultural alignment between teachers' values and the evolving expectations of the education system affects their sense of purpose and job satisfaction. Additionally, the public perception of education, including respect for the profession, policy decisions, and societal attitudes, can either reinforce teachers' dedication or contribute to burnout and frustration. These broader influences shape veteran teachers' experiences and decisions regarding their future in education.

Community Engagement

Veteran teachers valued strong relationships with the community, emphasizing that these connections reinforced their sense of purpose and motivation. Zane described how positive

interactions with families and community members provided a steady source of encouragement, particularly during challenging times. Zane shared that receiving feedback from parents who expressed gratitude for their efforts reminded them of the meaningful impact they were making in their students' lives.

> I have been in education log enough to go through good times and bad. Covid was a very difficult time and the professional has changed as a result of Covid. Family and community support during hard times means a lot and reminds me that I am making a difference with students and positively impacting the community.

Similarly, York emphasized the importance of community involvement in enhancing job satisfaction. “It is great to see community members helping at our family nights and volunteering during school hours.” They highlighted how collaborative initiatives, such as family nights and volunteering, fostered a shared sense of responsibility for student success. These events not only strengthened the bond between the school and its community but also created a sense of pride and belonging for York as an educator.

In contrast, Xen noted that a lack of community engagement made it harder to maintain morale. “It’s really hard for me when I am working so hard to help a child be successful and I don’t feel support from the parent and community partners.” Xen explained that when families, community partners and local stakeholders appeared disengaged or indifferent toward the school, it led to feelings of isolation and “diminished their sense of purpose.” For veteran teachers, strong community ties served as a vital source of support and motivation, while their absence created additional challenges.

Cultural Alignment

The degree of alignment between veteran teachers' values and others in the school played a pivotal role in their decision to remain in their positions. Vale described how working in a school community that prioritized "inclusivity and equity" allowed them to feel a deeper connection to their role, as these shared values created a strong foundation for collaboration and mutual respect. They found that the shared mission strengthened communication and teamwork, making their work more impactful.

Urban shared the importance of a shared vision between teachers and the broader community. "When we all are working on the same goal of educating students, inside of school and outside, the job becomes easier." They explained that when communities actively supported education and celebrated student success, it created a cohesive and rewarding environment for educators. This alignment not only enhanced their daily work experience but also reinforced their long-term commitment to their role.

Conversely, Xen discussed the challenges of working in a community where cultural values conflicted with their professional philosophy. Xen shared, "I had a parent that was frustrated because common core math because it was so much harder and it made it hard for them to help their child...she demanded I teach it the way she learned." This resistance from families toward progressive teaching practices made it difficult to implement innovative strategies, creating a sense of disconnect. This lack of alignment not only hindered their ability to engage meaningfully with students but also led them to question their long-term commitment to the school.

Public Perception of Education

Societal attitudes toward the teaching profession emerged as both a challenge and a motivator for veteran educators. Wynn expressed frustration with the perception of teaching as an undervalued profession.

> Teachers are undervalued. We are paid less than many other professionals. The parents and community don't understand our jobs or appreciate all the work we do. They expect us to teach their child to read and write and how to sit and learn. It's a lot, which is why less and less people are choosing education as a career and more and more of us are getting out.

They noted how these attitudes translated into insufficient pay and a lack of respect for educators' expertise. Such challenges made it harder to maintain enthusiasm for their work and often led to feelings of professional discouragement.

York and Vale found that these societal challenges, while "demotivating at times", also presented opportunities to "advocate for the importance of education." They explained that demonstrating the critical role teachers play in shaping future generations not only countered negative perceptions but also reinforced their sense of purpose and commitment to their roles.

Addressing Research SQ #4

The macrosystem, particularly the local community, directly influences teacher retention by shaping their sense of connection, purpose, and motivation through community engagement, cultural alignment, and societal perceptions. Both novice and veteran teacher interviews reveal that strong local ties and shared values significantly enhance educators' professional experiences, while disengagement or misalignment introduces challenges.

These participants emphasized that support and involvement from families and local stakeholders were essential to maintaining their morale and commitment. Novice participants found encouragement in small but meaningful gestures from parents and community members, such as kind words or expressions of gratitude. These interactions reinforced their sense of purpose and deepened their connection to their work. Veteran teachers echoed these sentiments, describing how community engagement reinforced their resilience and satisfaction. Some shared that receiving positive feedback from families reminded them of the importance of their role in shaping students' lives, particularly during difficult periods. Similarly, veterans highlighted how collaborative events, such as family nights and community-led projects, fostered a shared sense of responsibility for student outcomes, which not only benefited students but also instilled pride and belonging in educators.

However, both groups noted that inconsistent or absent community involvement created obstacles. Novices expressed frustration with the lack of engagement from some families, which left them feeling disconnected. Veterans described the impact of community indifference, explaining that it led to feelings of isolation and diminished their sense of purpose. Schools with limited engagement often struggled to create a cohesive environment, making it harder for teachers to remain committed to their roles.

For these participants, alignment between teachers' values and the cultural priorities of their local communities emerged as a decisive factor in their retention. For novice teachers, shared values such as inclusivity and student-centered growth made their work deeply fulfilling. Some found working in a community that valued nurturing relationships strengthened their commitment to their role, while others described how alignment with a school's emphasis on equity provided motivation and connection.

Veterans also highlighted the significance of cultural alignment in fostering long-term commitment. Vale explained that working in a community prioritizing equity and inclusivity gave them a sense of purpose and strengthened collaboration between teachers, families, and stakeholders. Urban reinforced this idea, stating that communities actively celebrating student success and equity created an environment that felt both cohesive and rewarding.

On the other hand, cultural misalignment posed challenges for participants. Novices expressed frustration with communities that did not prioritize shared goals or collaboration, which hindered their ability to build effective support systems. Similarly, a veteran noted that resistance to progressive teaching practices from families created a sense of disconnect and limited their ability to innovate in their teaching. This misalignment often led to teachers questioning their long-term commitment to their schools.

Societal attitudes toward the teaching profession influenced teachers' morale and retention, with both novice and veteran participants highlighting frustrations with undervaluation. Novices shared that negative societal narratives, such as focusing solely on test scores or minimizing the complexity of teaching, sometimes caused feelings of doubt and frustration. These perceptions often made it difficult to feel fully appreciated for their contributions.

Despite these broader societal challenges, community-level interactions often served as a counterbalance. Veterans noted that positive support from families and stakeholders provided validation and mitigated frustrations stemming from societal undervaluing of education. Two veterans saw societal challenges as opportunities to advocate for the importance of education, emphasizing that their role in shaping future generations reinforced their sense of purpose and

commitment. For these participants, the macrosystem, particularly through local community influences, played a pivotal role in teacher retention.

Chronosystem

The chronosystem, the final layer of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, considers the impact of changes over time on an individual's experiences and development. In education, this includes shifts in policies, societal attitudes, technological advancements, and personal career trajectories that influence a teacher's professional journey. Both novice and veteran teachers experience changes in expectations, resources, and support systems throughout their careers, which can impact their job satisfaction and retention. Understanding these evolving influences provides insight into how educators adapt and respond to the dynamic nature of the profession.

Novice

For novice teachers, the chronosystem plays a role in shaping their experiences and career trajectories. As they begin their journey in education, they are influenced by long-term impact they might make as teachers. Additionally, cultural shifts in the school or district, such as evolving instructional practices, societal attitudes toward teachers, and changes in student needs, shape their adaptation to the profession.

Long Term Impact

Two novice teachers often reflected on their desire to have a significant contribution to students' lives. Ace shared about the impact her second grade teacher made on her and her desire to do the same thing for her students.

> My second grade teacher...she understood me and knew I needed a little more than the other students in my class. She gave me the attention and helped me when I was having a

hard time. I knew I wanted to be like her when I grew up and wanted to impact the lives of students like she did mine.

Bailey highlighted the sense of pride they felt when former students returned to thank them for their guidance, sharing that such moments reinforced their "sense of accomplishment." For these participants, the ability to reflect on their contributions provided motivation and affirmed the enduring value of their work.

Cultural Shifts

Changes in school or district culture over time emerged as a critical factor that influenced novice teachers' experiences and their decisions to stay or leave. Bailey noted, a gradual improvement in school culture, driven by strong leadership and collaboration among staff, deepened their commitment to their role." They emphasized how these positive shifts created a more cohesive and supportive environment that made their work more fulfilling. Similarly, Carson shared that an "increase in peer collaboration over time had strengthened their sense of community and trust within the school", essentially enhancing their job satisfaction.

On the other hand, participants also reflected on the detrimental effects of negative cultural changes. Drew described how a "decline in administrative follow-through and the lack of trust among staff" created a toxic atmosphere that made it challenging to remain motivated. Finley echoed these concerns, sharing that "shifts in district and building priorities....directly impacted the culture of the building and makes teaching feel less rewarding." These experiences highlight how cultural shifts, whether positive or negative, can significantly shape teachers' long-term satisfaction and retention.

Veteran

For veteran teachers, the chronosystem shapes their experiences and commitment to the profession over time. The long-term impact they have on students and the community is meaningful. Cultural shifts within the school**,** including changes in leadership, student demographics, and instructional practices, affect their sense of stability and professional fulfillment. Additionally, sustained motivation plays a crucial role in their longevity, as the ability to find purpose and growth in their work determines their continued dedication to teaching.

Long Term Impact

Half of the veteran teachers interviewed described a sense of fulfillment derived from reflecting on their long-term influence on students and the broader school community. Zane shared an example of visiting with former students that are now contributing members of the community.

> I have been teaching for many years and to be able to see former students that have graduated and are now working, one even as a teacher, is the most powerful reminder that what I do everyday matters and makes a difference.

Vale emphasized the deep satisfaction of witnessing former students succeed in their academic and personal lives. They explained how hearing about "students' achievements validated their efforts as a teacher," reinforcing their dedication to teaching. For Vale, these moments were a powerful reminder of the enduring value of their work and provided motivation to stay engaged in their role. York shared a similar sentiment, "interactions with former students who expressed appreciation for their guidance were deeply rewarding." These connections underscored the

long-term significance of their contributions and reaffirmed their decision to remain in the profession despite its challenges.

