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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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Dr. Nannette Glenn, Dean of
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Teacher Attrition: A Quantitative Analysis of Driving Factors and Potential Solutions Among
Highly Qualified K-12 U.S. Public School Teachers

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by
Shari Donch
May 2024

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Mike, for supporting me through this chapter and every chapter of life.

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I would like to express my gratitude to my dissertation chair, Dr. McIntyre, my dissertation manager, Dr. McMichael, and all the professors at Abilene Christian University for their invaluable guidance and the opportunities they provided to help me grow as an educator over the past few years. I would also like to thank my parents for their profound contributions to my life's education, which have always motivated me to aim higher, and Mr. and Mrs. Nardone for their love, support, and meatballs.

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Abstract

A comprehensive analysis is necessary to determine the cause of and solutions for the rate of K-12 teacher attrition in the United States. Researchers have sought to understand the root causes of attrition or the institutional factors that influence teachers to voluntarily change professions. The most frequently identified factors include the personal characteristics of these teachers, freedom of curriculum development, teacher autonomy, and resources such as salaries. Evidence shows that this attrition among highly qualified teachers is detrimental to the quality of education, particularly in terms of student outcomes, and substantiates that effective initiatives surrounding remediation of these factors are necessary to address the root cause of many systemic issues currently faced. Regardless of efforts to understand and solve the problem, teacher attrition remains prevalent today. This quantitative descriptive and correlational study clarified the detrimental factors leading to attrition in the school system and educational policies and practices that mitigate the rate of loss of a valuable resource—namely, highly qualified teachers.

Keywords: attrition, educational policies, autonomy, work satisfaction, curriculum development, workplace environment, attrition rates, teacher freedom, administrative control

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	ii
Abstract.....	iv
List of Tables	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose of the Study	3
Research Questions	4
Definitions of Key Terms	4
Theoretical Framework.....	4
Summary	5
Chapter 2: Review of Literature	6
Literature Search Methods.....	7
Location of Literature	7
Selection and Evaluation of Sources.....	8
Analysis of Sources.....	8
Theoretical Framework.....	8
Teacher Retention	9
Qualified Teachers Affect Students' Performance	11
Teacher Attrition as a Crisis-Level Problem	12
Connection Between Teacher Autonomy and Teacher Attrition Rate	15
Freedom of Curriculum Development and Institutional Style.....	17
Possible Causes of Attrition and Dissatisfaction	18
Administrative Style	18
Working Conditions.....	20
Effects of Teacher Attrition	21
Methods for Understanding and Tracking Teacher Turnover	22
Attempts to Remediate Teacher Retention Rate	22
Instructional Freedom	22
Other Factors.....	23
Cultivate Collaboration.....	23
Empower Educators to Prosper.....	23
Give Them Support.....	23
Professional Recognition and Career Progression	23
Teacher Autonomy.....	24
Flexible Working	24
Recommendations.....	24
Summary	24
Chapter 3: Research Methods	26

Research Questions	26
Research Design and Method	27
Advantages and Disadvantages of Quantitative Techniques	28
Population	28
Study Sample	29
Materials/Instruments	29
Data Collection and Analysis Procedures	31
Ethical Considerations	32
Assumptions.....	32
Limitations	33
Delimitations.....	33
Summary	33
Chapter 4: Findings.....	35
Sample.....	35
Participant Demographics	36
Instrumentation	37
Distribution	38
Data Analysis	39
Alignment With Research Questions.....	40
Teacher Autonomy and Attrition Rate.....	40
Institutional Leadership Style	40
Solutions to Reduce Attrition Rate	40
Research Question 1	41
Research Question 2	45
Research Question 3	47
Research Question 4	48
Summary	49
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	50
Discussion of Findings in Relation to Past Literature	50
Limitations	55
Recommendations for Practice	56
Enhancing Leadership Capacity	56
Fostering a Positive Workplace Environment	57
Implementing Creative Problem-Solving Strategies	58
Structured Interventions and Accountability	58
Recommendations for Further Research.....	61
Conclusions.....	64
References.....	68
Appendix A: Survey Instrument	76
Appendix B: IRB Approval	77

Appendix C: Permission Letter.....	78
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List of Tables

Table 1.	Reasons for Leaving a Previous Teaching Position	42
Table 2.	Reasons for Leaving the Teaching Profession	44
Table 3.	Staff Perception of Administration Extending Care	45
Table 4.	Summary of Ratings for Factors Related to School Environment	46
Table 5.	Ranking of Reasons for Leaving	48
Table 6.	Suggested Solutions to Attrition Rate	49

Chapter 1: Introduction

Teacher attrition is the most significant problem facing K–12 education today (Grant et al., 2020). Half of teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years and search for new vocations (Boe et al., 2008). Early research emphasized compensation as a primary driver in attrition, but resultant legislative efforts produced counterintuitive results (Hanks et al., 2020). In addition to workplace conditions and salaries, attrition rates have been linked to a lack of perceived meaning in their work and psychological needs dissatisfaction (Hanks et al., 2020; Hupe & Stevenson, 2019). Other studies showed that factors such as how a teacher perceives their support may impact teacher retention (Shaw & Newton, 2014).

Psychological needs satisfaction includes autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Granjo et al., 2021). Autonomy support increases teachers' commitment to a school, whereas a lack of autonomy leads to decreased motivation (Granjo et al., 2021). High instructional autonomy is positively correlated with several dimensions of effective teaching, including applying contemporary teaching methods, alternative evaluation techniques, higher-order thinking skills, and effective classroom management. While the absence of autonomy was shown to impact the dimensions of teacher proficiency mentioned above, increased independence may not benefit every level of teacher experience (Grant et al., 2020; Yolcu & Akar-Vural, 2021).

Autonomy is unable to be standardized in all levels of teacher experience and requires agreement surrounding what is meant by "autonomy" (Grant et al., 2020). Novice teachers require more structure and support, whereas veteran teachers require more autonomy (Grant et al., 2020). Teachers find increased meaning in their work when the structure and autonomy afforded by their position match their proficiency level (Grant et al., 2020).

Until this point, autonomy was viewed dichotomously and debated among two opposed schools of thought: teacher freedom versus administrative control (Grant et al., 2020). Since teacher psychological needs satisfaction is a crucial trait for retention and there is a teacher shortage, additional effort needs to be directed toward helping teachers flourish (Hanks et al., 2020). Policy makers and researchers have identified teachers as the key asset in promoting academic success (Grant et al., 2020). Grant et al. (2020) called for a new perspective on teacher autonomy reflective of the inherent need for differentiation and flexibility. They proposed a theoretical base to build a graduated approach to developing autonomy for teacher support and satisfaction.

Therefore, research has shown that there is no agreement in the literature regarding salary as the main factor in teachers leaving the field, and there is a lack of understanding in how many other factors, such as teacher autonomy, contribute to teacher attrition rates. Finding a weighted hierarchy for key factors in teacher attrition carries direct implications into school administration.

In this chapter, therefore, I analyze the issue, addressing the problem statement while presenting the purpose of the study. The objective provides a straightforward design and methodology that the research took, creating a link between the problem and the reason for conducting the research. A formulation of the research questions thus guided me in conducting the study and setting clear objectives for the exercise. Lastly, this chapter defines the principal terms used in the study.

Statement of the Problem

In the United States of America, there has been a detrimental increase in the rate of attrition by teachers in the local schools. According to researchers, 45% of teachers enrolled in

the system leave the profession within 5 years (Boe et al., 2008). This number has continued to grow in recent years as more teachers are getting involved in other vocational activities and employment opportunities (Grant et al., 2020).

Additionally, the authors detailed that the rate of teacher turnover in schools can be related to multiple factors (Hanks et al., 2020). Some of the aforementioned factors include lack of support from the school administration, salaries and compensation, and alternative certification. The rate of teacher attrition in schools also has been related to leadership autonomy in the schools and curriculum development. Addressing the shortage of teachers in schools is essential as it contributes to the levels of effectiveness the school can attain, both academically and financially.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine correlations that can help understand the cause of high teacher attrition rates and to determine possible solutions that can be used to reduce such issues. In recent years, considerable research has been presented on the problem and case in question. Many research articles discussed and argued the different designs and ideas that were developed to justify the highlighted issues surrounding teacher attrition. However, more research needs to be conducted and more data collected from the field to find a weighted hierarchy regarding teacher attrition.

In this study, a quantitative research approach was utilized to find and determine a hierarchy of reasons teachers leave the profession. Both primary and secondary data were analyzed to obtain prior knowledge and research findings to add more insights into the research questions, as there is a need for more research and new data to find a weighted hierarchy for key factors in teacher attrition.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: In what ways does the school administration affect the rate of teacher retention?

RQ2: How does freedom of curriculum development and institutional style affect teacher retention rate?

RQ3: What is the connection between teacher attrition rate and teacher autonomy?

RQ4: What possible solutions are being implemented to reduce the attrition rate?

Definitions of Key Terms

Curriculum development. This term defines the process of creating and adopting various ways to teach a course or subject in any learning institution.

Educational policies. This term defines the decisions, principles, and rules that guide education.

Teacher attrition. This term defines the rate at which teachers leave their education profession for other career opportunities.

Theoretical Framework

An inductive research approach was utilized in the current study because it deepens the understanding of the two current phenomena: the increased teacher attrition rate and the tradeoff between administrative control and autonomy. Each individual case was evaluated, and any meaningful connections were constructed for new theoretical understanding. The collected primary research played an essential role in the inductive research approach. I used self-determination theory and Grant's graduated teacher autonomy framework to influence the design of the investigation and then looked for meaningful correlations as they arose.

Summary

The teacher attrition rate is not a new problem in the education sphere. Research shows that more than 25% of the people who join the profession through merit are not happy with the job (Claude et al., 2012). This chapter laid the groundwork for the entire study, providing the basics and motivation behind conducting this specific study while presenting the research methodology that was employed for the research. Chapter 2 offers a more detailed literature review of the problem based on previous research.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Empirical evidence suggests an increase in teacher attrition that continues to affect the education system. There is a worrying concern among other key constructs as many teachers divert to other employment professions. Archbald and Porter (1994) attributed this shift to curriculum changes and leadership issues that put increasing pressure on teachers' social, emotional, financial, and psychological well-being. Retrospectively, this study drew from extant literature to highlight the plight of teacher attrition in the American education system and draw policy and scholarly contributions for addressing the issue. While many empirical pieces have examined the persistent rise of teacher attrition rates, some of these studies, if not most, have overlooked vital underlying factors that have been detrimental in the critical analysis of the issue. Therefore, this literature review section (a) reviews empirical literature on the topic of teacher attrition and retention, (b) highlights the role of school administration in teacher retention, (c) explores the impacts of leadership styles and freedom of curriculum development on teacher retention, (d) explores empirical evidence on the linkage between autonomy and teacher attrition, (e) explores the literature on the proposed mitigations for reducing teacher attrition rates, and (f) highlights the gaps in the empirical literature on teacher attrition and retention. This section defines concepts and conceptualizations on teacher attrition literature while drawing comparisons and contrasts among literature sources.

The literature review section is organized as follows: The first section describes and justifies the literature search methods and selection criteria. The second section provides general definitions and conceptualizations of teacher retention and attrition concepts. The third section describes the theoretical underpinnings used in the study. Subsequently, I highlight the conceptual methodology underlying the analysis.

