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ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AS TO WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Student achievement can be described in various ways. Some might define student achievement as standardized test scores or grades from teachers. Others might say student achievement is being engaged and motivated in class lessons and activities. Still others might say it is modifying one's challenging behavior to accomplish tasks, and make better choices. Nonetheless, student achievement should be highlighted in all aspects of making a change for positive lifelong outcomes. Today's classrooms are so different from classrooms of the past. Past research states that teachers are one of the most influential reasons for student achievement. However, in today's classrooms, teachers' perceptions of what contributes to student achievement are not being addressed. This study is designed to give elementary teachers a platform to share their perceptions of what contributes to student achievement. Elementary teachers from the largest public school district in New Mexico will be invited to participate. The elementary teachers within the district will receive a link to a web-based survey from their principals. The data from the survey will collect new data perceptions and current representations of what elementary teachers think and believe contributes to student achievement.

Keywords: *Teachers' beliefs, Social Emotional Learning, student behavior, academic achievement, motivation, practices, relationships*

Teaching is a profession that is rewarding, yet one of the most demanding professions one can face. The day-to-day lessons are opportunities to impact student success. To make such an impact for each and every student involves careful implementation and knowledge of curriculum, providing a safe learning

environment, and fostering growth and improvement through effective and timely feedback. To foster growth and improvement in today's classrooms involves the execution of multiple approaches, strategies, and practices. If that is true, elementary teachers need a way to facilitate this voice. The aim of this literature review was to discover what elementary teachers believe and think contribute to student achievement. The education profession needs new research to be conducted because the classrooms and students of today are so different from those back in 2005, 2010, and even 2015. Research that goes back more than 20 years varies on what has shown to contribute to indicate student achievement and only creates more questions.

Twenty years ago, elementary teachers' perceptions of what contributes to student achievement were taken into account. Unfortunately, that dialogue is no longer happening in research. Student achievement in elementary school is the very backbone of how to build important life skills, better health later in life, a work ethic to be a productive citizen and a foundation for future success. The question is what do teachers believe contributes to student achievement?

Asking elementary teachers who are the face of early education and are with students day in and day out may provide an answer. The past research has identified and measured multiple variables as to what has yielded student achievement. The gap in literature addresses student achievement without attending to the challenges (more diversity and more students with special needs) teachers have to respond to in today's classroom. Elementary teachers' beliefs and what they think contributes to student achievement could provide an awareness as to how to assist them implementing the one thing that will make change happen. Therefore, there is a disconnect between past research and what teachers perceive to contribute to student achievement in today's classrooms. The need to conduct research would bridge the gap from past research and create a resolve in today's classroom. Addressing student achievement through the beliefs and thoughts of elementary teachers gives them a voice and the results from new research will enable them to "buy in" and do whatever it takes to provide for students to be successful.

A review of past literature was conducted to review what were past contributors to student success and achievement. It is evident that concrete numerical data provides information where students are achieving and areas in which they need to work in order to reach proficiency in various subject areas. Elementary teachers' perceptions of what contributes to student achievement should be taken into account. But the past research is limited in providing these answers. This literature review of supporting and insightful literature has been divided into two themes, elementary teachers' beliefs and perceptions, and past research and what it revealed about student achievement.

Elementary Teachers' Beliefs and Perceptions

A qualitative multiple case study by Schmid (2018) explored the behaviors and beliefs of teachers who had students repeatedly performing well on state assessments. Behaviors and beliefs are difficult to measure, as well as change over time. The review of this study makes a supportive claim relevant to the research because a teacher's behaviors and beliefs can impact students and the construct of a successful outcome academically for students.

The study investigated three high performing teachers who taught ELA and worked at former low performing schools in San Diego County, where the student population repeatedly scored 10% above the state average on the state test in English language arts. A predesigned set of questions was used to assemble data about the teachers and school principals (Schmid, 2018). In addition, the researcher monitored every cooperating teacher for approximately two days. The observation documentation concentrated on the existence or lack of teachers' behaviors and beliefs recognized in past literature as measures of successful teaching (Schmid, 2018). To ensure validity of the results, every teacher and principal were interviewed twice. The data were then coded and triangulated.