Cultural Shifts

Veteran participants described how shifts in school culture over time directly influenced their job satisfaction and commitment. Urban reflected on the "stagnant culture" in their school, describing a "lack of progress in creating a supportive and inclusive environment." They expressed frustration that, despite years of service, little effort had been made to address ongoing challenges or foster a sense of community. This cultural stagnation contributed to their sense of professional dissatisfaction.

In contrast, Vale observed positive changes in their school culture, noting how "improvements in collaboration and mutual respect among staff made a difference," essentially strengthening their connection to their role. These gradual shifts created an environment where they felt appreciated and motivated to contribute.

Sustained Motivation

Veteran teachers identified acknowledgment of their efforts and opportunities for growth as critical factors in sustaining their commitment. Wynn emphasized the "importance of strong professional relationships and opportunities for collaboration over time." They explained that these connections fostered a sense of belonging and reduced feelings of isolation, helping them remain motivated throughout their career. Likewise, Zane found motivation in maintaining a sense of adaptability and personal growth. Zane described "seeking out new strategies and tools to stay effective and meet the evolving needs of students." This focus on continuous improvement helped them sustain enthusiasm and motivation for teaching, even as challenges arose.

York highlighted how recognition from colleagues, families, and the community reinforced their sense of purpose. “Positive feedback from my partner teacher or others in my buildings goes a long way in my mind. It’s right up there with a positive note from a parent or a community member.” Hearing directly from peers, students and parents about the positive impact of their work served as a consistent source of inspiration.

Addressing Research SQ #5

The chronosystem, representing changes over time, directly influences teacher retention by shaping their sense of purpose, resilience, and connection to their work. Both novice and veteran teachers highlighted the evolving nature of their roles, the cultural shifts within their schools, and the long-term impact of their efforts on students as significant factors in their decisions to remain in the profession.

Reflecting on the enduring influence of their work often provided teachers with a renewed sense of purpose and pride. Essentially validating their efforts and reaffirming their commitment to teaching as well as highlighting the profound and lasting effects of their work. These reflections provided motivation during challenging periods, reinforcing their dedication to the profession.

The evolution of school or district culture over time played a pivotal role in shaping teachers’ experiences and satisfaction. For these participants, positive changes often strengthened teachers’ connections to their roles. While, stagnant or negative cultural shifts created challenges. These experiences illustrate how evolving cultural dynamics, whether positive or negative, significantly influence teacher retention.

The ability to observe long-term outcomes and receive ongoing recognition emerged as critical drivers of sustained motivation. Veteran teachers emphasized the importance of strong

professional relationships and collaboration, which fostered a sense of belonging and reduced feelings of isolation. For novices, witnessing students succeed over time provided a powerful source of encouragement.

Changes over time within the chronosystem directly influence teacher retention by shaping their connection to their work, their response to evolving cultural dynamics, and their ability to find sustained motivation.

Addressing the Primary Research Question

The primary research question is How do novice and veteran teachers perceive the factors of retention through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory? The data reveals that both novice and veteran teachers overwhelmingly perceive the mesosystem, the school, as the most influential factor in their decision to remain in the profession. When asked which of the systems had the most impact on staying in the professional, all participants identified the mesosystem, specifically the school setting, as having the greatest impact on their professional experiences. Novice teachers, such as Ace, Bailey, Carson, and Drew emphasized the role of their interactions within the school, particularly with students and colleagues, as central to their sense of fulfillment and retention. They highlighted the importance of fostering a positive and supportive culture within the school community.

A significant theme that emerged was the variable perception of administrative support. All of the veteran participants interviewed and some of the novice participants noted that that leadership played a crucial role in shaping their work environment, while a few of the novice participants, did not view administration as a significant factor. This discrepancy suggests that administrative practices and their influence on teachers' satisfaction vary widely, potentially depending on the individual school or leader.

Interestingly, broader systems such as the district (exosystem) and community (macrosystem) were not highlighted as impactful by any participant. For example, resources and professional development were not noted as key factors by these participants. Work-life balance was also notably absent as a dominant theme in the responses. Instead, participants focused on the immediate supports and challenges present in their school environment. For the participants in the study, the mesosystem, the school, emerged as the most critical determinant of retention for all the novice and veteran educators interviewed.

Chapter Summary

The findings of this study provided a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing teacher retention and satisfaction through the framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. By examining teachers' experiences across multiple interconnected systems, the study highlights the significance of relationships, school culture, district policies, community support, and changes over time in shaping professional commitment.

At the most immediate level, the microsystem reveals the fundamental role of relationships in fostering teachers' sense of purpose and belonging. Both novice and veteran educators emphasize the importance of strong connections with colleagues, students, and families in shaping their daily experiences. Supportive partnerships with peers and a collaborative environment create a sense of stability and motivation, while the absence of such connections contributes to stress and dissatisfaction. The mesosystem, encompassing the interactions within the school setting, emerges as the most influential factor in teachers' decisions to remain in the profession. A positive school culture, characterized by teamwork, administrative follow-through, and professional support, significantly enhances job satisfaction

and retention. Conversely, environments marked by weak leadership, lack of collaboration, or a toxic culture lead to disengagement and, in some cases, departure from the profession. Beyond the school setting, the exosystem examines the influence of district policies, professional development opportunities, and the allocation of resources. While access to meaningful training and instructional support strengthens educators' confidence and effectiveness, misalignment between district mandates and classroom realities presents challenges. Teachers express frustration with rigid policies and inconsistent administrative follow-through, which create barriers to successful implementation of initiatives intended to support instruction. The macrosystem, reflecting broader societal and community influences, reveals the complex relationship between public perceptions of education and teacher retention. Support from families and community stakeholders fosters encouragement and reinforces educators' commitment, yet a lack of engagement or societal undervaluation of the profession presents obstacles to sustaining morale.

The chronosystem provides insight into how teachers' needs, priorities, and professional experiences evolve over time. Long-term reflections on student impact and career fulfillment reinforce their dedication to education, while cultural and leadership shifts within schools influence their ongoing sense of belonging and motivation. Teachers who experience stagnation or negative changes in school culture report diminished satisfaction, whereas those in environments that prioritize collaboration and continuous improvement find renewed purpose in their roles.

Ultimately, the study finds that the mesosystem, specifically the school setting, has the most profound impact on teacher retention. Both novice and veteran educators identify school culture, leadership, and peer relationships as primary determinants of their professional

experiences. While district-level policies, community engagement, and external societal factors contribute to their perceptions of the profession, the immediate school environment remains the most critical factor in their decision to stay.

Chapter 5 - Discussion, Implication and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the findings of this qualitative study, which investigated teacher retention through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory from the perspectives of both novice and veteran educators. The purpose of the study was to explore how various environmental systems influenced teachers' decisions to remain in the profession, providing a deeper understanding of the factors that affected teacher retention.

The chapter begins with a summary of the study's most significant findings, offering a detailed overview of key results. These findings served as the foundation for subsequent analysis and interpretation, where connections between the data and the existing body of research were examined.

The discussion highlighted how the results addressed the study's objectives, offering insights into the complex factors that impacted teacher retention and attrition. The implications of the findings were considered in practical, theoretical, and policy-related contexts, emphasizing their relevance for educators, administrators, and policymakers. These implications shed light on strategies to enhance teacher retention and improve support structures across different educational environments.

The chapter also identifies areas for future research, outlining questions that emerged from the study's findings and acknowledging its limitations. These recommendations encouraged ongoing exploration to build on the insights gained, fostering continued growth and understanding in the field. Finally, the chapter concludes with a reflective summary, tying together the central themes and contributions of the study while reinforcing its significance in both research and practice.

Research Questions

RQ 1: How do novice and veteran teachers perceive the factors of retention through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory?

- SQ 1: How does the microsystem, partner teacher/department, directly influence retention of novice and veteran teachers?
- SQ 2: How does the mesosystem, school building, directly influence retention of novice and veteran teachers?
- SQ 3: How does the exosystem, school district, directly influence retention of novice and veteran teachers?
- SQ 4: How does the macrosystem, local community, directly influence retention of novice and veteran teachers?
- SQ 5: How does the chronosystem, changes over time, directly influence retention of novice and veteran teachers?

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings is framed through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, providing a structured analysis of the factors influencing teacher retention. This analysis first examines novice teachers, exploring how each ecological system shapes their early career experiences and influences their sense of commitment. Following this, the discussion shifts to veteran teachers, considering the impact of each system on their long-term retention and identifying the key factors that sustain their engagement in the profession.

Theoretical Framework

This section presents the findings of the study through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which provides a framework for understanding how various

environmental influences shape individual experiences. By examining the data within this theoretical context, the discussion highlights the ways in which different systems, ranging from direct interactions in the classroom to broader institutional and societal structures, impact the experiences of educators.

The findings will be analyzed through the layers of Bronfenbrenner's model, illustrating how relationships, policies, and external factors contribute to both challenges and support within the educational system. In the next sections, these insights will be further explored by comparing the experiences of novice and veteran educators, emphasizing the role of systemic structures in shaping their professional trajectories.

Novice Participants

The novice educators' experiences reveal a dynamic interplay of interconnected factors shaping their professional journeys. Insights from this group demonstrate the utility of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, encompassing the microsystem**,** mesosystem**,** exosystem**,** macrosystem**,** and chronosystem, in explaining the diverse influences on their satisfaction, growth, and retention.

Microsystem

The findings revealed that positive relationships were at the heart of novice teachers' experiences, significantly shaping their sense of commitment and job satisfaction. Strong connections with colleagues, students, and families created a supportive ecosystem where collaboration, trust, and emotional reassurance flourished. Research supports the critical role of these relationships, positive interactions with colleagues and administration enhance job satisfaction, strengthen professional resilience, and ultimately reduce early-career burnout

(Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Without these connections, early-career teachers often struggle to sustain their passion and perseverance in the profession.