Literature Search Methods

Effective literature reviews should begin with a clear definition of the research questions that guide the literature search process. Therefore, the literature search criteria included sources that discuss teacher retention, attrition, and the motivating factors.

Location of Literature

There is abundant literature on teacher attrition in various literature formats and databases. Therefore, there is a need for the correct and precise literature location by searching through relevant sources (e.g., databases, journals, scholarly websites) to identify a comprehensive database of relevant sources that help answer the research questions. I explored publications from academic journals and databases, with no restrictions on the types of publishers, magazines, and research locations. However, the literature search was limited to publications investigating teacher attrition, retention, curriculum development, autonomy, and policies. The purpose of restricting the literature search was to access only those sources that were applicable to the research topic and research questions. Following the restriction of the search criteria, the literature exploration used defined keywords to explore literature consistent with other studies (e.g., Granjo et al., 2021; Mølstad, 2015). The primary emphasis of the present research was to explore the main issues connected to teacher attrition and retention (e.g., institutional leadership, teacher freedom to develop curriculum, financial compensation, sociopsychological motives; Steinberg & Cox, 2016). Therefore, literature searches involved examining keywords in the article descriptions and titles, such as teacher attrition, teacher turnover, teacher shortages, teacher certification, and educator's attrition rate. The literature searches also involved examining keywords in the article descriptions and titles, such as *teacher attrition*, *teacher turnover*, *teacher shortages*, *teacher certification*, and *educator's attrition rate*.

The search engine used for this research paper was ACU OneSearch. Furthermore, the research also involved cross-referencing other publications for inclusion in the review.

Selection and Evaluation of Sources

The scope of this literature search was limited to peer-reviewed articles and publications to guarantee empirical relevance and quality to the research topic. The search skimmed through databases for the keywords, assessing sources published from the 1990s to the present. Only those sources that met the specific search criteria were selected for the review. However, I also cross-referenced other relevant authorities to examine their relevance to the study. I selected only those publications discussing teacher attrition, retention, turnover, and the interrelated concepts (e.g., leadership, school environment, curriculum, compensation, motivation, psychological factors) for review.

Analysis of Sources

I analyzed the selected articles based on the essential properties (e.g., type of source, publication date, and title). The papers were also analyzed based on the research methodology—for example, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, surveys, policy documents, case studies, literature review, and model studies, among others (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The articles also were analyzed based on the research design (quantitative or qualitative), data collection techniques (e.g., case studies), research area/industry/region, and sample size (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Additionally, the analysis of the sources was based on the research themes to create an effective relationship between the references to the research topic.

Theoretical Framework

The current study employed an inductive analysis to gain a better knowledge of the potential reasons for teacher turnover, its consequences, and solutions. The research work that

was gathered was crucial in such an inductive research method. Indeed, the absence of a theoretical model to explain the topic necessitated the study's use of grounded research features in a way that created an abstract and general theory of such a problem being studied. Moreover, according to current educational theory, one of the primary causes of poor academic results is schools' inability to properly staff classroom settings with experienced teachers. This theory explains that the shortages of teachers lead to school staffing issues (Ingersoll, 2016).

Teacher Retention

For students to achieve high educational outcomes, they require a significant contribution from teachers to enhance their goal setting, motivation, and performance. Teachers play an intrinsic role in students' educational outcomes by setting high expectations and motivating them to realize objectives (Smith & Erdoğan, 2008). Teacher attrition is when teachers leave the profession to pursue other opportunities. Billingsley (2007) argued that teacher attrition deprives learners of quality teaching and reduces students' performance. Mølsted (2015) argued that teacher attrition reduces the scope of influential professionals and consequently affects student learning. In their analysis, Guarino et al. (2006) contended that most teachers who leave the teaching profession to join other employment areas are more effective when compared to their counterparts. The impact of this inherent shift is the unavailability of effective instructors to deliver instruction geared toward enhancing student performance. Another study by Granjo et al. (2021) established that underperforming teachers have a high propensity to remain at their workplace. The impending implication of this characteristic is the inability of schools and teachers to meet the mandatory teaching needs.

Conversely, various studies have linked teacher retention to several organizational and individual characteristics (Bobbitt et al., 1991). Findings by Hupe and Stevenson (2019) in their

investigation of common traits among schools with high teacher retention rates revealed a relationship between negative teacher influences, negative interactions, unavailability of respect, teaching environments, organizational climate, and school leadership with high teacher attrition rates. Another study by Mølsted (2015) established that negative school environments and leadership significantly impact teachers' decisions to leave their schools for other professions.

Arguably, schools with frequent cases of teacher employment and loss record poorer student performances than those with consistent staff allocations. Boe et al. (2008) noted the need for schools with high teacher turnover rates to restructure their workforce continually. Billingsley (2007) supported this notion by establishing that the introduction of new teachers distorts the distribution of teaching partners and curriculum. Teachers must acclimate themselves to new teaching partners, curricula, and roles. Teacher attrition disrupts pedagogical consistency, creating less functional teaching programs and learning gaps (Wright et al., 2018). Arguably, learners require effective instructors to guarantee the continuity of learning and the creation of effective relationships for successful learning conditions. It is noteworthy to highlight that a high teacher retention rate has no impact on establishing adequate learning conditions for the institution, staff, and students (Ormond, 2017).

Findings by Billingsley (2007) supported the postulation that working conditions significantly influence the teaching profession's decisions. These included the availability of resources, administrative support, and roles of teachers. The decisions to remain employed as a teacher directly depend on the behavior of leaders and school environments. Fernet et al. (2012) suggested that the decisions to leave the teaching profession were influenced by a lack of collegiality and personal reasons. Other factors include unavailability of prestige, working conditions, lack of parental participation, lack of leadership support, disruptive learners, and

salary/compensation factors. Among these factors, Bobbitt et al. (1991) also determined that working conditions and leadership influence retention rates. Leaders can use their power and influence to determine dissatisfaction or satisfaction among teachers (Shaw & Newton, 2014). Therefore, principals must recognize their impact should they create toxic school environments or atmospheres (Theobald, 1990). These environments can underscore the significance of teacher support for mainly novices. Mølstad (2015) argued that principals could support new teachers through mentorships and classroom supplies.

Plausibly, the ability to secure and retain effective teachers depends on the interaction of conditions, characteristics, and conditions within the school environment. School conditions include environmental factors such as the working environment, school community, and other benefits in general that influence retention and attrition. Furthermore, school characteristics involve the characteristics of school personnel. Teacher compensation (salaries) also affects retention and attrition. The provision of reasonable wages encourages teacher retention and thus influences the capability of schools to retain high-quality teachers (Whittaker, 2000).

Qualified Teachers Affect Students' Performance

The profession of teaching and the critical roles educators play in developing a country's human resources cannot be overstated (Oke et al., 2016). The most valuable product generated in academics is the learner, but after that the most valuable commodity in education should be the classroom instructor (Shaw & Newton, 2014). Educators are the foundation of greater state schooling and investing in educator workforce development may build the groundwork for more comprehensive measures in other aspects of state education. Teachers have the biggest impact on student success (Podesta, 2007). With the application of new analytical and statistical approaches by a diverse group of academics, evidence has accumulated showing effective teaching may

contribute to a significant portion of the variation in learner test results (Berry, 2010). According to research, the utmost important aspect influencing how much students understand is the performance of their teachers. There are also a variety of factors such as innovativeness, supervisor support, organizational climate, and appreciation that help educators to deal with demanding relations with students (Bakker et al., 2007). According to one study, educators feel more motivated and competent by the support and guidance delivered through mentoring (Whittaker, 2000).

High-quality management has a direct impact on school productivity and enhances the workplace environment for instructors (Podesta, 2007). The positive effect of qualified teachers on students' performance leads to the overall success of the educational institution. Different factors combine to form a qualified and effective teacher. Such factors include being adaptable, lifelong learners, engaging, strong communicators, listening well, emphasizing collaboration, showing empathy, valuing learning of the real world, having patience, and sharing best experiences (Gagnon, 2019). Students require qualified teachers who can provide consistency in relationship building and learning, which adds to a productive educational environment. However, high rates of retention do not result in an effective learning atmosphere for faculty, students, or the school community (Darling-Hammond & Wei, 2009).

Teacher Attrition as a Crisis-Level Problem

Teacher attrition means the proportion at which educators change or leave their jobs (Macdonald, 1999). Currently, education journalists and researchers have brought attention to the country's K–12 teacher shortage. These journalists discuss a wide range of shortage indicators, such as personal testimonials, state-by-state academic vacancies and records from state educational local officials, and decreasing registration in teacher education programs. These

factors are important warning signs of the current state of education (Weiss & Garcia, 2019). With inadequate staffing in America, school districts across the nation are struggling with the problem of developing and retaining a greater academic staff for all pupils (Sutcher et al., 2019). The annual attrition rate was elevated to 1 in 4 educators from 2000 to 2001 (Boe et al., 2008).

In 2012, the Education Department estimated that about 1.6 million educators would be needed in America over a period of 10 years (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2020). However, every year, 8% of educators leave their job. Nearly 9 out of 10 educators recruited every year are replacing coworkers who voluntarily left, with more than two-thirds leaving before retirement (University of Massachusetts Global, 2020). Tackling the issue of ongoing teacher attrition has now become an important factor in resolving the nation's shortage of teachers (University of Massachusetts Global, 2020).

Although teacher attrition is a prevalent issue, it is more common among certain educational groups. According to research, Title I academic institutions, which accept federal grants for low-income pupils, have approximately 50% higher turnover rates than other institutions. Title I science and math teachers have around 70% higher rates. Such variables are worsened in school systems with a higher proportion of minority students (University of Massachusetts Global, 2020). The shortage of teachers has severe repercussions. Limited availability of experienced teachers jeopardizes students' potential to learn. Destabilization in an institution's teaching profession (high attrition and/or turnover) has a negative impact on student achievement and reduces teacher performance and efficiency (Weiss & Garcia, 2019).

Research conducted by Hanks et al. (2020) argued that because of the growing complexities and dynamism in the teaching profession, there is mounting pressure that weighs heavily on teachers and thus influences their decision to stay or exit the teaching profession.

These dynamisms range from increasing school populations to inadequate school funding and growing demands for test scores and state assessments (Ormond, 2017). However, Boe et al. (2008) posited that teacher attrition is a significant cause of these challenges as it substantially reduces the availability of quality teachers. Granjo et al. (2021) contended that, despite training and mentorship programs, a significant percentage of new teachers in the profession exit within the first year, while more than half leave after 5 years. Even more alarming are the findings on the motivations for new teachers in leaving the profession, with poor working conditions and dissatisfaction with leadership support reported as the primary reasons (Greer, 1992). Job satisfaction refers to the identifiable characteristics that influence job longevity and performance. Lower job satisfaction increases the likelihood of changing their teaching profession. However, there is a need to distinguish between morale and job satisfaction, as enthusiasm consists of extrinsic and intrinsic characteristics. (Dis)satisfaction primarily depends on outside factors (Macdonald, 1999).

Retrospectively, some may argue that the solution to teacher shortages is recruiting or attracting more new teachers into the field. On the contrary, Boe et al. (2008) stated that the continuous challenges in the teaching profession result from teacher dissatisfaction and teacher attrition; that is, society keeps misdiagnosing the challenge as a recruitment issue instead of a retention issue. Therefore, the acquisition of new teachers does not address the persistent challenge of teacher attrition. Bobbitt et al. (1991) noted that the attrition rate is greater than the rate of potential recruitment. Therefore, there is a need for a fundamental resolution of the challenge of teacher attrition (Player et al., 2017).