The findings disclosed that cooperating teachers felt that all students were able to learn and that student learning was a true reflection of their teaching. For learning to occur, teachers had to be invested in their own professional learning in order to provide appropriate instruction which enabled students to succeed (Schmid, 2018). Professional learning included analyzing data and working with colleagues and that took a significant amount of time. In conclusion, failing schools had pockets of excellence with teachers whose students performed well. This small study of only three teachers from San Diego, California must be viewed with discretion due to the small sampling size. If they had beliefs that translated into specific instructional behaviors that would have been important for school leadership, researchers, and student teachers to have known. More research must be directed towards distinguishing how students' success could be augmented through a longer school day or school year. It would have been interesting to know if the behaviors and beliefs were the primary source of students' success and to what extent.

Student achievement can be examined through the eyes of teachers because they can detect through daily observations and interactions with students what can move the student in the right direction that leads towards being successful. Gage and Thomas (2019) wanted to identify teachers' perceptions of the effects of SEL (Social Emotional Learning) on school atmosphere, student behavior, and academic success. There were six participants from three schools in Central Alabama. The three schools involved had 50% or more free and reduced lunch.

Two researchers used past literature and qualitative interview questioning techniques in a 90-minute session where the teachers responded to nine open-ended questions that assessed teachers' discernment concerning the result of social and emotional learning on school atmosphere, student behavior, and academic success (Gage & Thomas, 2019). The responses to the interviews provided an awareness into the cooperating teachers' insight of the efficacy of social and emotional learning. The results showed that teachers recognized a pronounced contrast in a positive mindset throughout the school, self-regulation and student-led academic achievement after the implementation of The Leader in Me (TLIM) program. More importantly, teachers noted that moving from a student-centered environment to a student-led environment had the greatest influence on student achievement (Gage & Thomas, 2019).

In addition, participants believed the social and emotional learning program supported development in student achievement along with the other categories. This study provides a common thread to the research of Gage and Thomas (2019) relating to the thought process that all students can, and will learn. The two studies share a common thread that supports the premise of future research to find out what elementary teachers' perceptions and beliefs contribute to student achievement and how those beliefs result in teaching and learning. Gage and Thomas (2019) also found that teachers perceived a significant difference in a social and emotional learning program where academic achievement did increase because of a more pronounced understanding of the importance of self-motivation to succeed.

In conclusion, the effective methods of the program did foster improvement in several categories, but most notably academic achievement. Moving forward, practice and theory could explore other cost effective SEL skills curricula in school settings that would improve student behavior, school climate and overall student achievement.

Next, Succar (n.d.) provided empirical evidence of how two new English language arts teachers' personal beliefs and professional knowledge impacted their teaching practices and student achievement. The study was a narrative inquiry regarding the teachers' differences between personal and professional beliefs, and the diverse needs of their students. At the time of the study, there was growing research about how a teacher's personal and professional beliefs about their practice can influence student outcomes.

Two ELA teachers that were in their early-years of teaching composed the small participant sample size. The researcher's rationale was the need for in-depth stories that were received and represented. Both teachers had a Bachelor of arts (one in English literature and the other in elementary education) and agreed to volunteer for the study either to enrich teaching style, or to improve teaching

practices. The school district was a medium-sized school with approximately 1000 diverse students in a semi-urban area in the southeastern United States. Students were from low to middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds. The unique school housed only grades three through six.

Weekly observations of ninety minutes took place during the third nine weeks of the school year. The weekly observations allowed the researcher to witness and gather information as it was happening. At the end of the study, field notes were completed and checked by both the researcher and participants. Revisions were made for the final text.