For many novice teachers, relationships with partner teachers and administrators defined their experience and influenced their longevity in the field. Bailey described how a “family-like” atmosphere among colleagues cultivated camaraderie, making the school a place where they felt valued and supported. This echoes research emphasizing the importance of collegial relationships in mitigating workplace stress and increasing teacher retention (Lochmiller et al., 2024). Carson similarly emphasized the stability and emotional reassurance that came from working in a school where collaboration was prioritized. Teachers leaned on one another not just for instructional support but also for navigating the emotional toll of the profession, an essential factor in preventing burnout (Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014).

However, while strong relationships fostered a sense of belonging, the absence of support within the school environment could erode even the most dedicated teachers' morale. Carson recalled how strained relationships with a partner teacher made success feel unattainable, further contributing to the challenges of navigating the early years of teaching. Without trust and collaboration, teachers experienced increased stress and a diminished sense of connection to their school environment. Ace shared that misalignment among staff, coupled with minimal leadership engagement, left them feeling isolated and overburdened, illustrating how the presence or absence of support could make or break a teacher's experience.

Ultimately, the microsystem, comprising relationships with colleagues, served as the foundation of teacher retention. When these relationships thrived, teachers felt connected, motivated, and resilient. But when support was inconsistent or absent, dissatisfaction and burnout became inevitable. These findings underscore the need for intentional efforts to cultivate

school environments that prioritize collaboration, trust, and emotional reassurance. As research suggests, when schools invest in fostering strong professional communities, teachers are more likely to remain in their roles and sustain their passion for teaching (Kraft et al., 2016).

Mesosystem

The findings highlighted that school culture, leadership, and collaboration opportunities were central to teacher retention. A positive school culture rooted in respect, inclusivity, and teamwork fostered a sense of belonging and encouraged teachers to remain in the profession. Novice educators described how a supportive environment enhanced their emotional well-being, strengthened collaboration, and deepened their professional commitment. This aligns with research by Sorensen and Ladd (2020), which found that school climate and organizational support directly impact early-career teacher retention, with positive cultures reducing burnout and attrition rates.

For Bailey, the school's culture felt like an extension of family, where staff members genuinely supported one another, making it easier to navigate the challenges of teaching. Carson echoed this sentiment, explaining that a collaborative and respectful environment not only boosted their confidence but also made them feel like they were contributing to something larger than themselves. In contrast, Drew described experiencing a "lack of community in the building," which made daily responsibilities feel isolating and overwhelming. Finley added that a toxic school culture, one where competition overshadowed teamwork, created barriers to effective teaching, making it difficult to find joy and fulfillment in the role. These experiences reinforce the critical role of culture in sustaining teacher engagement, as schools that foster trust and collaboration create environments where educators can thrive.

Leadership also played a crucial role in shaping teachers' experiences. Participants valued leaders who provided clear expectations and followed through on commitments, fostering trust and stability within the school. Research supports this, with Grissom (2021) identifying principal leadership quality as one of the strongest predictors of teacher retention, particularly when leaders prioritize professional development, communication, and emotional support. Teachers in the study expressed a strong preference for administrators who were approachable, involved, and willing to advocate for their needs.

Bailey shared how a principal's consistent follow-through and active presence in classrooms created a sense of stability, reinforcing their trust in the school's leadership. Conversely, Drew recalled how inconsistent leadership, marked by unfulfilled promises and lack of transparency, led to frustration and eroded confidence in administration. Carson emphasized that when leaders not only listened but also acted on staff concerns, it strengthened morale and reinforced their commitment to the school. This aligns with findings from Sebastian et al. (2016), who highlight that teacher-administrator trust significantly influences job satisfaction and long-term commitment to a school.

Collaboration emerged as another essential factor in novice teachers' experiences. Opportunities to work closely with colleagues, share ideas, and problem-solve strengthened professional growth and reduced feelings of isolation. Research indicates that professional learning communities and mentorship programs improve teacher efficacy and retention by providing structured opportunities for collaboration and peer learning (Kraft et al., 2016). Carson described how a strong sense of teamwork within their grade level helped lighten the workload, making the demands of teaching more manageable. Finley emphasized that collaborative spaces allowed teachers to refine their practices, troubleshoot challenges, and celebrate successes

together. However, not all participants had access to such support. Drew noted that a lack of collaboration made it more difficult to stay motivated, as the absence of shared problem-solving increased the emotional and logistical burden of teaching. This sentiment aligns with Ronfeldt et al. (2013), who found that teachers in schools with strong collegial networks were more likely to remain in the profession and report higher job satisfaction.

Ultimately, school culture, leadership, and collaboration are deeply intertwined, shaping novice teachers' sense of belonging, effectiveness, and longevity in the profession. When these factors align to create a supportive environment, teachers feel empowered to grow, contribute, and sustain their commitment to their roles. However, when any of these elements are lacking, dissatisfaction and burnout become more likely, underscoring the importance of intentional efforts to build schools where educators feel valued and supported.

Exoystem

The findings revealed that meaningful professional development, district leadership, and administrative follow-through significantly impacted novice teachers' experiences and overall job satisfaction. Professional development was most valuable when it addressed practical classroom challenges and provided targeted support for diverse learners. Novice participants consistently emphasized the need for hands-on training that was directly applicable to their classrooms, allowing them to refine their skills with confidence. Ellis shared how a district-led workshop on differentiated instruction transformed their approach, making them feel more equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students. This aligns with previous research indicating that job-embedded professional development, particularly coaching and mentoring programs, enhances teacher efficacy and retention by addressing real-time classroom needs (Kraft et al., 2018).

However, not all professional development experiences were beneficial. Some novice participants expressed frustration with district-level training that felt disconnected from their specific challenges. Carson described a series of professional development sessions that were too broad to be useful, noting that "they talked about strategies, but not in a way that applied to my kids." This sentiment reflects research by Garet et al. (2001), who found that effective professional development must be content-focused, sustained over time, and integrated into daily practice to have a lasting impact. When training lacked relevance, teachers felt that it was a waste of valuable time rather than a meaningful investment in their growth.

District leadership and policies played a pivotal role in shaping teachers' daily experiences, often determining whether they felt supported or stifled. Collaborative initiatives, such as district-wide grade-level meetings, fostered a sense of shared purpose and connection among educators. Finley found these meetings invaluable, explaining that "hearing how other teachers tackled similar challenges made me feel less alone in the struggle." Research by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) supports this, showing that collaborative professional learning, when implemented effectively, increases teacher satisfaction and improves student outcomes.

Still, participants raised concerns about the misalignment between district expectations and classroom realities. Ace described how rigid directives from district leaders often complicated their work, limiting their ability to meet students' unique needs. "They want us to individualize instruction, but then require us to follow a scripted curriculum, how does that make sense?" This frustration is echoed in Ingersoll's et al. (2018) study showing that overly prescriptive district mandates can hinder teacher autonomy and creativity, ultimately contributing to burnout and turnover.

Consistency and follow-through from district leaders emerged as essential for building trust. When leaders introduced initiatives without sufficient support or resources, it led to confusion and frustration among teachers. Drew recalled an initiative to integrate a new assessment system that was rolled out without training or clear expectations, causing widespread stress among staff. This lack of follow-through created a sense of instability and disengagement. On the other hand, Bailey described how transparent communication and reliable leadership at the district level helped them feel more secure in their role. “When district leaders actually listen and follow through, it makes a huge difference in how we approach change,” they explained. Research by Sebastian et al. (2016) reinforces this, finding that strong district leadership positively influences teacher morale when policies are implemented with transparency, responsiveness, and adequate resources.

For many, a sense of reliability and trust in district leadership was crucial in maintaining their commitment to the profession. When teachers felt heard and supported, they were more willing to adapt to new initiatives and invest in long-term professional growth. However, when district policies felt disconnected from the realities of the classroom, it led to frustration, disillusionment, and ultimately, attrition. These findings highlight the importance of bridging the gap between district leadership and classroom practice, ensuring that professional development, policies, and initiatives are not just well-intentioned, but also practical and responsive to the needs of educators.

Macrosystem

Novice teachers identified community support, cultural alignment, and societal perceptions as influential factors in their experience and commitment to the profession. When families and local stakeholders actively engaged with schools, teachers felt a stronger sense of

fulfillment, as these interactions reinforced their value and belonging within the community. Finley described how a simple note from a parent expressing gratitude for their dedication gave them the motivation to push through a particularly challenging week. Ellis similarly found encouragement in classroom volunteers, recalling how parents' involvement in school events made them feel part of a broader team working toward student success. This aligns with research indicating that strong school-community partnerships enhance teacher satisfaction and retention by fostering a sense of shared responsibility and mutual investment in student success (Epstein, 2023).

However, not all schools experienced the same level of community engagement. Drew noted the stark contrast between schools with active parental involvement and those where families were largely absent from the educational process. "At my last school, parents were in the building all the time, helping with events, checking in on their kids' progress. Here, I feel like I'm doing it all alone," they shared. The inconsistency in community involvement created disparities in teacher support, leaving some educators feeling disconnected and underappreciated. Without these external reinforcements, the emotional weight of the job became more difficult to carry.

Cultural alignment between teachers' personal values and the school community also played a critical role in job satisfaction. Educators found that working in environments that aligned with their beliefs, whether a focus on equity, collaboration, or student-centered learning, deepened their sense of purpose. Bailey, who came from a family of educators, shared that teaching in a school that prioritized relationship-building and inclusivity reinforced their long-standing belief that education should be a place of belonging for all students. Research supports

this, showing that teachers who perceive strong cultural alignment with their school are more likely to experience job satisfaction and remain in their roles long-term (Pantic & Florian, 2015).

Beyond the immediate school environment, broader societal perceptions of teaching added another layer of complexity. Participants frequently expressed frustration over the undervaluing of their profession, particularly when discussions around education focused solely on test scores rather than the relationships and growth happening in their classrooms. Finley shared how demoralizing it was to hear public narratives that reduced teaching to standardized outcomes, ignoring the countless hours spent supporting students' emotional and academic development. Research suggests that negative public perceptions, often driven by policy debates and media portrayals, impact teacher motivation and professional identity (Bosso, 2017). These narratives can create an added emotional burden, making teachers feel unseen and underappreciated.