While many fields across the United States experience significant pay inequalities, teacher attrition is mainly linked to dissatisfaction due to unavailability of support, leadership

issues, and leadership characteristics. Accordingly, Ormond (2017) reported that many new teachers are unprepared for the realities of the teaching profession as they lack the fundamental skills for thriving in a school environment. Some teachers enter the field intending to work for a short term, while others become teachers because they are committed to long-term professional fulfillment and service (Collie et al., 2018). Nonetheless, while the literature review indicates that various studies have assessed the causes of high retention and attrition rates, few have explored the strategies for increasing and maintaining the supply of high-quality teachers. Additionally, there is a need to focus on retaining the existing workforce. Therefore, it is vital to devise strategies for minimizing teacher attrition and assessing contributing factors to teacher retention to address the concern of teacher retention (Grant et al., 2020).

Connection Between Teacher Autonomy and Teacher Attrition Rate

Collie et al. (2018) noted that autonomy significantly influences teacher retention choices and development. Autonomy refers to the freedom accorded to teachers to develop their curriculum and implement effective teaching and learning strategies to optimize learning outcomes (Barbara, 2017; Shalem et al., 2018). However, the allocation of teacher autonomy varies depending on the level of experience in the field. For instance, Fernet et al. (2012) suggested that new and developing teachers often require less autonomy and more guidance and structure as they are not well-established in the profession. However, other studies found that experienced teachers require limited guidance or structural intervention. The existence of, or lack of, freedom influences the attrition rates by controlling the teachers' decisions to stay or leave the profession. Bakker et al. (2007) deduced that there is a need to analyze the role of autonomy in enhancing effective performance, satisfaction, and teacher retention. However, policies and administrators should use effective theoretical and conceptual frameworks to guide the allocation

of teacher autonomy (Yolcu & Akar-Vural, 2021). Similarly, Grant et al. (2020) postulated that the distribution of teacher autonomy should follow effective models that match the level of independence to proficiency. Accordingly, implementing this dynamic model could potentially support different teachers' needs and could promote good relationships, teacher development, retention, and job satisfaction (Erss et al., 2016).

Retention is affected by job satisfaction, which may be mediated by autonomy (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020). Researchers have investigated the outcomes of positive reform efforts and linked teacher autonomy as a driving force in student achievement. Consequentially, autonomy is included as a primary item on many work satisfaction surveys. Autonomy is a central thread unifying studies in motivation, empowerment, agency, and professional identity. Vocational autonomy is viewed as an essential component in this study because it influences teachers' overall perceptions of their agency in their work environments, including classrooms. Professional autonomy includes decision-making faculties provided to instructional staff to self-determine certain aspects related to pedagogical approaches and instructional content. While autonomy is impacted by elements like professional connections and governmental policies, it remains a topic of interest among highly qualified teachers (Harmening, 2021).

Increasing self-awareness is connected to higher measures of educator autonomy. Job satisfaction could be poor in the absence of autonomy and self-efficacy among veteran teachers, resulting in increased teacher turnover and, ultimately, decreased student achievement and motivation. Consequentially, instructor autonomy is a key factor in attrition among teachers who have developed a need for greater autonomy. Administrations that are viewed as top-heavy contribute to a culture of dissatisfaction among practicing teachers who view their efforts as heavy-handed and counterproductive. Teachers who have the basic supports necessary to adapt

to their job and are afforded freedom and a sense of trust to administer their work show higher levels of overall work satisfaction and are less likely to leave such jobs. Those having lower degrees of autonomy, on the other side, reported feeling a sense of distrust from their administration and, consequentially, poor levels of overall work engagement and a rise in teacher turnover (Harmening, 2021).

Freedom of Curriculum Development and Institutional Style

Archbald and Porter (1994) noted that among the motivations for novice teachers to leave their profession, freedom of curriculum development and institutional style play an integral role. Some schools have strict rules on curriculum development that limit the teachers' expressive and explorative capabilities. According to Ormond (2017), teacher attrition and turnover decisions are influenced by the inability to develop their teaching curriculum. Therefore, teachers feel constrained by restrictive policies and regulations that affect their teaching and explore various teaching methods (Mellegård & Karin, 2016). Limited curriculums hinder the ability of the teachers to explore their capabilities and potential to the fullest, thus influencing their decision to leave the profession (Archbald & Porter, 1994).

Accordingly, institutional style influences teacher attrition decisions due to its impact on motivation, job satisfaction, and freedom. Institutional types that offer teachers more support, autonomy, and significant learning opportunities encourage teacher retention. Further research by Fernet et al. (2012) concluded that institutions with more influence on workplace policies encourage participatory and collaborative deliberations to address teacher concerns. Based on Boe et al. (2008), ineffective leadership styles negatively influenced the health of public institutions through the impact on job dissatisfaction and increased stress. On the other hand, transformational leadership encourages teamwork and innovation that create a conducive

learning environment and effective relationships. Collie et al. (2018) noted that a school's culture and environment (e.g., practices, procedures, values, beliefs, and norms) significantly influence the relationships and interaction levels.

Possible Causes of Attrition and Dissatisfaction

According to the NCES published survey, the number of teachers who changed institutions or left the job identified multiple issues with the teaching profession as major factors. The Learning Policy Institute stated that the commonly mentioned causes include dissatisfaction with accountability pressures and testing, inadequate administrative support, discontentment with the profession of teaching, and unhappiness with the environment (Wang, 2019).

Administrative Style

Fernet et al. (2012) denoted that school administration plays an intrinsic role in creating a conducive school environment that fosters job satisfaction and good relationships. These characteristics, including administrative support and leadership influence, extrinsically influence attrition and retention (Shaw & Newton, 2014). The administrative policies on job performance, attitudes, and relationships influence teacher motivation (Player et al., 2017). Bobbitt et al. (1991) mentioned other characteristics, including professional programs, other teachers, parents, lack of student support, performance or subjective reviews, favoritism, unfairness, and poor communication. A survey by Ormond (2017) on teacher attrition and retention concluded that unsupportive administrations motivate teachers' option to leave. Teachers thrive with the availability of supportive environments, such as consistency. Furthermore, new teachers in the profession require supportive school administrations to foster the principles of character, effective communication, and fairness (Erss et al., 2016).

Notably, influential leaders employ various strategies to enhance positive school environments. These include constantly improving the school culture, applying multiple change implementation strategies, fostering professional staff development, facilitation of effective communication structures, implementation of effective leadership models, and encouragement of a participatory approach in decision-making (Yi, 2017). Leadership majorly influences decisions on teacher retention. Similarly, various studies have shown a significant relationship between the decision to change the profession and teachers' attitudes toward school administrations (Bakker et al., 2007; Ormond, 2017). Leadership styles influence the nature of relationships among teachers and between teachers, leadership, and students. Therefore, negative administrative characteristics are directly linked to student achievement and teacher turnover (Perkins et al., 2020).

In America, 8% of educators leave their field each year, with more than half leaving before retirement. One of several causes for teacher turnover, according to teachers leaving the profession, is an ineffective administration. Educator preconceptions of their school leadership's effectiveness could have an impact on school's capacity to retain teachers. Teachers cited disappointment with the administrator's leadership style as a primary factor spurring them to reconsider their profession. Consequentially, Aud et al. (2010) discovered many factors leading to workplace satisfaction in a survey administered to ex-teachers who were then working in a different field. These findings showed the following key differences in noninstructional work environments: (a) more guidance from their executives, (b) more advancement opportunities, (c) greater collegiality, (d) opportunities to gain knowledge from coworkers, (e) more influence in corporate policies, and (f) complete independence on their own job. It is impossible to overestimate the impact of an instructor on student performance. The teaching staff is the single

greatest variable driving student success. In comparison to classroom sizes, overall spending, teacher salaries, teacher-to-staff ratio, and academic background factors like language barriers, race, and socioeconomic status, a highly effective teacher yields the greatest impact on student performance and outcomes.

A study of North Carolina middle-level institutions conducted by Lucy Sorensen and Helen Ladd (2020) discovered that an instructor's efficiency continued to rise through their 12th year of educating children, defying conventional thinking that educators stop progressing after their initial years of schooling. There is compelling evidence that there is a link between teacher attrition and school leadership, potentially due to a disconnect between this natural growth process and administrative efforts to improve the staff with current research (Newton, 2017; Player et al., 2017). Educators are more inclined to remain in the classroom if they are satisfied with their work. Leadership or effective administration adds to new teachers' job satisfaction, and this is the administrator's duty to look for ways to improve job satisfaction as the teachers mature and develop into their role. Principals can influence whether educators stay or leave by exhibiting particular actions with their employees—namely, by providing additional support to less experienced teachers and allowing increased autonomy for developing veteran teachers (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2020).

Working Conditions

Teachers remain in school systems where they enjoy working and where the environment is favorable. Schools are stable and supportive places to be in these circumstances. They are more inclined to leave when their coworkers, including school officials, are less compassionate (Brown & Wynn, 2009), and their working conditions cause stress (Goddard et al., 2006). Mutual respect and trust cultures in positive education systems are critical for retention (Bryk et

al., 2010). Scutt (2019) contended that a supportive environment would foster openness and respect, provide opportunities for meaningful collaboration, and focus teacher evaluation on enhancing teaching standards.

Effects of Teacher Attrition

Among the most serious problems with attrition is that it causes schools to recruit less effective, inexperienced educators to fill that gap left by pervasive higher-frequency vacancies. When skilled teachers leave, institutions are frequently forced to turn to alternatively qualified educators who may have gone through lower-quality teacher training programs in order to receive their certification. Highly qualified teachers frequently require much less planning as well as on-the-job assistance than atypically certified teachers. Also, less qualified teachers are 25% more prone to experience attrition. As per records from the Learning Policy Institute (Wang, 2019), educators with no preparation leave at a rate that is two to three times that of educators with extensive preparation.

In terms of improving shortfalls, high rates of attrition add to school costs. According to the Learning Policy Institute (Wang, 2019), every instructor who needs to leave a metropolitan district costs up to \$20,000 or more. Moreover, a report from the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Academic Research showed that teacher turnover lowers student performance, with increased turnover leading to lower math and ELA scores (Wang, 2019). Teacher attrition could have an adverse impact on educational processes by interrupting school consistency, cooperation, and cordial relations among academic staff, as well as leading to the loss of critical institutional knowledge (Wang, 2019).

Methods for Understanding and Tracking Teacher Turnover

Teacher turnover patterns and rates can be examined at the state, national, school, program, or district levels. School leaders must take the opportunity to monitor the rate of special educators who leave their jobs and explain why they do so. They have three options for doing so:

- keeping track of rates of attrition over time;
- conducting private exit interviews or surveys; or
- asking current teachers to explain how long they intend to stay (Billingsley, 2007).

Attempts to Remediate Teacher Retention Rate

The reduction of successful and experienced educators has a significant impact on the educational field. As the rate of teacher attrition rises, the drop in a depleted teaching staff has become a condition that must not be overlooked. If such a profession of teaching is to be sustained, strategies for retaining active teachers must be developed (Sneddon, 1989). By providing autonomy, rewards, support, different opportunities, and increasing salaries with time, teacher turnover rate can be minimized. Moreover, Hanks et al. (2020) explained that new policies should be made to increase teachers' wages and improve their working conditions as a prerequisite to improving retention.