Despite these challenges, many participants found strength in their dedication to students and their belief in education's transformative power. Ellis explained that while external pressures were frustrating, moments of connection with students and families reaffirmed their decision to stay. "At the end of the day, it's about the kids. That's what keeps me here," they shared. Carson found resilience in advocating for change, using their voice to challenge misconceptions about teaching and push for policies that better supported educators. Research suggests that community and administrative recognition can counteract negative societal perceptions by reinforcing teachers' sense of purpose and professional identity (Bosso, 2017). When educators feel supported, both within and beyond their schools, they are more likely to remain committed to their roles.

Ultimately, the interplay between community support, cultural alignment, and societal perceptions shaped novice teachers' experiences in profound ways. Schools that fostered strong community connections, aligned with teachers' values, and actively countered negative narratives about education created environments where teachers felt valued, motivated, and resilient. Conversely, a lack of support, cultural mismatches, and discouraging public perceptions made the challenges of teaching more difficult to navigate. These findings emphasize the need for intentional efforts to strengthen community engagement, ensure cultural alignment, and elevate the public perception of teaching to create sustainable and fulfilling careers for educators.

Chronosystem

Novice teachers highlighted their desire to make a lasting difference in students' lives as a powerful motivator. Many described how meaningful interactions with students fueled their passion for teaching, reinforcing their sense of purpose even during challenging times. Finley reflected on a binder filled with letters from former students, each note a reminder of the lives they had touched. "When I question whether I'm making an impact, I read through those letters, and it reminds me why I'm here," they shared. Similarly, Ellis spoke about a signed dress from their student teaching class, a memento symbolizing the strong connections they had built. These moments of recognition and gratitude reaffirmed their commitment to the profession. Research supports this, showing that teachers who feel a deep sense of purpose and connection with their students are more likely to remain in the field (Ingersoll et al., 2021).

For many, their own experiences as students also shaped their motivation to teach. Carson recalled how a teacher's personalized support during a difficult childhood inspired them to enter the profession, hoping to provide that same encouragement to their students. "I remember how much it meant to have someone believe in me. Now, I try to be that person for

my students," they explained. Gu and Day (2007) also highlighted that educators who see teaching as a calling, rather than just a career, demonstrate higher levels of resilience and job satisfaction. When teachers witness the long-term impact of their work, whether through student success stories or small moments of appreciation, it strengthens their sense of fulfillment and reinforces their commitment to staying in the classroom.

Cultural shifts within schools and districts also played a significant role in shaping teacher experiences and retention. Participants described how positive changes, such as stronger leadership and increased collaboration among staff, created a more cohesive and supportive environment. Bailey noted how a shift in leadership at their school led to a more positive culture, where teachers felt heard and supported. "Before, we were all just surviving. Now, we're working together and actually enjoying teaching again," they shared. Johnson (2019) confirms that schools with strong leadership and a collaborative culture see higher teacher retention rates, as educators feel more connected and valued.

Expanded opportunities for collaboration also strengthened teachers' sense of community and trust. Carson described how, over time, their school developed stronger professional learning communities, where teachers shared strategies and problem-solved together. "Knowing I have a team to lean on makes a huge difference. We're not just coworkers—we're a support system," they explained. This aligns with findings from Reeves et al. (2017) who highlight how increased collaboration fosters job satisfaction by reducing teacher isolation and creating a sense of shared purpose.

However, not all cultural shifts were positive. Some participants experienced a decline in administrative follow-through and reduced trust among staff, which created a toxic environment that made it difficult to stay motivated. Drew described how, over time, leadership became less

engaged, leading to a culture of inconsistency and frustration. “At first, it felt like we were building something great. Then leadership stopped following through, and suddenly, everything felt disjointed and unsupported,” they explained. Similarly, Finley shared that shifting district priorities, such as an increased emphasis on standardized testing over student relationships, made teaching feel less rewarding. “We used to focus on the whole child. Now, it feels like we’re just chasing numbers,” they lamented. Sasan et al. (2023) underscores how evolving school culture, whether through administrative changes, shifting priorities, or lack of leadership support, can profoundly impact teacher satisfaction and long-term commitment.

Ultimately, teachers’ experiences evolved over time, influenced by both their personal sense of purpose and the cultural dynamics within their schools. When they felt valued, supported, and connected to their students and colleagues, their motivation remained strong. However, when leadership faltered and cultural shifts moved away from student-centered practices, it became harder to sustain that commitment. These findings highlight the importance of fostering a positive and stable school culture, one that prioritizes collaboration, teacher support, and a shared vision for student success, to ensure that educators remain engaged and dedicated to their work.

Veteran Participants

The findings from the veteran group reveal a deep understanding of the layers of influence affecting their professional satisfaction and commitment. Their insights highlight how relationships within the microsystem, interactions in the mesosystem, policies in the exosystem, societal values in the macrosystem, and changes over time in the chronosystem collectively shape their experiences.

Microsystem

Veteran teachers consistently highlighted how relationships within their immediate peer group, particularly with partner teachers and grade-level teams, were directly related to their success and job satisfaction, aligning with the mesosystem. These relationships formed the foundation for collaboration, trust, and shared problem-solving, fostering a sense of community and belonging. Many described their peer group as a "family," emphasizing that positive relationships created environments where they felt supported and motivated. Urban stated outright that they "cannot stay in a position without a good partner/team," underscoring how critical these bonds were in sustaining long-term commitment. Similarly, Xen described their school's sense of community as essential to their success, explaining that working in an environment where colleagues supported one another made teaching not only manageable but fulfilling. Research supports this, showing that strong peer networks contribute to higher teacher retention and job satisfaction (Ronfeldt et al., 2015).

Collaborative relationships with grade-level peers were seen as critical for sustaining professional growth and improving practice. Teachers valued environments where their partner teachers actively collaborated, shared resources, and worked together toward common goals. Vale highlighted the significance of teamwork in fostering professional growth and success, explaining that being part of a collaborative culture helped them continuously refine their teaching practices. Wynn echoed this, emphasizing that a shared sense of purpose among colleagues made the day-to-day challenges of teaching more manageable and rewarding. These experiences created a cohesive work culture that reinforced their passion for teaching. This aligns with findings that professional learning communities and collaborative networks enhance instructional quality and overall teacher well-being (DuFour, 2007).

Conversely, when these relationships were absent or negative, the impact was profound. Urban described how working in a school with a "poor culture" and a lack of collaboration made them feel isolated and dissatisfied, ultimately leading them to consider leaving. Xen noted that a toxic work environment, where peer support was lacking, diminished their motivation and increased feelings of burnout. Research has shown that a lack of collegiality and support is a significant factor contributing to teacher burnout and attrition (Schatz-Oppenheimer & Goldenberg, 2023). Negative interactions or a lack of collaboration within their immediate peer group created toxic work environments that drained enthusiasm and ultimately drove some teachers to seek different opportunities. Teachers like York and Urban stressed that without trust and alignment with their partner teachers, it was difficult to remain in their roles.

Ultimately, the microsystem's influence on these veteran teachers was clear: strong, supportive relationships with partner teachers and grade-level teams were essential for fostering a positive experience, while strained or absent connections posed significant challenges to their long-term success. As York explained, the relationships they built with colleagues were just as important as their relationships with students in shaping their overall satisfaction and willingness to stay in the profession. Schools that prioritize a collaborative and supportive peer culture not only enhance teacher retention but also create environments where educators can thrive both personally and professionally.

Mesosystem

Veteran teachers emphasized that the mesosystem, particularly the school building's culture and environment, played a significant role in their job satisfaction, success, and retention. A positive, family-like school culture created a strong sense of belonging, fostering collaboration and mutual support among staff. Xen described their school's sense of community as vital to

their ability to thrive, noting that a supportive culture made the daily challenges of teaching more manageable and rewarding. Research has shown that school culture significantly impacts teachers' morale and their decision to remain in the profession (Bosso, 2017). When teachers worked in cohesive environments, where colleagues shared goals and supported one another, it reinforced their commitment to their roles. This aligns with findings that strong social connections in schools enhance job satisfaction and professional efficacy (Sudibjo & Suwarli, 2020).

Collaboration within the school was a key element of a thriving mesosystem. Opportunities for teamwork and shared problem-solving helped teachers feel valued and connected. Teachers repeatedly stressed that working with a supportive team and having a reliable partner teacher were essential for long-term satisfaction. Vale described how teamwork fostered professional growth, explaining that collaborative problem-solving with colleagues not only improved instructional practices but also created a sense of camaraderie that made teaching more sustainable. Wynn echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that mutual support from colleagues allowed them to stay motivated even in difficult moments. Zane added that strong teamwork cultivated a family-like atmosphere, where challenges were addressed collectively rather than in isolation. Studies have found that teacher retention is often linked to a school's collaborative culture, as shared professional responsibilities and mutual support contribute to a sense of belonging and motivation (Lambersky, 2016). In contrast, a lack of collaboration or strained relationships left some feeling isolated and disconnected, diminishing their enthusiasm for teaching. Urban described how a school environment lacking collaboration created frustration and made them question their future in the profession.

School leadership played a pivotal role in shaping the school culture. Strong administrative support, clear expectations, and consistent follow-through contributed to a cohesive environment where teachers felt empowered and valued. Zane praised administrators who actively fostered collaboration and followed through on commitments, explaining that effective leadership builds trust and encouraged a shared vision among staff. Vale also highlighted the role of supportive administrators, noting that their school culture improved when leaders promoted teamwork and made an effort to listen to teachers' concerns. Transformational leadership has been shown to significantly impact teacher morale, fostering a positive school climate that enhances job satisfaction (Lambersky, 2016). Conversely, weak or absent leadership often led to negative shifts in the school culture, resulting in decreased morale and motivation. Urban noted that insufficient administrative support contributed to a "poor culture" that eroded their motivation, while Xen described how ineffective leadership created an environment of uncertainty, making it difficult to feel secure in their role. Schools experiencing leadership instability often struggle with teacher retention, as shifting priorities and inconsistent policies create an atmosphere of unpredictability (Hanselman et al., 2016).

The mesosystem, defined by its culture, leadership, and collaboration opportunities, directly shaped veteran teachers' experiences. Supportive environments where teachers felt connected and valued enhanced their professional identity and commitment. York explained that a positive school culture influenced their decision to stay, noting that the relationships they built with colleagues and students were central to their job satisfaction. However, when school culture deteriorated due to poor leadership or limited collaboration, it became a driving factor in decisions to leave. Xen emphasized that they could not remain in a school where negative culture and a lack of support diminished their passion for teaching. Research confirms that school

culture and leadership are among the most influential factors affecting teachers' long-term commitment, underscoring the importance of fostering a stable and collaborative educational environment (Dottin, 2023).

Exosystem

The school district plays a crucial role in shaping veteran teachers' experiences through professional development, policy alignment, and resource allocation. Research emphasizes that district-led professional development is most effective when it is relevant, targeted, and connected to the real challenges teachers face in their classrooms (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Teachers consistently highlighted that sessions focused on practical strategies for managing behavior or meeting diverse student needs were particularly valuable. Zane described how workshops on culturally responsive teaching helped refine their instructional approach, making them feel more equipped to reach all learners. Similarly, Vale found professional development focused on behavior intervention strategies particularly useful, as it provided them with tangible techniques they could immediately implement in their classrooms.

However, not all professional development experiences were beneficial. Wynn expressed frustration with training sessions that felt disconnected from classroom realities, describing how generic presentations often failed to offer applicable solutions. "It's hard to stay engaged when the content doesn't relate to what we actually need," they explained. This aligns with research showing that professional learning opportunities that incorporate active engagement and address authentic classroom concerns lead to higher teacher satisfaction and improved instructional effectiveness (Garet et al., 2001). Many teachers emphasized the importance of incorporating teacher input to ensure that training sessions addressed authentic needs rather than being

generalized or purely theoretical. York stressed that when teachers had a voice in shaping professional development, the sessions were far more impactful and meaningful.

District expectations and their alignment with daily classroom realities were also key themes. Teachers described feeling disconnected when policies were implemented without consideration for the unique needs of individual schools. Urban voiced frustration over rigid district mandates, explaining that the "one-size-fits-all" approach often created more problems than solutions. They felt that district leaders made decisions without fully understanding the nuances of their classrooms. Research suggests that policy misalignment with classroom realities can contribute to teacher dissatisfaction and burnout, particularly when educators feel excluded from decision-making processes (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Conversely, York described how district-led collaboration initiatives helped enhance teaching practices and create shared goals, demonstrating that when teachers were actively involved in shaping policies, they were more likely to feel invested in their success.

Teachers stressed that district initiatives would be more effective if educators were involved in the decision-making process, especially when it came to curriculum changes and instructional mandates. Xen highlighted how abrupt shifts in curriculum often disrupted instructional continuity, making it harder for teachers to adapt and effectively support students. "If we had a seat at the table before these decisions were made, implementation would go so much smoother," they said. Research supports this perspective, finding that including teacher perspectives fosters a greater sense of agency and investment in policy implementation, ultimately leading to more effective instructional practices (Kraft et al., 2016).

Resource availability was another critical factor influencing teachers' experiences. Access to adequate teaching materials, up-to-date technology, and external support services

significantly impacted job satisfaction and student outcomes. Research has demonstrated that well-resourced schools contribute to higher teacher retention rates and improved student achievement, as teachers feel more equipped to address diverse learning needs (Podolsky et al., 2016). York explained that having access to high-quality resources made them feel valued by the district, reinforcing their commitment to their school. Similarly, Xen highlighted the importance of support services like behavior specialists and mental health counselors, noting that these professionals helped alleviate some of the challenges teachers faced when addressing student needs. This aligns with findings that comprehensive student support services enhance both teacher effectiveness and job satisfaction (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

However, resource inequities across schools were a source of frustration. Teachers expressed concerns about limited access to classroom supplies, outdated technology, and the absence of key support roles like instructional coaches. Urban noted that while some schools had an abundance of resources, others, often in lower-income areas, were left scrambling to provide even the basics for students. “We are expected to do the same job with half the resources,” they explained. These inequities created additional barriers to effective teaching and contributed to feelings of professional disillusionment. Wynn echoed this sentiment, noting that the lack of instructional support staff made it difficult to address student learning gaps effectively. Studies indicate that disparities in resource allocation disproportionately affect schools in lower-income areas, exacerbating teacher turnover and widening achievement gaps (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Ultimately, veteran teachers emphasized that district-level support and thoughtful resource distribution were essential for maintaining morale and sustaining long-term commitment. Schools where teachers felt heard, had access to relevant professional

development, and were equipped with adequate resources fostered a sense of investment and belonging. Conversely, when district policies were misaligned with classroom realities or resources were unevenly distributed, teachers experienced increased frustration and burnout. Research underscores that districts that prioritize educator input, provide meaningful professional development, and allocate resources equitably create environments where teachers are more likely to remain committed to their profession (Podolsky et al., 2016).

Macrosystem

At the macrosystem level, the broader community significantly influenced veteran teachers' experiences and perceptions of their roles. Community engagement was a vital source of encouragement and motivation for educators. Zane described how receiving positive feedback from families and community members reinforced their dedication, especially during difficult times. Similarly, York emphasized the power of strong school-community partnerships, recalling how family nights and volunteer initiatives strengthened relationships and created a shared commitment to student success. Epstein's (2023) research supports this, indicating that strong school-community partnerships enhance teacher morale and student achievement, reinforcing a collective responsibility for educational success.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of these connections, as teachers relied on community support more than ever. Wynn reflected on how parents stepping in to assist with remote learning provided reassurance that their work was valued. Studies have shown that schools with active parental and community involvement experienced greater teacher retention and job satisfaction, as these relationships provided both emotional and professional support (Bryk et al., 2010). Conversely, a lack of involvement from families and community partners contributed to feelings of isolation, making it more difficult for teachers to stay motivated and

connected to their work. Xen shared how disengaged families made their job more challenging, stating, “When there’s no buy-in from the community, it feels like we’re working against the current instead of with it.”

Cultural alignment between the school and community played a crucial role in shaping veteran teachers’ long-term commitment. Educators who worked in environments that prioritized shared values like inclusivity and equity found greater collaboration and stronger relationships. Vale emphasized that working in a school that aligned with their belief in student-centered, inclusive practices made their job more fulfilling. “When the school and the community share the same vision, it makes everything, communication, collaboration, even challenges, easier to navigate,” they explained. Research has found that when schools and communities align in their educational values, teachers experience greater professional fulfillment and long-term commitment to their roles (Ishimaru, 2017). However, misalignment between community values and school practices created significant obstacles. Wynn described the frustration of implementing research-based instructional strategies, only to face resistance from families who preferred traditional teaching methods. “We’re expected to innovate, but when the community doesn’t trust new approaches, it feels like we’re fighting an uphill battle,” they noted. This misalignment not only hindered instructional progress but also led some educators to question their future in the profession. Studies suggest that resistance from community members toward educational innovations can create barriers to implementation, making it essential for schools to foster open dialogue with families to build trust and support (Auerbach, 2012).

Public perception of education emerged as a complex issue, influencing both teacher morale and commitment. Societal attitudes often undervalued the teaching profession, contributing to frustrations over low pay and a lack of respect for educators’ expertise. Zane

expressed disappointment in how teachers were portrayed in the media, noting that the emphasis on standardized test scores often overshadowed the relational and developmental aspects of teaching. “People think we just teach content, but they don’t see the emotional labor, the mentoring, the countless hours we put in outside the classroom,” they shared. Research has shown that negative public perceptions of teaching contribute to increased stress, decreased job satisfaction, and higher turnover rates (Santoro, 2018).

Despite these challenges, some educators viewed negative societal perceptions as motivation to advocate for the profession. York described how they actively engaged in public discourse about education, sharing positive stories about their students and the impact of their work. “I can’t change the entire system, but I can change how I talk about my profession,” they explained. Santoro suggests that when teachers actively engage in advocacy and public discussions about their profession, they experience a stronger sense of agency and professional identity, which can buffer against burnout (2018).

Ultimately, the macrosystem played a defining role in shaping veteran teachers’ experiences. Supportive communities reinforced educators’ sense of purpose, while cultural misalignment and negative societal perceptions created challenges that tested their resilience. Teachers who felt connected to their communities and engaged in advocacy were more likely to sustain their passion and commitment to the profession. As schools continue to navigate these external influences, fostering strong community partnerships and promoting a positive public narrative about education will be essential in ensuring long-term teacher satisfaction and retention.

Chronosystem

Within the chronosystem, changes over time had a significant impact on the experiences and perspectives of veteran teachers. Reflecting on the long-term influence of their work brought a strong sense of fulfillment and validation. Seeing former students succeed and contribute to the community reaffirmed their dedication and provided powerful reminders of the lasting value of their efforts. Zane described how their "jar of kind notes" from students served as a tangible reminder of the impact they had made over the years. Similarly, Vale shared how witnessing former students return as successful adults fueled their motivation, stating, "When I see them thriving, I know that all the hard work was worth it." Research suggests that teachers who witness the long-term achievements of their students experience a greater sense of professional purpose and resilience, reinforcing their commitment to the field (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). Hearing from former students who expressed gratitude further strengthened their resolve, as positive student-teacher relationships have been shown to enhance teacher well-being and longevity in the profession (Kini & Podolsky, 2016).

Shifts in school culture over the years also affected teachers' job satisfaction and connection to their roles. While some expressed frustration with a stagnant environment where little progress was made in fostering a supportive community, others noted positive cultural changes. Urban described how a lack of meaningful change in school culture led to disengagement, explaining that "when the same issues persist year after year, it becomes exhausting." In contrast, York reflected on how gradual improvements in staff collaboration and leadership responsiveness strengthened their connection to the school, saying, "It finally feels like we're working together instead of just coexisting." Research indicates that a school culture characterized by trust, collaboration, and shared leadership significantly impacts teacher retention and professional satisfaction (Bryk et al., 2010). York noted that as their school

prioritized professional learning communities (PLCs), teamwork and shared accountability became stronger, reinforcing their commitment. Studies show that schools fostering PLCs and emphasizing collective teacher efficacy lead to higher engagement and job satisfaction among educators (Donohoo et al., 2018).