Instructional Freedom

To be an effective instructor means acquiring access to advanced education, fair pay, and ongoing professional development opportunities. This also entails having the liberty to contribute to the formation of the school curriculum, as well as the professional freedom to select the most suitable approaches and techniques for more equitable, effective, and inclusive education. Additionally, it entails being responsible for educating about security and safety amid periods of political upheaval, conflict, and instability (UNESCO, 2017). Educators who have increased

instructional autonomy effectively apply current teaching approaches, high-order thinking abilities, alternative assessment techniques, and efficient classroom administration (Yolcu & Akar-Vural, 2021).

Other Factors

Cultivate Collaboration

Teachers might feel alone in their class full of children. Isolation, according to multiple studies, can drive instructors to abandon the field entirely. According to one study, when instructors did not have access to continual collaboration, 1 in every 5 left the job (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). When institutions offered chances for educators to interact with one another on a regular basis, retention rates of teachers increased.

Empower Educators to Prosper

Elevated induction along with guidance initiatives, as per a journal paper reported in *Politics & Policy*, is the most effective way to increase retention rates (Makse, 2017). Opportunities for teachers to attend learning courses, webinars, and conferences are all good strategies to enhance their professional abilities and raise morale.

Give Them Support

The degree of encouragement that educators receive could have a significant impact on how they think about their professions. Supervisors may help keep educators happy in their existing positions by assuring that they feel supported, valued, and cared for.

Professional Recognition and Career Progression

Effective leadership gives an extra incentive for teachers to persist in education instead of pursuing advancement possibilities elsewhere. Offering a supportive and positive development and learning environment for teachers may therefore help with retention and morale (Bromley,

2020). Colleges may also profit from further techniques to recruit devoted personnel if they ensure optimal motivation (Fernet et al., 2012).

Teacher Autonomy

Instructors recognize autonomy in their career development objectives is closely related to overall work satisfaction and retention (Bromley, 2020). There is also another concept (i.e., teacher–learner autonomy), which has been discussed within the language learner autonomy literature in current years (Smith & Erdoğan, 2008).

Flexible Working

Flexible working hours or part-time employment are also highly appraised by educators and are important to encourage retention and recruitment. Some regarded this as a means of achieving a better life balance (Bromley, 2020).

Recommendations

To retain and recruit educators, school principals could demonstrate strong leadership abilities and include teachers in strategic planning, creating a platform for teachers to utilize their expertise in the content area. Future research is required for an inclusive interpretation of the techniques that minimize the rate of teacher turnover.

Summary

The teaching profession involves a revolving cycle of attrition and retention that includes employing teachers who leave the job early in their career. Therefore, schools, school districts, states, and federal governments should explore retaining quality teachers. The literature review highlighted how job dissatisfaction, lack of autonomy, and freedom to develop the school curriculum, administration, leadership, and organizational culture affect teacher attrition and retention. While the authors have highlighted challenges in school administration, freedoms,

autonomy, and cultures, evidence on the existence or development of practical solutions to this phenomenon is limited. There is inadequate research focused on the preparation and retention of teachers despite the persistent nature of the retention crisis in the United States. This study contributes to the existing literature by investigating the impacts of autonomy. The paper has established how teachers, school administrations, and the government are prepared to respond to this challenge. It is an overall view that the research findings are instrumental in understanding the research issue and significantly contribute to the overall research in the field.

This section included different possible reasons and how they contribute to the teacher attrition rate with the help of various research articles and research organizations. Chapter 3 includes the research methodologies and designs to study teacher shortages.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Teacher attrition is a major problem for schools today as the shortage of teachers can significantly decrease the quality of education in the country. Many educators seek new positions outside of the educational field due to high workloads, low salaries, and lack of support from the administration. Early studies claimed that financial reimbursement was the main cause of the high teacher attrition rate. However, today, scholars point to other causes of attrition among teachers, including workplace conditions, high levels of stress, lack of autonomy, and lack of support.

The shortage of teachers today could be a significant problem for the educational system as well as the public, as it could decrease the quality of education. Finding a hierarchy for reasons teachers leave the profession could help determine a solution that could be applied to address this problem and prevent a high rate of teacher attrition in schools.

Research Questions

This study aimed to address the following questions:

RQ1: In what ways does the school administration affect the rate of teacher retention?

RQ2: How does freedom of curriculum development and institutional style affect teacher retention rate?

RQ3: What is the connection between teacher attrition rate and teacher autonomy?

RQ4: What possible solutions are being implemented to reduce the attrition rate?

While performing survey methods, one is often going to answer a preestablished series of questions. Research conducted by Jantzi and Leithwood (1996) validated the reliability and validity of the survey instrument utilized in this study which was conducted using a Likert scale with 5 points ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The researcher can test the

hypotheses to see if the results are statistically significant and, therefore, meaningful. In any disciplined investigation, hypothesis testing is one of the most crucial techniques for verifying the accuracy and dependability of results (Hoy, 2010).

Research Design and Method

As shown in Appendix B, this study was conducted with the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), ensuring adherence to ethical standards and participant safety. This study used a quantitative method of research. Quantitative research techniques aim to test for statistical significance to determine if the results are due to chance or some other factor. Achieving statistical significance implies the results can be trusted. It also implies that similar findings would be obtained regardless of who does the study. They can also be used to find patterns (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001).

The choice of the research method relies on the nature of the research problem and research questions. The study determined if there is a relationship between several variables, including *attrition rate* (dependent variable), *institutional leadership style*, and *teacher autonomy* (independent variables). Results from correlational research are helpful to detect prevalence and relationships among variables, which are applied to determine the forecast of data (Curtis et al., 2016). Thus, the study used the quantitative correlational methodology to test the hypotheses.

Descriptive statistics were used to determine the quality of data collected. Chi-square and Spearman rank correlational tests were used to determine the correlational relationship between variables. To test the validity, a *p* value of less than 5% was utilized to determine statistical significance. Lastly, regression techniques were used to determine the dependence and effect of variables on each other.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Quantitative Techniques

While collecting massive data, quantitative techniques are helpful. First, the outcome is frequently measurable, making it much more fair. Second, the information is quantitative and can usually reach a larger public. Third, it may enable a researcher to track evolution over time and create indicators. Finally, it includes a clear, quantifiable metric for funding opportunities and recommendations (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001).

Excel, access, or data analysis tools are useful to calculate the findings, but this is not always available to a national program. The investigator must upload, filter, and analyze data, which requires patience. The bigger the group, the longer it takes to examine the data and interpret the findings. The bigger the sample, the longer it takes to gather information. The statistical evidence overlooks a crucial human component (Vogt, 2007).

Population

The target population for this research study was three school districts in northwestern Pennsylvania. School District A is a large district of about 8,000 students with a socioeconomic status of about 30% of the student population being categorized as economically disadvantaged. School District B is an even larger district of about 10,000 students with a socioeconomic status of about 70% of student population being categorized as economically disadvantaged. School District C is a smaller district of about 2,000 students with a socioeconomic status of about 40% of student population being categorized as economically disadvantaged. In total, there were 5 high schools, 5 middle schools, and 5 elementary schools chosen to be sent a request for permission to send the survey. A random sampling technique, one stratum for teachers and another for administrators, was used to obtain a sampling population of 65–70 subjects which included 50–55 teachers and 10–15 administrators. To reach out to these school districts and the

target population, I wrote a consent letter to the administration through email before the start of the study, and then a survey written through SurveyMonkey was distributed by the administration. Ideally, the study should have about a 27% response rate.

The participants were recruited personally via email by obtaining authorization from three school districts in northwestern Pennsylvania. All participants signed a consent form before involvement in the study. Criteria for inclusion in the quantitative sample were the following: holding a position of an educator or an administrator, being in this position for at least half a year, being employed by the chosen school districts in northwestern Pennsylvania, and willingness to participate.

Study Sample

The primary setting of this study was 15 schools within three school districts in northwestern Pennsylvania: School District A, School District B, and School District C. In total, there were 5 high schools, 5 middle schools, and 5 elementary schools chosen to be sent a request for permission to send the survey. Criteria for inclusion in the quantitative sample were the following: holding a position of an educator or an administrator, being in this position for at least half a year, being employed by a school district in Pennsylvania, and willingness to participate. The participants were recruited personally via email by obtaining authorization from the administration of the school districts in northwestern Pennsylvania. All participants signed a consent form before involvement in the study. After 2 weeks, participants were sent an email reminder regarding the completion of the survey.

Materials/Instruments

The survey used originated from questions chosen from Hanover's K–12 Climate Survey (see Appendix C). Between 2018 and 2022, Hanover Research (Becker, 2022), distributed the

survey to 30 commissioned school districts throughout the United States West, South, Northeast, and Midwest regions. A total of 150,354 individuals responded to the survey. Questions from the survey were used that directly apply to this study.

The survey was distributed via email using SurveyMonkey with the goal of obtaining at least a response rate of at least 27%. Emails were sent to the administration first to request permission to distribute surveys to staff. Then participants volunteered pending they met the following requirements: holding a position of instructor or administrator, being in this position for at least half a year, and having a readiness to participate. The volunteers were sent a reminder email after 2 weeks if the survey was not completed. Since the study used a survey for quantitative research, the instruments must measure the study's variables.

Specifically, data on teacher attrition for the 2019–2020 school year were available from school districts in Pennsylvania. Teacher autonomy was measured by the validated instrument, the Teaching Autonomy Scale (TAS) developed by Pearson and Hall (1993), an 18-item questionnaire with a 4-point Likert scale, to which teachers responded. Once surveys were completed, the data were analyzed through cross-studying to determine if patterns were found. I also used .05 as the statistical difference, as this is typically the acceptable threshold to determine whether results are significant.

Institutional leadership style was measured by adapting the validated instrument developed by Jantzi and Leithwood (1996), a 24-item survey with a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. From the findings, it indicated there was a statistically substantial association between the student's impression of the principal's transformative leadership and the student's level of academic success. To validate the instrument, the research indicated the degree of how teachers' perceptions of principals'

transformational leadership had a statistically substantial correlation with student performance.

The full survey instrument can be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data collection included a survey among teachers and administrators of 3 chosen school districts in northwestern Pennsylvania and data on teacher attrition school. Emails were sent to the administration first to request permission to distribute surveys to staff. The method to conduct the survey was to distribute the survey among the participants via email using SurveyMonkey. The respondents had 2 weeks to fill out the survey and then received an email follow-up after the 2 weeks regarding delivery and/or participation. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical instruments available in SurveyMonkey, including descriptive statistics, correlational study, the 1–5 Likert scale, and a survey.

In my research, I employed a quantitative approach to analyze the data collected through SurveyMonkey, a versatile online survey tool that supports a range of statistical analyses. The initial step in my data analysis involved applying descriptive statistics to summarize the data. This method allowed me to capture the central tendency, dispersion, and shape of the survey responses distribution effectively. By calculating measures such as the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation, I was able to provide a clear and concise summary of the responses. This allowed me to give insight into the general attitudes and opinions of the surveyed population.

To reach deeper into the relationships between various variables identified in my study, I conducted a correlational analysis. This method was instrumental in identifying patterns and the strength of associations between different factors, such as the link between teacher autonomy and job satisfaction. By employing the 1–5 Likert scale for survey responses, where participants rated their agreement or satisfaction from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*, I could

quantify subjective attitudes in a structured manner, making it possible to apply statistical tests to these ordinal data.