Research has consistently found that collegial relationships and mentorship opportunities are key predictors of teacher retention and job satisfaction (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Sustained motivation for these teachers was closely tied to professional relationships, opportunities for growth, and consistent recognition. Strong connections with colleagues and opportunities for collaboration helped reduce feelings of isolation and fostered a sense of belonging. Wynn emphasized the importance of peer support, sharing that "having colleagues to lean on makes all the difference in keeping the passion alive." Similarly, Xen noted that professional relationships provided not only instructional support but also emotional reassurance, making the challenges of teaching more manageable.

A focus on adaptability and continuous improvement allowed teachers to remain responsive to evolving student needs, keeping their work fresh and purposeful. Zane explained how embracing change and seeking out new strategies kept them engaged, stating, "The moment you stop learning, you start burning out." Recognizing the importance of adaptability, research highlights that teachers who engage in lifelong learning and reflective practice maintain higher levels of motivation and effectiveness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Recognition from peers, families, and the broader community served as an enduring source of encouragement, helping teachers maintain their passion and commitment to the profession over time. Vale described how simple acknowledgments from parents and students reinforced their dedication, explaining that "when families recognize the work we put in, it

reminds us that what we do matters." Santoro confirms that public and professional recognition reinforces teachers' sense of efficacy and long-term dedication (2018).

Ultimately, the chronosystem reveals how long-term experiences, whether witnessing student success, navigating cultural shifts, or sustaining motivation through relationships and recognition, shape veteran teachers' resilience and commitment. While challenges such as stagnation in school culture and external pressures can create obstacles, the ability to adapt, collaborate, and find meaning in student growth keeps teachers engaged over time. As schools continue to evolve, fostering supportive cultures, prioritizing professional learning, and recognizing teachers' contributions will be essential in sustaining educators' passion and dedication throughout their careers.

Most Impactful Themes to Novices and Veterans

The relationship between school culture and administrative leadership serves as a foundational element in shaping teacher retention, influencing professional satisfaction, and fostering long-term commitment to the field. Within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, these interconnected influences are examined separately for novice and veteran educators, highlighting how leadership practices and cultural dynamics impact their experiences at different stages of their careers. While the theoretical framework provides insight into the layered nature of these influences, the most impactful themes for veteran teachers center on the strength of school culture, the consistency of leadership, and the availability of meaningful collaboration, underscoring the essential role of a supportive and well-structured environment in sustaining teacher engagement and retention.

School Culture and Administrative Support

The relationship between school culture and administrative leadership plays a crucial role in shaping teacher satisfaction, professional growth, and retention. Both novice and veteran participants emphasized that strong leadership is essential to creating and maintaining a collaborative, inclusive, and supportive school culture. Research consistently supports the idea that a positive school environment, led by effective administrators, fosters teacher well-being and strengthens their commitment to the school community (Leithwood et al., 2004). The experiences shared by the novice teachers, Carson, Drew, Bailey, and others illustrate how leadership practices directly influence school culture and teacher retention.

Carson, a novice teacher, highlighted how a "family-like school culture" was cultivated by administrators who prioritized collaboration and established a shared purpose among staff. This intentional focus on teamwork and addressing challenges created a strong sense of community and support. In contrast, Drew's experience illustrated the opposite, how the lack of administrative involvement led to isolation and a fractured school culture. Drew's statement that "not having supportive administration impacts everything I do in my classroom and makes me feel alone" underscores the detrimental effect of inconsistent leadership. Without a cohesive culture or leadership intervention, teachers often find themselves struggling in silos, disconnected from their peers.

Participants emphasized that administrators who actively listen to staff, seek teacher input, and respond to concerns in real time help establish trust and respect within the school. Vale, a veteran educator, and Bailey, a novice educator, both recognized that collaborative leadership strengthened their sense of unity and mutual purpose. Vale pointed out how

administrators who promote open communication foster a culture of trust, while Bailey commended leaders who worked alongside teachers to align goals and expectations.

Research by Bryk et al. (2010) on relational trust in schools supports these observations, noting that trust is a key component of effective school communities. Administrators who demonstrate consistency, accountability, and active engagement build strong relationships with staff, which, in turn, promotes teacher satisfaction and retention. For novice educators like Drew and Ellis, the presence of a supportive administrator made the difference between feeling overwhelmed and feeling part of a team. Ellis highlighted how having a "supportive partner/team" was essential for overcoming challenges, emphasizing the importance of collaboration in sustaining new teachers.

Veteran teachers like Vale and Wynn echoed this sentiment, underscoring how collaborative environments not only contributed to their professional growth but also enhanced their personal connection to the school community. These relationships with colleagues and administrators created a cohesive atmosphere, which, according to Wynn, was essential for long-term engagement and job satisfaction. Conversely, when collaboration opportunities were limited, novice teachers like Drew and Finley experienced increased isolation, burnout, and dissatisfaction.

The consistency and follow-through of district leadership also emerged as a critical factor. Drew, a novice educator, described how district leaders' failure to provide ongoing support and resources for new initiatives created frustration and diminished trust. Carson, another novice educator, similarly noted how inconsistent communication from district office leaders led to confusion and uncertainty. On the other hand, Bailey, also a novice educator, highlighted the positive impact of reliable leadership, explaining that "consistent follow-through

on district initiatives contributed to a sense of stability and alignment." This sense of reliability reinforced teachers' trust and strengthened their commitment to both the school and the district.

In conclusion, the interconnectedness of school culture, administrative leadership, and teacher retention cannot be overstated. Effective leadership fosters a positive school culture marked by collaboration, respect, and inclusivity. Administrators who engage with teachers, maintain open communication, and follow through on promises create an environment where educators feel supported and valued. This environment, in turn, promotes teacher satisfaction and retention. Both novice and veteran educators alike emphasized that when teachers experience a sense of belonging, connection, and professional growth, they are more likely to stay committed to their roles, contributing to the overall success of the school.

Meaningful Relationships

Supportive relationships with partner teachers, staff, students, and families significantly influence teacher retention by fostering a sense of community, emotional well-being, and professional fulfillment. Research highlights that collaborative and trusting school environments reduce teacher stress, promote engagement, and enhance job satisfaction (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Both novice and veteran teachers consistently described how positive relationships within their microsystem created a "family-like" atmosphere that helped buffer the demands of teaching and reinforced their commitment to the profession.

For novice teachers, relationships with partner teachers were essential for both professional growth and emotional reassurance. Ellis emphasized how having a supportive team provided practical guidance and reduced feelings of isolation. This mirrors Ingersoll and Strong's (2011) findings that mentorship and peer collaboration are critical in improving retention among early-career educators. By fostering open communication and shared problem-

solving, partner teachers helped novice educators build confidence and adapt to the challenges of the classroom.

Veteran teachers echoed the importance of these collaborative relationships, noting that collegiality and mutual support were key to their job satisfaction. Vale shared that a culture of collaboration made them feel more connected to their work and contributed to their long-term commitment to the school. Zane highlighted how relationships with colleagues helped create a positive work environment that promoted professional growth and provided a consistent source of encouragement.

Relationships with students and families were also cited as powerful motivators for staying in the profession. Teachers described how personal connections with students brought meaning and purpose to their work. Carson, a novice educator, reflected on how small tokens of appreciation from students reinforced their sense of impact, while Finley, a novice educator, emphasized that strong partnerships with families deepened their investment in the school community. Research supports this, showing that teacher-student relationships are linked to higher teacher engagement and job satisfaction (Roorda et al., 2011).

These emotional connections were particularly significant when combined with a supportive school culture. Teachers felt validated and motivated to persist through challenges when they experienced strong, trusting relationships with students, families, and colleagues. York, a veteran educator, summarized it well, explaining that “the relationships we build are what keep us grounded and connected to the work.”

In conclusion, relationships within the microsystem and mesosystem, particularly with partner teachers, staff, students, and families, are central to teacher retention. These connections create a collaborative and emotionally fulfilling environment, providing teachers with the

support and purpose they need to remain committed to the profession. Schools that prioritize these relationships not only enhance teacher satisfaction but also build a stronger, more connected community that promotes long-term retention.

Professional Development and Adaptability

Access to meaningful and adaptable professional development is a critical factor in teacher satisfaction, professional growth, and retention. Current research emphasizes that effective professional development strengthens teacher practice and promotes retention by addressing real-world classroom challenges (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Both novice and veteran educators agreed that the most impactful professional development directly aligned with their instructional needs and supported their professional growth. However, the adaptability of a district's approach plays a vital role in determining how well professional development supports teachers at different stages in their careers.

Participants highlighted the value of practical, targeted professional development that helped them refine their instructional strategies and respond to the diverse needs of students. Ellis, a novice educator, shared how workshops on supporting diverse learners were critical in boosting their confidence and refining teaching strategies. Similarly, Zane, a veteran educator, pointed to sessions on managing behavior and culturally responsive teaching as essential tools for building their capacity to meet student needs. These experiences reflect research by Garet et al. (2001), which shows that professional development focused on relevant and actionable skills positively impacts teaching practice and student outcomes.

Adaptability emerged as a crucial element in professional development success. Finley described how non-traditional professional development during the COVID-19 pandemic gave them practical skills for online learning, emphasizing that responsive and adaptive training kept

them engaged and prepared. Teachers found the most value in professional development sessions that directly addressed their classroom realities and offered strategies they could immediately implement.

However, when professional development lacked relevance or failed to address teachers' needs, frustration often followed. Carson, a novice educator, described district-level professional development as "one-size-fits-all," explaining that these generalized sessions felt disconnected from their school's specific challenges. Drew, a novice educator, echoed this sentiment, noting that professional development without follow-up or actionable support left them feeling unprepared and unsupported. Research by Garet et al. (2001) confirms that professional development is most effective when it is ongoing, content-specific, and embedded in the school context.

Participants emphasized that teacher input in shaping professional development is essential. York, a veteran educator, noted, "Asking teachers for input is very valuable, if the input is used for decision making." When teachers were involved in designing professional development, it became a meaningful tool for growth rather than a compliance exercise. Districts that adapted training based on teacher feedback fostered stronger relationships, increased engagement, and helped create a culture of continuous learning. Bailey, novice educator, described how consistent follow-up and alignment between professional development and district initiatives contributed to a sense of stability and trust, reinforcing their commitment to the school and district.