Ethical Considerations

Statistics can lead to misinterpretation, purposeful distortion, and modification of the conclusions if they are not appropriately handled. Among the most important factors to consider while using the survey strategy in research is ensuring that the empirical technique's core concept of impartiality is evident in practice (Franco, 2021).

Since I recruited human respondents, following the research code of conduct was critical. Participation in the survey was anonymous and voluntary. All respondents had a possibility to withdraw from the study if they decided to quit participation; no personal information from participants that could reveal their identity was gathered. Only data on gender, years of experience, educational level, and position in the school were essential. Before starting the survey, permission to carry out the process was due before the participation. Notably, all respondents signed a consent form. Permission to recruit respondents was obtained from school districts in northwestern Pennsylvania. Raw data from the study will be kept for 5 years and then will be destroyed. Only I will have access to raw data, which will be kept electronically safeguarded by the login and password. There was proper citation of all resources, respectively.

Assumptions

It is possible to assume that the study showed a close correlation between teacher autonomy and attrition. For instance, limited autonomy could result in higher attrition and vice versa. Limitation of personal space and ability to choose could become a critical aspect in increasing attrition. The same effect on teacher attrition could be made by institutional leadership

style. For example, if the school uses an inappropriate leadership approach, it is more likely that teachers will choose not to stay in the school and seek new positions in different locations.

Limitations

The study was set in northwestern Pennsylvania, which could have specific problems of teacher attrition that might be, for example, not applicable to other areas of Pennsylvania or the United States. This limited the generalizability of the research and decreased the external validity of the study. It is possible that the survey revealed subjective opinions on teacher attrition, the role of administrators, or solutions to this problem. I did not consider the effect of confounding factors on the correlation between teacher attrition, leadership style, and teacher autonomy. The addition of other factors to the analysis could create unnecessary complexity. Yet, this was a limitation, as it was possible to omit certain effects on teacher attrition.

Delimitations

At the same time, the study focused on a specific area of Pennsylvania in order to analyze the problem of teacher attrition in more specific and concrete terms rather than expanding the area of research. I did not seek generalizable results. Also, the study focused on teacher autonomy and institutional leadership styles in the context of teacher attrition. The validity was supported by using only validated instruments, which decreased the impact of confounding variables on the relationship between the determined variables.

Summary

Teacher attrition is a significant issue for schools today as the scarcity of veteran teachers could dramatically lower the quality of education in the country. Several instructors look for new settings outside of the academic field due to high workload, low salaries, lack of autonomy, and lack of support from the administration. Very early studies declared that financial compensation

was the major cause of high teacher attrition prices. However, today, scholars point to other root causes of attrition. A hierarchy of reasons for teacher attrition could aid in finding a solution to this problem.

Chapter 4: Findings

As stated previously, the purpose of this study was to obtain a better understanding of the causes of high teacher attrition rates and to determine possible solutions that can be used to address the issue. The aim of the survey utilized in this study was to determine the multiple factors influencing instructors to voluntarily leave their careers and to capture institutional elements contributing to attrition. It collected statistics on various aspects, which included teaching experience, motives for leaving preceding positions, and perceptions of the faculty surroundings. The survey utilized for this study proved to have many unforeseen results regarding the causes of teacher attrition, which is discussed in this chapter.

The study used a quantitative method of research. Quantitative research techniques aim to test for statistical significance to determine if the results are due to chance or some other factor. Achieving statistical significance implies the results can be trusted. It also implies that similar findings would be obtained regardless of who does the study.

Sample

The survey was sent via email to 15 schools in three school districts in northwestern Pennsylvania. The 103 teachers were recruited via email by obtaining permission, via email, for involving participants from the administration of their district before the process of recruitment. The email contained a consent form and a survey written through SurveyMonkey. All participants signed the consent form before involvement in the study. Criteria for inclusion in the quantitative sample were the following: holding a position of an educator or an administrator, being in this position for at least half a year, being employed by the chosen school districts in northwestern Pennsylvania, and willingness to participate. Of the three school districts in northwestern Pennsylvania, 15 schools were asked to provide permission to conduct the study,

and all granted permission for the survey to be distributed. There were 5 high schools, 5 middle schools, and 5 elementary schools. Schools in District A employ 173 teachers and administrators. Schools in District B employ 214 teachers and administrators. Schools in District C employ 106 teachers and administrators. A total of 493 teachers and administrators were sent the survey, with a return rate of 20.68% (103 returned surveys).

Participant Demographics

Of the 83 respondents, 15.66% (13 participants) identified as male, while the majority identified as female (84.34%, 70 participants) indicating a majority of female participants within the survey and 20 skipped this question.

All grade levels were represented in the participant pool providing insight into elementary, middle, and high school settings. Among the 82 participants who replied to the question about grade level, 26.82% (22 participants) taught at the elementary level, 15.85% (13 participants) taught at the middle school level, and the majority of 57.32% (47 participants) taught at the high school level. These responses indicate various representations of teaching levels within the survey sample.

All experience levels were represented in the participant pool, providing insight into teacher perspectives at various points in their career. As to the subjects' years of teaching, 29.63% (24 participants) taught for 6 months to 2 years, 39.51% (32 participants) taught for 3–6 years, a small fraction of 3.70% (3 participants) taught for 7–10 years, and 27.16% (22 participants) possessed 10 or more years of teaching experience. These responses illustrate a range of teaching levels, with many respondents having taught for an extended period.

Furthermore, members were requested to quantify their total teaching experience. Among the 83 respondents, 7.23% (6 participants) had 6 months to 2 years of experience, 21.69% (18

participants) had 3–6 years of experience, 18.07% (15 participants) had 7–10 years of experience and the majority of 53.01% (44 participants) had 10 or more years of experience. These findings imply that a significant percentage of the participants possessed vast teaching experience, imparting intelligent insights into the factors influencing attrition in the teaching career.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument used for data collection in this study was based on an adaptation of the Hanover Research K–12 Climate Survey employing a 5-point Likert scale. The Likert scale ranged from 1 = *strongly agree* to 5 = *strongly disagree*, allowing participants to express their level of agreement with a series of statements related to teacher autonomy, institutional leadership style, and their effects on teacher attrition rates.

The survey instrument was developed based on the research questions aiming to explore the dynamics between teacher autonomy, institutional leadership style, and teacher attrition rates. Drawing on the existing literature, including the work by Jantzi and Leithwood (1996), the survey was designed to capture nuanced perceptions and experiences of teachers and administrators regarding these variables. The reliability and validity of similar instruments have been validated in past research, providing a foundation for the current study's methodological approach.

In my study, I shared methodological similarities with the Hanover Research K–12 Climate Survey in several crucial ways. First, both my research and the Hanover study employed survey instruments as the primary method for collecting data. This approach was particularly effective for gathering extensive responses across diverse populations, which was essential for exploring attitudes, perceptions, and experiences within educational contexts. Furthermore, the focus of the Hanover survey on various aspects of the educational climate aligned with my

interest in understanding factors that influence the educational environment, including leadership styles and teacher autonomy, which were central to my investigation into teacher attrition.

Another point of similarity was the wide geographic distribution of the Hanover survey, which encompasses different regions of the United States. This broad interest in capturing diverse educational climates and experiences suggested that the survey questions, chosen for my study from this instrument, were grounded in a broad context, enhancing the relevance and applicability of my findings. The large sample size of over 150,000 individuals who responded to the Hanover survey provided a robust data set for analysis. Although my study may not have matched this scale, utilizing questions from such a comprehensive survey lent credibility to my instrument, given those questions had been effectively understood and responded to by a large and diverse sample.

Lastly, my strategic choice to select questions from the Hanover survey that directly applied to my study indicated a methodological alignment in terms of content focus. This decision implied that my research questions and objectives are supported by an instrument with proven effectiveness in gathering relevant data within the educational sector. Given these similarities, my study benefited from leveraging a well-established instrument known for its broad application and proven reliability in educational research. This connection enhanced the validity of my survey by utilizing questions that have been vetted and responded to by a large, diverse population, providing a solid foundation for my analysis of teacher attrition and related factors.

Distribution

The survey was distributed using SurveyMonkey, a widely used online survey tool that facilitates the collection of data from a broad audience. The target population was approached

through a consent letter sent via email to the administration of selected schools in three northwestern Pennsylvania school districts. Upon receiving permission, the survey link was distributed by the school administration to the intended participants, including teachers and administrators.

Data Analysis

In my approach to analyzing the data for this study, I first ensured that all responses collected through SurveyMonkey were meticulously organized and cleaned. This preliminary step involved reviewing the data for any incomplete or outlier responses that could potentially skew the results. I paid special attention to ensuring that each response aligned correctly with the corresponding survey questions, particularly focusing on the scales of 1–5 on the Likert items that measured aspects such as teacher autonomy, administrative support, and job satisfaction. This careful scrutiny was crucial for maintaining the integrity of the data set, allowing for a more accurate and reliable analysis.

Next, I proceeded with the descriptive statistical analysis, a process that allowed me to obtain a comprehensive overview of the data. By calculating the mean, median, and mode for each question, I was able to identify central tendencies across the responses, providing insights into the general patterns of teacher experiences and perceptions within the surveyed districts. The standard deviation was also calculated to assess the variability of responses, offering a clearer picture of how widespread or concentrated the opinions were among the participants. This stage was particularly enlightening, as it revealed not just the average tendencies but also the range of experiences that educators face, highlighting the complexity of the factors contributing to teacher attrition.

Building on the foundation laid by the descriptive analysis, I researched correlational studies to explore the relationships between the key variables identified in my research questions. Using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, I examined the strength and direction of associations between variables such as teacher autonomy and their intention to leave the profession. This involved comparing the ranked responses to discern patterns and potential predictors of attrition. Through this process, I discovered the underlying dynamics influencing teacher retention and attrition, aiming to contribute valuable insights to the discourse on improving teacher support and working conditions in schools.

Alignment With Research Questions

The design of the survey instrument and the quantitative correlational methodology employed aligned closely with the study's research questions.

Teacher Autonomy and Attrition Rate

The survey included items specifically designed to assess perceptions of teacher autonomy, which allowed me to examine its connection with the attrition rate, directly addressing the first research question.

Institutional Leadership Style

By incorporating statements related to various aspects of leadership style, I used the survey to solicit its impact on teacher attrition, aligning with the second and third research questions regarding the effect of institutional leadership and school administration on attrition.

Solutions to Reduce Attrition Rate

Although the survey primarily focused on identifying problems, it also was used to gather data on potential or existing solutions implemented by schools to reduce attrition rates, indirectly

addressing the fourth research question through items that explore satisfaction with implemented strategies.

The quantitative correlational approach, supported by the use of a Likert scale survey, was apt for exploring the relationships between teacher autonomy, leadership style, administration, and attrition rates. The methodology was designed to test for statistical significance, ensuring that the results reflect genuine patterns rather than chance occurrences. This approach provided a robust framework for analyzing the data collected. The study's design, from the development of the survey instrument to its distribution and the chosen statistical analyses, aimed to address the research questions posed, offering a comprehensive exploration of the factors contributing to teacher attrition in the selected school districts.

Research Question 1

The first research question was, "In what ways does the school administration affect the rate of teacher retention?" Responses from the survey questions 6, 9–13, and 19–26 were analyzed to discover findings for RQ1.

To benefit from information on the motives behind leaving preceding teaching positions, participants who had either left a previous teaching role or contemplated leaving their current positions were requested to rate various factors contributing to their decision. These elements included salary, administrative style, working conditions, teacher autonomy, discontentment with the profession, and "other" factors. Respondents utilized a score scale starting from 1 to 6, in which 1 represented the most important cause, and 6 indicated the least important cause. The classifying responses to this question may be observed in Table 1.

Table 1*Reasons for Leaving a Previous Teaching Position*

Reasons for leaving a previous teaching position	Rating
Salary	3
Administrative style	1
Working conditions	2
Teacher autonomy	4
Discontentment with the profession	5
Other factors	6

The survey results also showed that administrative style is the most important reason for teacher attrition. The functions of the school administration play a major role in determining many other factors in the workplace environment and interpretation of teacher responsibilities. Administration bears the responsibility of handling conflicts and administering discipline based on these interpretations of responsibilities and the environment overall. This result reveals that administration bears the chief responsibility in shaping the aspects of the workplace leading to either satisfaction or attrition. This is further illustrated by the close-second rated value in workplace conditions. Administrative styles, whether a function of personality or differences in values, play the largest role in teacher satisfaction.

Workplace conditions are the tangible effects of administrative policies and community values and challenges. Workplace conditions encapsulate provision of materials and supports, work time requirements, and student behaviors and discipline policy. Staff relations are also a factor in workplace conditions; however, this was delineated in the survey implement. Working conditions scored relatively high as a factor leading to attrition.

Salary ranked as the third highest factor in attrition, and many teachers report dissatisfaction with their pay. Teacher requirements and public accountability have both increased significantly in the past couple of decades with research and legislation pointing to teachers as being the single most effective variable to address in K–12 schooling. While there have been efforts to address teacher salaries, many feel that this still does not address the rising costs of higher education and the resultant student debt, as well as a harder community that often demands teachers prove themselves. Veteran teachers often call to mind experiences under different conditions where teachers garnered community respect and trust and did not have to endure high scrutiny and doubt as often.

In addition to the previously discussed survey questions, participants were asked if they had ever contemplated teaching at a different school district. Out of the 83 respondents, 57.83% (48 participants) responded yes, indicating that they had contemplated teaching at a different school district. Conversely, 42.17% (35 participants) replied with no, suggesting they had not considered teaching in a different district.

Furthermore, participants were asked if they had considered leaving the teaching career altogether. Among the 83 respondents, 61.45% (51 participants) responded affirmatively, indicating that they had contemplated leaving the teaching career. Conversely, 38.55% (32 participants) replied negatively, expressing that they had not considered leaving the career (Table 2). This alarming number demonstrates that great consideration must be given to adjusting the current atmosphere in education.

Table 2*Reasons for Leaving the Teaching Profession*

Question number	% of participants rating 1 or 2
Q11: Leadership style	30
Q19: Administrators in school are in tune with teachers' concerns	53
Q20: Administrators in school are in tune with students' concerns	46
Q22: Administrators in school are in tune with nonteaching staffs' concerns	65

Regarding institutional leadership style, when asked if supervisors cared about them (Q11), roughly 30% either rated this as a 1 or 2, or they stated they neither agreed nor disagreed. When asked if administrators at the school are in tune with teachers' concerns (Q19), roughly 53% either rated this as a 1 or 2, or they stated they neither agreed nor disagreed. When asked if administrators at the school are in tune with students' concerns (Q20), roughly 46% either rated this as a 1 or 2, or they stated they neither agreed nor disagreed. When asked if administrators at the school are in tune with parents' concerns (Q20), roughly 46% also either rated this as a 1 or 2, or they stated they neither agreed nor disagreed. When asked if administrators at the school are in tune with staff members' concerns (nonteaching staff; Q22), roughly 65% also either rated this as a 1 or 2, or they stated they neither agreed nor disagreed. These results indicate that the staff do not view the administration as extending care for the impacts of their decisions, culminating in an uncaring/impersonal workplace perception (Table 3).

Table 3*Staff Perception of Administration Extending Care*

Rating	%	<i>n</i> of responses
Strongly agree	6.10	5
Disagree	10.98	9
Neither agree nor disagree	47.56	39
Agree	24.39	20
Strongly agree	10.98	9

The survey results also show that administrative style is the most important reason for teacher attrition. The functions of the school administration play a major role in determining many other factors in the workplace environment and interpretation of teacher responsibilities. Administration bears the responsibility of handling conflicts and administering discipline based on these interpretations of responsibilities and the environment overall. This result reveals that administration bears the chief responsibility in shaping the aspects of the workplace leading to either satisfaction or attrition. This is further illustrated by the close-second rated value in workplace conditions. Administrative styles, whether a function of personality or differences in values, play the largest role in teacher satisfaction.

Research Question 2

The second research question was, “How does freedom of curriculum development and institutional style affect teacher retention rate?” Responses from questions 6 and 14–18 were analyzed to discover findings for RQ2.

To delve deeper into participants’ perceptions of their school surroundings, questions were posed regarding different factors relating to their experiences. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with statements regarding the school environment, using a scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The statements included various subjects

regarding positive relationships with other staff members, guidance from colleagues and supervisors, professional development opportunities, technology materials, and peer collaboration. The ratings provided by the participants in reaction to these questions are offered in Table 4, offering valuable insights into their perceptions of the teaching environment and its impact on teacher attrition.

Table 4

Summary of Ratings for Factors Related to School Environment

Factors	Average rating
Positive relationships with staff members	4.2
Support from colleagues and supervisors	3.8
Professional development opportunities	4.1
Technology and material resources	3.6
Peer collaboration	4.0

The data indicated that many educators appreciate peer collaboration. Participants' responses also indicated that professional development opportunities, such as curriculum development, are an important aspect of teacher satisfaction. The data showed a high level of collaboration and efforts to provide staff development but showed discrepancy with perceptions of support and the value of chosen developments. Participants further indicated high levels of technological materials being made available, but a marked difference when discussing physical materials in provision. This may indicate that the teachers are underutilizing the technological tools available and preferring physical tools that are perceived as less available.

Research Question 3

The third research question was, “What is the connection between teacher attrition rate and teacher autonomy?” Questionnaire responses 6 and 12–18 were analyzed to discover findings for RQ3.

Hanks et al. (2020) identified that salaries have contributed to the increasing rate of attrition in the school countrywide. Other studies find that how a teacher perceives their support may impact teacher retention (Shaw & Newton, 2014). Therefore, research has shown no agreement in the literature regarding salary as the main factor in teachers leaving the field. Finding a weighted hierarchy for critical factors in teacher attrition carries direct implications for school administration. Additionally, the authors detail that the rate of teacher turnover in schools can be related to multiple factors (Hanks et al., 2020).

Based on my research, I believed there to be a lack of understanding of how many factors other than salary contribute to teacher attrition rates, such as teacher autonomy. When determining the connection between teacher autonomy and the teacher attrition rate on a scale of 1–6 where 1 is the most important and 6 is the least important reason for leaving a previous position, the survey results point to autonomy being the fourth-most important reason, with administrative style being the first. Therefore, a connection between teacher autonomy and teacher attrition rate can be found. The results of this particular survey also demonstrated that salary was not the most important reason for leaving a previous position, which is contrary to most findings from 2020. Further investigation is recommended for a delineation of autonomy perception and administrative style as teachers may be reporting elements contrary to autonomy via perceptions of administrative efforts. Particularly between Items 14 and 15, there is a noted decrease in perceptions of the value of chosen professional developments. Participants reported

sufficient quantity of professional development. with a weighted average of 4.17, but when asked to rate the quality of those efforts, the weighted average dropped to 3.77, indicating a trend with teachers preferring to have more influence in their development (i.e., autonomy; Table 5).

Table 5

Ranking of Reasons for Leaving

Reason for leaving	Ranking
Administrative style	1st most important reason
Autonomy	4th most important reason

Research Question 4

The fourth research question was, “What possible solutions are being implemented to reduce the attrition rate?” Questionnaire responses 6–8 and 27–30 were analyzed to discover findings for RQ4. Questions 27–30 established that recruitment efforts do work to find a high-quality, diverse teacher base but showed a discrepancy with perceptions of retention.

Based on the results, a significant portion of the respondents listed professional development opportunities and providing materials as a resource preventing attrition. Administrative efforts routinely target a positive, collaborative workplace culture, as evidenced in the higher weighted averages for questions dealing with workplace collaboration (Q18 at 4.24) and positive staff relationships (Q9 at 4.54).

Positive relationships with colleagues, help from colleagues, and professional development opportunities were rated favorably. However, areas that include teaching materials and resources, in addition to support from peers, scored lower, indicating some areas for improvement. Questions probing perceptions of administrator understanding (Q19 at 3.31) and appreciation (Q11 at 3.89) for faculty scored lower in comparison to similar questions regarding

peer understanding and appreciation (Table 6). Based on these data, administrative efforts could intentionally target staff concerns and expression.

Table 6

Suggested Solutions to Attrition Rate

Issue	Weighted average
Positive and collaborative work culture	4.24
Positive staff relationships	4.54
Perception of administrator understanding	3.31
Appreciation	3.89

Summary

In summary, findings for Research Question 1 indicated that educators are most affected by administration style and perceptions of care from the administration for the teachers, even more so than questions of compensation and autonomy. Results from Research Question 2 showed that teachers value professional development and collaboration but would benefit from more autonomy in selection of professional development. Research Question 3 revealed a deep connection between teacher attrition and administrative style but also revealed that teachers may report autonomy concerns as problems with the administration, requiring further study. Findings for Research Question 4 determined that administrative efforts were seen as positive in regard to environment but not able to provide significance in an argument for retention. Peer support and professional development were credited for providing the greatest retention effort.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

High-quality teachers have been identified as the most valuable asset in K–12 education. (King Rice, 2003). In spite of many identified variables and remedial efforts, teacher attrition remains at crisis levels. The purpose of this research was to establish a weighted hierarchy of factors leading to teacher attrition. Participants were surveyed with 5-point Likert scale questions with the data being compiled and analyzed for trends and rankings amongst the factors.

The survey instrument faced possible limitations with wording ambiguity, as shown in the significant difference in ranking between administrative style and measures of autonomy in their respective survey items. The current results indicate that administrative style and workplace environments are the highest reasons teachers consider leaving their current assignment or the profession altogether. This indicates that workplaces are potentially in need of leadership enrichment and creative problem-solving, even more so than increased salaries. Further research is recommended to delineate teacher autonomy, administrative style, and workplace conditions for exactly what is being reported as well as each item's respective effect on teacher morale and resiliency in the profession.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Past Literature

Past research has shown conflicting results in terms of what is the highest factor for teacher attrition. Study results have shown commonalities in factors leading to teacher attrition but are also subject to the current climate in education, following communal events/attitudes and legislative efforts. Early research emphasized compensation as a primary driver in attrition, but the resultant legislative efforts produced counterintuitive results (Hanks et al., 2020). In addition to workplace conditions and salaries, attrition rates have been linked to a lack of perceived meaning in their work and psychological needs dissatisfaction (Hanks et al., 2020; Hupe &

Stevenson, 2019). Other studies find that factors such as how a teacher perceives their support may impact teacher retention (Shaw & Newton, 2014).