In contrast, Wynn, veteran educator, described the frustration of attending theoretical sessions that lacked practical application, calling them a "waste of time." This lack of relevance not only disengaged teachers but also diminished the perceived value of professional

development. Research shows that professional learning opportunities that lack connection to classroom practice can lead to teacher dissatisfaction and burnout, ultimately increasing attrition (Kraft et al., 2018).

Ultimately, the participants emphasized that the adaptability of a school district and the relevance of its professional development offerings have a direct impact on teacher retention. Teachers were more likely to remain in schools where professional development was targeted, responsive, and followed by ongoing support. Effective professional development, shaped by teacher input and aligned with classroom realities, created an environment where educators felt valued, confident, and committed to their work.

Implications for Practice

The findings from both novice and veteran educators provide valuable insights into the key factors that influence teacher retention and commitment. School culture, leadership, relationships, and professional growth opportunities collectively shape teachers' professional experiences and long-term engagement. By prioritizing these areas, schools and districts can foster environments where educators feel valued, supported, and motivated to remain in the profession.

The Role of School Culture and Leadership

The mesosystem, teachers' immediate school environment, exerts the most significant influence on retention. A strong, inclusive school culture establishes a foundation for teacher satisfaction, shaping how educators experience their roles and interact with their colleagues. Participants consistently highlighted that schools where collaboration, trust, and shared values were prioritized fostered a sense of belonging, making it easier to navigate professional challenges. Educators who viewed their workplace as a "family" reported greater job satisfaction

and resilience, reinforcing research that underscores the link between positive school culture and teacher retention.

Leadership emerged as a defining factor in shaping school culture. Supportive administrators played a critical role in fostering an environment where teachers felt heard, valued, and empowered. Participants frequently cited administrators who prioritized staff well-being, maintained transparent communication, and facilitated collaboration as essential to their professional fulfillment. Conversely, those who experienced leadership instability or disengaged administrators described increased frustration, disengagement, and, ultimately, attrition. Research supports these findings, emphasizing that effective leadership is one of the strongest predictors of teacher retention, particularly when administrators build trust, provide support, and promote shared decision-making.

School districts can take a proactive role in strengthening school culture and leadership by implementing structured mentorship programs for administrators, ensuring that new leaders receive coaching from experienced professionals. District-wide leadership training focused on conflict resolution, instructional leadership, and emotional intelligence can provide administrators with the tools necessary to create a supportive and effective school culture. Additionally, implementing climate surveys and teacher feedback mechanisms can help leaders identify areas for improvement and maintain a pulse on staff morale, leading to more responsive leadership that directly impacts teacher retention.

Developing School Culture

Veteran and novice educators alike underscored that a positive school culture is not accidental, it requires intentional leadership and continuous investment. Establishing shared values and a unified vision ensures that teachers, students, and families work toward common

goals. When all stakeholders contribute to shaping the school's mission, the environment becomes more cohesive and purpose-driven. Participants pointed to professional learning communities, collaborative planning, and mentorship as structures that strengthened relationships and encouraged professional growth. Research supports this, indicating that strong professional networks and structured collaboration enhance teacher satisfaction and reduce isolation (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

A recurring theme among participants was the importance of administrator visibility and presence in the building. Teachers expressed that when school leaders were actively engaged, whether through classroom visits, informal check-ins, or participation in collaborative meetings, it reinforced a culture of trust and accountability. This presence signaled investment in both teacher success and student outcomes, fostering a sense of shared responsibility. Transparent communication was also highlighted as essential in maintaining a positive climate. Educators valued administrators who kept them informed, involved them in decision-making, and provided consistent feedback, reinforcing research that links open communication to stronger school cultures.

School districts can support culture development by allocating time for collaborative planning and professional learning communities within the school day. Establishing recognition programs, such as "Teacher of the Month" initiatives or peer-nominated awards, can further strengthen morale and reinforce a culture of appreciation. Additionally, offering structured onboarding programs for new teachers, including orientation weeks and mentorship pairings, can help educators feel supported from the outset, reducing early-career burnout and attrition.

Developing Strong Leaders

Effective leadership is the backbone of a thriving school culture. However, strong leadership does not develop by chance, it requires ongoing investment in training, mentorship, and professional development. Districts must take an active role in identifying and preparing future leaders to meet the evolving needs of schools. Many veteran teachers expressed concerns about administrators who were unprepared for the complexities of leadership, reinforcing the necessity for structured leadership development programs.

Comprehensive training that blends instructional leadership, strategic planning, and emotional intelligence is critical. Participants noted that administrators who demonstrated empathy, conflict resolution skills, and responsiveness to staff needs cultivated more positive and cohesive school environments. Research indicates that transformational leadership, characterized by collaboration, support, and shared decision-making, directly correlates with teacher retention and overall school success (Sasan et al., 2023).

Mentorship and coaching were also identified as valuable tools for leadership development. Pairing novice administrators with experienced mentors provided opportunities for reflection, problem-solving, and skill refinement. Additionally, external coaching was seen as a beneficial resource, offering an objective perspective on leadership challenges. Veteran participants who had experienced ineffective leadership transitions suggested that ongoing coaching for administrators could mitigate common pitfalls and support long-term success.

Districts must also cultivate a culture of accountability and feedback, ensuring that leadership growth is an ongoing process. Administrators who regularly seek input from staff, engage in self-assessment, and remain committed to continuous learning are better positioned to lead effectively. Investing in leadership development is not just about strengthening individuals,

it is about ensuring that school communities as a whole remain stable, supportive, and conducive to teacher and student success.

Meaningful Relationships

Both novice and veteran teachers emphasized that relationships, with students, colleagues, and families, were at the core of their professional fulfillment. Strong peer connections provided a crucial source of support, helping educators navigate the demands of their roles. Schools that fostered collaboration, shared planning time, and professional learning communities saw stronger staff cohesion and increased job satisfaction.

Equally important were the relationships teachers built with students and families. Many educators cited moments of gratitude from students or parents as powerful motivators, reinforcing their sense of purpose. Veteran teachers reflected on the long-term impact of these connections, describing how seeing former students succeed reaffirmed their dedication to the profession. Research supports these findings, showing that teacher-student relationships are a key predictor of job satisfaction and professional longevity (Martin & Collie, 2016).

School districts play a critical role in fostering these relationships by providing resources, training, and opportunities for engagement. District-sponsored family engagement initiatives, mentorship programs, and school-community partnerships all contribute to creating environments where meaningful relationships can flourish.

Professional Development and Adaptability

Teachers stressed the importance of ongoing learning, particularly in adapting to shifts such as new curriculum requirements or changes in student needs. For novice educators, high-quality professional development was essential in building confidence and competence. For

veteran teachers, continued growth opportunities prevented stagnation and reinvigorated their passion for teaching.

To ensure professional development is meaningful, districts must take a responsive approach. Participants emphasized the need for training that is relevant, job-embedded, and immediately applicable. Research indicates that professional learning communities, coaching, and mentorship are among the most effective methods for supporting sustained teacher growth (Rodgers & Skelton, 2014).

Adaptability also emerged as a crucial factor in teacher retention. Educators who felt equipped to navigate change, whether due to policy shifts, instructional updates, or external challenges, were more likely to remain engaged in their work. Schools and districts must prioritize flexibility in professional development, allowing educators to continuously refine their skills and respond to evolving educational landscapes.

Supporting teacher well-being was another recurring theme. Participants highlighted that professional development should not only address instructional strategies but also include opportunities for resilience-building and self-care. Recognizing the emotional labor of teaching and providing resources for stress management and work-life balance can help sustain long-term engagement in the profession.

Ultimately, investing in ongoing learning and adaptability ensures that teachers remain effective, motivated, and committed to their work. When districts provide meaningful professional development, cultivate strong leadership, and foster collaborative school cultures, they create environments where educators and their students can thrive.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research can expand on the current findings to refine strategies that improve teacher retention, job satisfaction, and school culture. Investigating these areas further will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing educators' experiences and inform practical solutions for sustaining a committed and motivated teaching workforce. Three key areas for future exploration include an in-depth examination of school culture, a broader qualitative study incorporating a larger and more diverse sample of novice and veteran educators, and a focused analysis of the impact of leadership qualities on teacher retention.

Exploring School Culture in Greater Depth

A deeper examination of school culture is essential for understanding how it develops, evolves, and influences teacher retention. While existing research highlights the importance of a positive school environment, more detailed studies could explore the specific mechanisms that contribute to a thriving culture. A study focused on the mesosystem, the immediate school environment, would provide insights into how relationships, shared values, communication patterns, and leadership practices collectively shape teachers' experiences.

This research could examine how school culture is cultivated across different contexts, identifying the key conditions that foster a supportive, collaborative, and inclusive environment. Understanding the long-term development of school culture and the deliberate actions leaders take to reinforce or reshape it would be particularly valuable. Findings could offer practical guidance for administrators seeking to strengthen school climate and create an atmosphere where educators feel valued, respected, and motivated to remain in the profession.

Expanding the Study with a Larger, More Diverse Sample

Broadening the scope of research to include a more diverse sample of novice and veteran educators would provide a richer understanding of the factors influencing teacher retention. While the current study offers important insights, its limited sample size restricts generalizability. A larger-scale qualitative study incorporating educators from various geographic locations, school types, and demographic backgrounds would reveal whether the trends identified in this research hold true across different educational settings.

By capturing a wider range of perspectives, future research could examine how school culture, administrative support, and professional development impact retention in urban, suburban, and rural schools. Additionally, comparing the experiences of teachers at different career stages would help determine whether retention factors evolve over time. This broader dataset would allow researchers to identify commonalities while also uncovering context-specific challenges that may require tailored solutions.

Investigating the Impact of Leadership on School Culture

While the current findings highlight the significant role of leadership in shaping school culture and teacher satisfaction, further research could pinpoint the leadership qualities and practices most effective in promoting long-term retention. A targeted study could explore how leadership traits such as emotional intelligence, communication skills, and the ability to build trust influence teacher morale and commitment.

Combining quantitative and qualitative methods, such as surveys and interviews, would provide a comprehensive analysis of how different leadership styles impact school culture and teacher well-being. Additionally, studying the effects of leadership development programs on teacher retention could offer valuable insights into how districts can better prepare and support

administrators. This research would help identify specific strategies that school leaders can implement to foster an environment where educators feel empowered, supported, and motivated to stay in the profession.

By addressing these three areas, future research can provide a deeper and more actionable understanding of how school culture, teacher experiences, and leadership intersect. Expanding knowledge in these domains will enable school leaders and district administrators to design targeted interventions that improve teacher retention, enhance job satisfaction, and cultivate thriving school communities. A more robust body of research will not only support educators but also benefit students, families, and the broader educational system by ensuring greater stability and continuity in schools.

Conclusion

This study explored how novice and veteran teachers perceive the primary factors influencing their retention through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. By examining their experiences within the interconnected layers of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, the research provided insight into the complex and interwoven influences that shape educators' decisions to remain in the profession.

Findings highlighted the profound impact of immediate environments and relationships. At the microsystem level, peer connections and collaborative grade-level teams played a crucial role in shaping teachers' sense of belonging and professional fulfillment. The mesosystem emphasized how interactions between these elements, particularly school leadership practices, either reinforced a supportive culture or contributed to workplace dissatisfaction. The exosystem revealed how district policies, including professional development opportunities and resource allocation, indirectly influenced school conditions and teacher experiences. At the macrosystem

level, broader societal attitudes toward education and community engagement affected teachers' professional identities and job satisfaction. Lastly, the chronosystem illustrated how changes over time, whether shifts in leadership, evolving school cultures, or personal growth, shaped teachers' adaptability and long-term commitment.

The findings emphasize a fundamental truth: schools and their cultures play an indispensable role in teacher retention. More specifically, school leadership, particularly the principal, emerged as the most significant factor in shaping an environment where teachers feel valued, supported, and motivated to stay. The principal's role extends beyond administrative responsibilities; it is central to fostering a culture of trust, collaboration, and continuous professional growth that sustains educators throughout their careers. When leadership is strong, school culture thrives, teacher collaboration deepens, and retention rates improve. Conversely, when leadership is inconsistent or unresponsive to teachers' needs, dissatisfaction grows, and turnover increases.

Recognizing the impact of leadership on school culture and retention, districts must take proactive steps to ensure that school leaders are equipped to create positive, inclusive environments. Investing in high-quality professional development tailored to leadership effectiveness is essential. Principals should receive ongoing training, clear expectations, and meaningful feedback to refine their ability to cultivate trust, promote collaboration, and address the evolving needs of their teachers. Strengthening leadership at the school level is one of the most effective ways to enhance retention, improve workplace morale, and foster a stable, engaged teaching workforce.

Ultimately, school districts hold the responsibility for ensuring that principals and administrators have the necessary skills, resources, and support to lead effectively. A district's

commitment to developing strong leaders directly influences its ability to retain high-quality teachers. Without intentional efforts to cultivate leadership excellence, the cycle of teacher attrition will persist, affecting school stability, student achievement, and overall educational quality. If districts are serious about addressing teacher retention, they must prioritize investing in the individuals who shape the very environments where educators choose to stay or leave.

This study contributes significantly to the field of educational research by providing a nuanced understanding of teacher retention through Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework. It highlights the layered and interdependent nature of factors influencing educators' career trajectories and offers a theoretical foundation for future research. Moreover, the findings carry important practical implications for school districts, administrators, and policymakers striving to create environments that not only retain teachers but also enhance overall school effectiveness. By addressing the systemic influences on teacher satisfaction and commitment, stakeholders can implement targeted strategies that foster long-term stability, promote professional fulfillment, and ultimately strengthen the education system as a whole.

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Appendix A - Protocols for Individual Interviews

1. The facilitator begins with introductions and consent forms (if not already signed): "Thank you for being here today. I look forward to this interview. Please review this consent form and sign it. As a reminder, your identity will be kept confidential."
2. Provide a brief overview of the study and goals for the interviews: "Today we will be discussing the primary factors influencing teacher retention and how connection and community influences continued service. During the interview, please do not mention any specific names of people. Please feel free to share your thoughts, views, and experiences with me. If at any time you want to skip a question or opt out of a question, just let me know."
3. Conduct interview.
4. The facilitator will close the interview: "That brings us to the end of the interview. Thank you for your participation."

Appendix B - Demographic Information

This information is collected as part of the interview selection process.

1. What is your age?
    a. 18-24
    b. 25-34
    c. 35-44
    d. 45-54
    e. Over 55
    f. Prefer not to say

2. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?
    a. Bachelor's Degree
    b. Master's Degree
    c. Doctoral Degree

3. How long did you student teach in a classroom setting?
    a. No student teaching experience in a classroom
    b. One semester
    c. Two semesters
    d. One year

4. How many districts have you taught in throughout your career?
    a. 1 (current school district)
    b. 2
    c. 3
    d. 4
    e. 5 or more district

5. How many years have you been teaching throughout your career?
    a. Less than one year

b. 1-3 years
c. 4-10 years
d. 11-15 years
e. 16-20 years
f. More than 20 years

6. How many years have you been teaching in SmallTown District?
    a. Less than one year
    b. 1-3 years
    c. 4-10 years
    d. 11-15 years
    e. 16-20 years
    f. More than 20 years

7. How many years have you lived in SmallTown Community?
    a. I don't live in the community.
    b. Less than one year
    c. 1-5 years
    d. 6-10 years
    e. 11-15 years
    f. 16-20 years
    g. More than 20 years

8. Did you attend SmallTown District as a student?
    a. Yes
    b. No

Appendix C - Informed Consent

Informed Consent

PROJECT TITLE:

Retention of educators through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

PROJECT APPROVAL DATE:		**PROJECT EXPIRATION DATE:**		**LENGTH OF STUDY:**	

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	Royce Ann Collins, Ph.D., Professor
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):	Krystal Young, doctoral student
CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:	Royce Ann Collins, racollin@ksu.edu, 785-532-5535
IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION:	Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224; Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the teacher perceptions of teacher attrition and teacher retention and how it relates to connection to one of the ecological systems based from Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. The research aims to understand the multifaceted factors influencing teacher retention by examining the interplay between individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal levels within the teaching environment. The research aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on teacher retention by offering a holistic understanding of the interconnected factors influencing teachers' decisions to remain in the profession.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

If you choose to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in a 60 to 90 minute interview and to bring an artifact that symbolizes your dedication to teaching and staying in the profession. The interviews are to gather your insights into your professional experiences, reasons for staying at the school district and commitment to teaching. The interviews will be audio-recorded and held in a secure location by the researcher. You will be assigned a pseudonym and all identifying information will be removed. Follow up interviews may be completed to clarify information and to allow you to give feedback.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:

There are no expected discomfort or risks related to this study. Participants may voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time.

BENEFITS ANTICPATED:

A potential benefit is that you may develop a better understanding of your commitment to the profession of teaching and a better awareness of the support system around you. For the field, we may develop a new way to look at teacher retention and attrition.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

You will be assigned a pseudonym which will be used for all documents, except personal correspondence with the participant. The school and any work locations will not be recorded to further protect your identity. All electronic documents will be maintained in a password protected electronic format for three years after publication of the dissertation on the researcher's private password protected computer.

The information or biospecimens collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant).

PARTICIPANT NAME:			
PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE:		**DATE:**	
WITNESS TO SIGNATURE: (PROJECT STAFF)		**DATE:**	

Appendix D - Interview Questions

The following questions will be asked during the in-person interview.

1. Tell me what you brought with you today that motivates you to continue teaching and why you brought it.
2. When did you know you wanted to be a teacher? What led to that decision?
3. Describe your student teaching experience. How did your experience influence you as a teacher?
4. What would be the reasons you would leave a district?
5. What would be the reasons you would continue to teach in a district?
6. What role does your partner teacher or department team play in your success as a teacher? How does it influence your decision to stay or leave a position?
7. Describe the culture of the building in which you work. How does that culture of your building affect your success as a teacher? How does culture influence your decision to stay or leave a position?
8. What personal experiences have you had in that support your previous answers?
9. You have been in SmallTown District for X years and teaching for a total of X years (take this from demographic sheet). How does SmallTown District impact your success as a teacher? How does it influence your decision to stay or leave a position?
10. Use information from the demographic sheet to add to this question (live in community, grew up in the community, don't live in community). What role does the community play in your decision to stay or leave SmallTown district?
11. If you were to think about your partner teacher/department, school, district or community; which of those most impacts your success as a teacher and influences your decision to stay or leave the district?
12. What do you value most about SmallTown School District?

Appendix E - Data Alignment Table

Table 2
Data Alignment Table

Research Question	Sub-questions	Interview Question #	Interview Question
RQ 1	SQ 1-5	IQ 1	Tell me what you brought with you today that motivates you to continue teaching and why you brought it.
		IQ 2	When did you know you wanted to be a teacher? What led to that decision?
		IQ 3	Describe your student teaching experience. How did your experience influence you as a teacher?
		IQ 4	What would be the reasons you would leave a district?
		IQ 5	What would be the reasons you would continue to teach in a district?
	SQ 1	IQ 6	What role does your partner teacher or department team play in your success as a teacher? How does it influence your decision to stay or leave a position?
	SQ 2	IQ 7	Describe the culture of the building in which you work. How does that culture of your building affect your success as a teacher? How does culture influence your decision to stay or leave a position?
	SQ 1-3	IQ 8	What personal experiences have you had that support your previous answers?
	SQ 3	IQ 9	How does SmallTown District impact your success as a teacher? How does it influence your decision to stay or leave a position?
	SQ 4 SQ 5	IQ 10	Use information from the demographic sheet to add to this question (live in community, grew up in the community,

			don't live in community). What role does the community play in your decision to stay or leave SmallTown district?
	SQ 1-5	IQ 11	If you were to think about your partner teacher/department, school, district or community; which of those most impacts your success as a teacher and influences your decision to stay or leave the district?
	SQ 1-5	IQ 12	What do you value most about SmallTown School District?