This study, however, elucidates that in its current state, the highest factor leading to attrition is administrative style, with working conditions and salary following in importance, respectively. For example, studies by Hanks et al. (2020) and Hupe and Stevenson (2019) also indicated that beyond the traditionally emphasized compensation, other factors such as psychological needs dissatisfaction and a lack of perceived meaning in work play significant roles in teacher attrition. These findings align with the study's conclusion that administrative style is currently the most significant factor in attrition, suggesting a complex interplay between leadership, workplace conditions, and individual psychological needs in influencing teachers' decisions to leave the profession. In addition, research by Archbald and Porter (1994) and Bakker et al. (2007) also underscored the complexity of teacher attrition, indicating that factors such as teachers' perceptions of autonomy and satisfaction, alongside job resources and demands, play crucial roles. These studies complement the findings by illustrating that administrative style, when examined alongside autonomy and job engagement, emerges as a critical determinant of attrition, further emphasizing the multifaceted nature of teacher retention issues.

While various studies have identified common reasons that push teachers out of the profession, it is essential to recognize that prevailing circumstances can highly influence these reasons. In particular, prevailing feelings in the teaching realm, the impacts of local occurrences, and alterations in academic laws can determine these results. For instance, there might be periods when the educational sector faces heightened scrutiny or negative press, which could lead to teachers feeling undervalued or overwhelmed. Similarly, introducing new legislation or reforms,

which might demand a shift in teaching methodologies or increased administrative work, could make the profession seem less appealing to some.

The research in focus brought clarity to this complex issue by taking a fresh look at the factors contributing to teacher attrition in the current educational landscape. A significant revelation from this study is that administrative style is the primary cause of discontent among educators. How school leaders manage, guide, and interact with their teaching staff is pivotal in determining whether teachers stay committed to their roles or contemplate leaving. Following closely in significance are the actual conditions under which educators work. This encompasses various elements, from the resources available for teaching and the classroom environment to the school's overall ethos and the level of collegial support. An environment perceived as stressful or unsupportive can weigh heavily on a teacher's decision to continue in their role. While still vital, salary emerged as the third key factor influencing teacher retention. This highlights that although competitive compensation is essential, it is not the sole determinant. Much like professionals in other fields, teachers seek a holistic and fulfilling work experience, and the monetary aspect is just a piece of the puzzle.

Teachers play an intrinsic role in students' educational outcomes (Smith & Erdoğan, 2008). Prior studies have shown that the role of teachers is crucial in enhancing students' goal setting, motivation, and performance, indicating that teacher retention directly affects learning outcomes (Mølstad, 2015). Prior studies also argue that teacher attrition deprives learners of quality teaching and reduces students' performance (Billingsley, 2007). Furthermore, teacher attrition has been identified as a factor that deprives learners of quality teaching and diminishes students' performance, reinforcing the importance of addressing teacher retention to ensure educational success (Billingsley, 2007). Findings by Hupe and Stevenson (2019) in their

investigation of common traits among schools with high teacher retention rates revealed a relationship between negative teacher influences, negative interactions, the unavailability of respect, teaching environments, organizational climate, and school leadership with high teacher retention rates. These studies collectively highlight the complex interplay of administrative style, working conditions, and salary in teacher retention and underscore the need for comprehensive strategies to support educators and enhance the educational environment.

Another study by Mølstad (2015) established that negative school environments and leadership significantly impact teachers' decisions to leave their schools for other professions. These studies identify a dilemma in the educational realm but do not provide a way to begin to find a solution. They laid the foundation for this current study, in that there was evidence of a problem and a clear need for a solution, but prior studies were unable to find a weighted hierarchy for key factors in teacher attrition. This current study carries direct implications for school administration and can be used as a keystone in future studies regarding the solution to the issue that is teacher attrition. Similarly, studies by Billingsley (2007) and Guarino et al. (2006) provided additional context, showing that teacher retention is influenced by a variety of factors, including the work environment and the availability of professional development opportunities. These insights align with the study's conclusions, illustrating that while administrative style is paramount, the interplay between supportive work conditions and opportunities for professional growth cannot be overlooked in addressing teacher attrition.

Understanding teacher attrition requires a multidimensional approach, considering not just individual factors but also the broader contextual forces at play in the education sector. In my dissertation, Chapter 5 reveals that the administrative style is the leading factor influencing teacher attrition, a conclusion that aligns closely with the literature on educational leadership and

school climate. For instance, the work of Bryk et al. (2010) in “Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago,” emphasized the critical role of effective administration in fostering environments conducive to teacher retention. This insight is echoed in the research by Brown and Wynn (2009), which discussed the significant impact of principal leadership on teacher retention issues, further validating my findings regarding the paramount importance of administrative style.

Moreover, my results underscore that working conditions are the second most significant factor contributing to teacher attrition. This finding resonates with Billingsley’s (2007) evidence on how both physical and emotional working conditions in schools play a substantial role in teacher turnover. Additionally, Ingersoll’s (2016) discussions on organizational factors, including working environments as determinants of teacher turnover, provide a supportive backdrop to my analysis, highlighting the critical nature of working conditions in the retention equation.

Regarding salary, my research indicates it as an important yet comparatively less significant factor behind administrative style and working conditions. This perspective is supported by the literature review conducted by Guarino et al. (2006), which acknowledged salary as a factor in teacher retention but pointed out the greater significance of elements like school climate and administrative support. Furthermore, Podesta’s (2007) discussion elaborated on the necessity of not only competitive salaries but also quality working conditions and supportive leadership for retaining teachers. This nuanced view on salary aligns with my findings, suggesting that while it is a consideration for teachers contemplating attrition, it is not their primary concern.

Through integrating these insights from my dissertation with the referenced past research, I aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted factors contributing to teacher attrition. My findings not only confirm but also expand upon the existing literature by offering a detailed examination of how administrative style, working conditions, and salary collectively influence teachers' decisions to stay or leave the profession. This approach not only validates my research but also positions it within the broader academic and policy discourse on improving teacher retention in the education sector.

Limitations

This study faced limitations due to a relatively localized pool of survey participants. The survey was given to teachers in northwestern Pennsylvania and is the result of regional and statewide policy. Additional survey work to include a national and/or international focus may reveal differences in the hierarchy of factors leading to teacher attrition. Interpretations of wording (e.g., “enough” in item 14 may mean “I don’t want any more PD” [responding 4 or 5] to some or “They did not provide meaningful PD to my needs” [responding 1 or 2]—c.f., with other items aimed at getting values of current PD).

The outcomes of this study might also have been influenced by certain constraints, particularly the geographic concentration of its participants. Specifically, the survey was conducted among educators in northwestern Pennsylvania, a choice that is shaped by the region’s distinctive policies, both at the local and state levels. Therefore, the findings might exhibit characteristics unique to this specific locale. For example, one must consider the sociocultural aspects, economic conditions, or even the educational dynamics of northwestern Pennsylvania. These factors could have affected the sentiments and responses of the surveyed teachers, making them different from those of teachers in other regions or countries.

It would be beneficial to extend the study beyond this regional boundary to develop a broader, more generalized understanding. By introducing a national or even international perspective, the study could capture diverse experiences and opinions. For instance, what factors lead to teacher attrition in the southern states? Or how do these reasons compare with those in European or Asian countries? Expanding the study's reach in this manner might expose a different hierarchy or pattern of reasons for teacher departures.

While this study offers valuable insights specific to northwestern Pennsylvania, it is crucial to approach its findings with an understanding of their geographic specificity and the potential nuances in interpretation. Further research with a wider and more varied demographic and refined survey phrasing can pave the way for more comprehensive and universally applicable conclusions.

Recommendations for Practice

To expand on the recommendations for practice, it is crucial to delve deeper into the mechanisms through which leadership and workplace environment improvements can be actualized in educational settings. The emphasis on leadership enrichment and creative problem-solving as key strategies for enhancing teacher retention necessitates a multifaceted approach that addresses both the structural and cultural dimensions of educational institutions.

Enhancing Leadership Capacity

Leadership capacity in schools can be enhanced through comprehensive professional development programs that focus on transformational leadership qualities. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate their staff by creating a vision for the future, fostering an environment of trust, encouraging innovation, and recognizing individual contributions. To

achieve this, educational administrators should be encouraged to participate in leadership development workshops and seminars that focus on the following:

- Emotional intelligence: Understanding and managing one's own emotions and those of others to foster positive relationships and improve decision-making.
- Inclusive decision-making: Engaging teachers in the decision-making process to ensure that their voices are heard and valued, thereby increasing their commitment and satisfaction with their work environment.
- Conflict resolution: Equipping school leaders with the skills to manage and resolve conflicts constructively, thereby reducing stress and improving the school climate.

Fostering a Positive Workplace Environment

Improving the workplace environment requires attention to both the physical conditions of schools and the interpersonal dynamics within them. Efforts to enhance the workplace environment might include:

- Resource allocation: Ensuring that teachers have access to the necessary resources, including technology, materials, and support staff, to effectively deliver their curriculum.
- Professional development opportunities: Providing teachers with ongoing opportunities for professional growth and development, tailored to their individual needs and career aspirations.
- Wellness programs: Implementing wellness programs that support teachers' physical and mental health, recognizing that teacher well-being is crucial for sustaining their motivation and effectiveness.

Implementing Creative Problem-Solving Strategies

Creative problem-solving involves thinking differently about the challenges facing schools and seeking innovative solutions that go beyond traditional approaches. This could involve the following:

- Collaborative partnerships: Establishing partnerships with local businesses, community organizations, and higher education institutions to enhance learning opportunities for students and professional development for teachers.
- Leveraging technology: Exploring new pedagogical technologies to engage students and streamline administrative tasks, thereby reducing the workload on teachers and improving the learning experience for students.
- School culture initiatives: Developing initiatives that foster a culture of appreciation, recognition, and mutual respect among all members of the school community.

Structured Interventions and Accountability

To ensure the effectiveness of leadership enhancements and creative problem-solving initiatives, it is vital to implement structured interventions with clear objectives, timelines, and metrics for success. This could involve the following:

- Leadership coaching and mentoring programs that provide ongoing support and feedback for school administrators.
- Regular evaluations of leadership practices and workplace conditions to assess progress and identify areas for improvement.
- Establishing a culture of accountability where school leaders are responsible for the impact of their leadership on teacher retention and student outcomes.

In incorporating these recommendations, it is clear that improving teacher retention requires a holistic and integrated approach that addresses the multifaceted challenges educators face. By focusing on leadership enrichment, fostering positive workplace environments, encouraging creative problem-solving, and implementing structured interventions with accountability, schools can create a more supportive and engaging environment for teachers, ultimately enhancing the quality of education.

The current results indicate that administrative style and workplace environments are the highest reasons teachers consider leaving their current assignment or the profession altogether. This indicates that workplaces are potentially in need of leadership enrichment and creative problem-solving, even more so than increased salaries. School leadership could undergo interventions providing leadership theoretical frameworks and accountability to development.

Recent findings have suggested that the way school administrations operate, and the workplace conditions significantly influence teachers' decisions about staying in their current roles or even continuing in the teaching profession. These factors play a more significant role than previously assumed, possibly overshadowing even monetary incentives or salary hikes.

Consider an educational institution dominated by strict and commanding leadership. In such environments, educators may perceive that their insights are dismissed or marginalized. When combined with issues like scarce resources, deteriorating facilities, or weak support networks, these professionals might experience devaluation and stress. Struggling to impart education in the face of such adversity could lead them to reassess their position and even the suitability of the teaching profession itself.

This realization underscores the pressing need for schools to reevaluate and potentially revamp their leadership strategies. Instead of focusing on salary increments as a primary

retention tool, there is an evident need for leadership enhancement. School administrators must be equipped with skills that go beyond traditional management. For instance, understanding the nuances of effective communication, empathy-driven decision-making, and the ability to foster a positive, collaborative environment can make all the difference.

Creative problem-solving is another area from which schools can benefit. Instead of sticking to age-old methods, administrators could be trained to think outside the box, finding innovative solutions to age-old challenges. For instance, if there is a lack of resources, can partnerships be developed with local businesses or community groups to bridge the gap? If classroom management is an issue, are there contemporary pedagogical methods or technologies that can enhance student engagement?

Moreover, there is value in introducing structured interventions for school leadership. These interventions could be based on proven theoretical frameworks emphasizing modern leadership principles tailored to educational settings. These include strategies for effective delegation, fostering a culture of continuous feedback, or even techniques for conflict resolution. Importantly, there should be a mechanism for accountability alongside equipping leaders with these skills. This ensures that administrators are putting these strategies into practice once trained and are held responsible for their development and the subsequent impact on the school environment.

In conclusion, while salaries are undeniably essential, the findings highlight the more profound need for nurturing a conducive work environment and adaptive leadership styles in schools to ensure teacher retention and satisfaction.

Recommendations for Further Research

The significance of comprehending the factors leading to teacher attrition cannot be overstated. Based on prior investigations, a series of recommendations have been put forward to delve deeper into this crucial subject.

Recommendations include further research in finding a hierarchy for other parts of the state, and other states. This broader research perspective would offer a more holistic view of educators' challenges in varying geographic and demographic contexts. For instance, while one area might have administrative challenges as a primary concern, another might have infrastructural or resource-related issues.

Recommendations also include investigations into administrator preparation programs to determine what leadership styles are encouraged in their program of study. What kind of leadership paradigms are these programs promoting? Are these styles in line with educational institutions' current needs and dynamics? By studying the curriculum of these programs, one can gain insights into whether they promote autocratic, democratic, transformational, or other leadership styles.

Administrative styles in use should be investigated for fidelity to any leadership theoretical frameworks in use. Leadership style interventions could be conducted based on these results. It is essential to assess if the leadership styles practiced by school administrators align with the theoretical frameworks taught during their training. Are there discrepancies between theory and practice? If so, pinpointing these gaps can provide valuable insights. For instance, an administrator might be trained in transformational leadership but lean towards an autocratic style in real-world situations.

Building on the insights gained from my dissertation, which explored the significant impact of teacher autonomy on retention rates, I strongly recommend further research to deepen understanding of this potential connection. Future studies should aim to explore the nuances of teacher autonomy, including the specific aspects of curriculum development and instructional decision-making that most strongly influence teacher decisions to stay in or leave the profession. Additionally, comparative research across different educational contexts, such as urban versus rural schools or primary versus secondary education levels, could provide valuable insights into how the importance of autonomy might vary across different teaching environments. Such research could employ a mix of qualitative methods, such as interviews and case studies, to capture the lived experiences of teachers, alongside quantitative approaches to identify patterns and correlations at a larger scale. This multifaceted approach would enrich understanding of the complex dynamics between teacher autonomy and retention, offering a solid foundation for developing targeted interventions to support teachers and reduce attrition rates.

Moreover, examining the role of administrative support in facilitating teacher autonomy could offer critical insights into effective strategies for enhancing teacher retention. Future research should investigate how school leaders can best empower teachers, encouraging innovative teaching practices while providing the necessary resources and support structures. This includes studying the impact of professional development opportunities tailored to fostering autonomy and identifying the barriers that teachers face in exercising their autonomy within the institutional framework. By focusing on these areas, researchers can contribute to the creation of a more nuanced, evidence-based understanding of how to create supportive educational environments that not only value but actively promote teacher autonomy. The ultimate goal of this research should be to inform policy and practice, ensuring that teachers feel both empowered

and supported, thereby enhancing their commitment to the profession and reducing the likelihood of attrition.

Other recommendations include describing teacher autonomy, administrative style, and workplace conditions for exactly what is being reported and then each item's respective effect on teacher morale and resiliency in the profession. It is paramount to precisely define and understand specific factors such as teacher autonomy, the nature of administrative leadership, and the general conditions of the workplace. What exactly do teachers mean when they cite these concerns? For instance, when referring to "teacher autonomy," are educators pointing toward curriculum choices, classroom management strategies, or something else entirely? Delving into the nitty-gritty of these terms can clarify their specific impact on teacher morale and their willingness to persevere in the teaching profession. One could wonder, for example, if a more democratic administrative style, where teachers have a say in decision-making processes, would bolster their enthusiasm and commitment to their roles.

Lastly, based on the findings from the above investigations, targeted interventions can be designed. If a particular leadership style is more effective in fostering teacher morale and retaining talent, then efforts can be made to train and encourage administrators to adopt that approach. For instance, if a democratic style is most effective, workshops and training sessions can be organized to equip school leaders with the skills and mindset to incorporate this style into their daily operations.

By broadening the research scope and focusing on specifics, more effective strategies to bolster teacher morale and retention can be crafted, ensuring a more robust educational system for all.

Conclusions

Teacher attrition continues at crisis levels in education. Any hope of improving the educational system must address teacher attrition, as teacher quality is identified as the most important controllable variable in educational success. This study showed that school administration is the biggest reason for teacher attrition among 15 schools in northwestern Pennsylvania. Teachers reported a perception of administrators being disconnected from workers' needs and experiences, which suggests faculty leadership may not be a priority in their preparation programs of study. Principals are tasked with a massive workload, learning educational theories, legal statutes, and community initiatives but may benefit from interventions developing outcomes-based leadership work from current theoretical frameworks. Current results indicate that administrators may be squandering their best resources by neglecting to meet the psychological and emotional needs of their teaching staff. Future studies could help determine levels of consistency in factor hierarchies in other regions.

Addressing the issue of teacher attrition is paramount to enhancing the education system. This is particularly vital given that the caliber and expertise of teachers have been recognized as the most influential factor that determines the success of education. In essence, having the best curriculum or infrastructure is secondary to having skilled and motivated educators in the classroom.

In this study, many educators felt that the administrators, including school principals, needed an understanding of the day-to-day challenges and needs of the teaching staff. This feedback hints at the possibility that the training and preparation programs for school administrators might need to give more emphasis to effective faculty leadership.

While principals play an instrumental role in schools and are inundated with responsibilities, there is a need for a balanced approach. Their responsibilities span understanding intricate educational theories, staying updated with legal regulations, and engaging with community-based initiatives. Nevertheless, the importance of outcomes-based leadership, rooted in contemporary theoretical approaches, should be considered amid these tasks. Such leadership practices ensure that the needs of the teaching staff are met and adequately supported.

The insights from this study indicate a concerning trend. School administrators might be inadvertently sidelining their most valuable assets—the teachers—by not addressing their emotional and psychological needs. This not only affects the morale of the teachers but can also impact the overall learning environment for students. The research by Bryk et al. (2010) on organizing schools for improvement highlights the impact of leadership and school climate on teacher satisfaction and retention, further validating my study's findings on the critical role of school administration in addressing teacher attrition. Studies by Ingersoll (2016) and Guarino et al. (2006) also indicated that the organizational conditions within schools, including the style of leadership and the working environment, play a significant role in teacher attrition. These findings underscore the importance of administrative practices and the quality of the workplace in influencing teachers' decisions to remain in or leave the profession. Furthermore, the work of Darling-Hammond and Wei (2009) suggested that teacher preparation and ongoing professional development, which are directly impacted by administrative priorities, are crucial for teacher retention, supporting my observation that administrators may need to realign their focus to better meet teachers' needs.

More research is necessary to develop a holistic understanding and ascertain if these findings are consistent across different geographies. Future investigations could compare these results with different regions or countries' findings. Such comprehensive research would provide deeper insights into whether these challenges are localized or more widespread, paving the way for tailored interventions to improve teacher retention and, ultimately, the quality of education.

Teacher attrition remains a critical challenge in the field of education, reaching what many consider to be crisis levels. The quality of teachers is universally acknowledged as a pivotal element in the educational success of students, making it the most significant factor that can be controlled and improved within the education system. My study, focusing on 15 schools in northwestern Pennsylvania, has highlighted school administration as the primary contributor to teacher attrition. Teachers have voiced concerns about administrators appearing out of touch with the realities of teaching, suggesting a gap in faculty leadership training within administrator preparation programs. Principals, burdened with extensive responsibilities, from mastering educational theories to navigating legal complexities and leading community initiatives, could significantly benefit from targeted interventions. These interventions would focus on developing leadership skills that are outcomes-based and aligned with contemporary educational needs.

The results of my research suggest that by not addressing the psychological and emotional needs of their staff, administrators risk undermining the very foundation of effective teaching and learning environments. The call for a shift in focus towards more empathetic and supportive leadership is clear. As teachers navigate the daily challenges of their profession, they seek understanding and support from their school leaders, which, in turn, can greatly enhance their job satisfaction and retention.

Furthermore, this study brings to light the critical need for a balanced approach to the administrative responsibilities of principals. While their roles are undeniably complex and multifaceted, the essence of effective leadership lies in meeting the needs of the teaching staff, thereby fostering an environment where educators feel valued, supported, and understood. The potential disconnect between the training of school administrators and the realities of effective faculty leadership underscore the necessity for a reevaluation of administrator preparation programs.

The concerning trends identified in this study point to a larger systemic issue that may not be unique to northwestern Pennsylvania. There is a pressing need for further research to explore the consistency of these findings across different regions and educational contexts. By extending the scope of future studies to include diverse geographic locations and educational settings, a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to teacher attrition can be gained. Such research is vital for developing targeted interventions and policies aimed at improving teacher retention, thereby enhancing the overall quality of education.

In conclusion, addressing teacher attrition is not merely about improving numbers; it is about recognizing and nurturing the heart of education—the teachers. As the most crucial controllable variable in educational success, the well-being and retention of teachers should be at the forefront of educational reforms. By fostering a culture of support, understanding, and effective leadership, a more sustainable and successful educational system may be created.

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument

1. Please state your gender

☐ Male ☐ Female

2. In your previous position, did you teach elementary or high school?

☐ Elementary ☐ Middle School ☐ High School

3. How long did you teach in your previous position?

☐ 1–2 years ☐ 3–5 years ☐ 7–10 years ☐ 10+ years

4. How long have you taught overall?

☐ 1–2 years ☐ 3–5 years ☐ 7–10 years ☐ 10+ years

5. Please rate the following in order of reasons why you exited your previous position (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neither agree nor disagree; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly agree.

☐ Salary

☐ Administrative Style

☐ Working Conditions

☐ Teacher Autonomy: i.e., freedom of curriculum development and institutional style

☐ Discontentment with the profession of teaching

☐ Other: Please explain

Appendix B: IRB Approval

Date: 2-22-2023

IRB #: IRB-2023-1

Title: Teacher Attrition

Creation Date: 1-2-2023

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Shari Donch

Review Board: ACU IRB

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type Initial

Review Type Exempt

Decision **Exempt**

Appendix C: Permission Letter