The study resulted in a particular theme that has been identified as a common thread throughout this literature review. There are commonalities of providing a nurturing and caring environment (Garza et al., 2014) to themes derived from the findings of this study that indicated the type of classroom environment and support within that classroom has been linked to student achievement. Both participants' beliefs and practices aligned in understanding their roles as educators, how students learn by establishing relationships and the results promoted student learning. Other findings demonstrated that a caring environment allowed students to ask more questions, request clarification to broaden their understanding, and ultimately, enhance learning, self-expression, and overall confidence in what they were learning. The research was valuable in yielding social-emotional outcomes as an added value. The researcher allowed the narrative inquiry approach from past theory to organize a framework of themes that illustrated teacher beliefs and practices. The researcher's actions were specific to the focus of this research study where a chronological sequence provided the narrative structure to code common phrases and sentences and recognize patterns across narratives.

Thus, the teachers differed in background, education, and experiences. The primary intent of the study and this review of this investigation was to disclose that there were beliefs and perceptions from elementary teachers in what contributed to student success and achievement. The author of the study made a call to action that this type of inquiry was new on how teachers' beliefs and practices influenced student achievement in an ever-changing environment within schools. The review of this article has created validation for the problem many are wanting to address—a gap in research about elementary teachers' perceptions of what contributes to student achievement.

Similarly, nine elementary teachers' perspectives on instructional approaches for reading and math were investigated by Smith (2019). At the time, a significant number of grades 3 through 5 students were scoring below grade level on state assessments and the problem was to examine a lack of structure on

current instructional strategies teachers used in increasing student achievement levels.

The data was collected and coded to determine themes. Three sources were used to ensure dependability and reliability through triangulation. The sources were interviews, teachers' data notebooks, and Professional Learning Communities meeting minutes. The results of the study led to understanding that teachers benefited from ongoing professional development and PLC meetings where research-based strategies were discussed and provided. Teachers also commented about the opportunities they received from other teachers regarding instructional practices that would help with increasing student achievement on state assessments. Findings disclosed that cooperating teachers used a variety of methods to track students' academic improvements that over time showed student growth (Smith, 2019).

Data guided the instruction, but having effective instructional strategies was what contributed to student learning and success while closing the achievement gap. The findings also provided various instructional strategies that were utilized such as differentiated and small group instruction to scaffolding of new concepts. An interesting and significant finding was that the instructional practices were primarily put in place for low performing students, but participants believed the instructional practices used benefited all students regardless of academic status.

Participants voiced that collaborating on instructional strategies and analyzing data together allowed them to improve their teaching practices that improved student's data when taking state assessments. The findings recommended that teachers have effective PLC meetings and PD in order to implement new ways to improve student academic performance through effective instruction (Smith, 2019). In conclusion, teachers used instructional strategies and practices that closed the achievement gap in reading and math. The review of this study was a scholarly source relevant to the topic and an emerging voice in the field under review. In addition, the study identified the beliefs of teachers in what they thought contributed to student success.

Along the same lines was yet another study. The intent of this study was to describe the extent teachers perceived that the law No Child Left Behind governed instructional and assessment practices (Mertler, 2011). K-12 teachers from 38 out of 156 school districts in Ohio during the 2005-2006 school year agreed to participate. A web-based survey was developed and provided to 1,534 randomly selected teacher respondents through an email sent to superintendents with pertinent information regarding the basis of the study and consent to participate. The superintendents then forwarded the email to teachers. The teachers were provided instructions on how to complete the 22 questions posed in the 4-point Likert scale survey. The data was studied using the Statistical Package for the

Social Sciences (SPSS, v. 15) for frequencies, means, percentages and standard deviations that summarized the overall results from the survey.

Noteworthy results disclosed that teachers believed NCLB had negative influences on instructional and curricular practices as well as increased levels of stress visibly seen in students during testing (Mertler, 2011). Another finding stated that 73% of teachers believed they felt forced to channel attention away from what actually improved teaching and learning. Consequently, a belief from the majority of teachers emanated that they spent more time on test content, than on state standards. Results also indicated that elementary teachers were doing more to prepare students for taking the test than making instructional changes that resulted in student achievement. This finding was also reiterated by Abrams (2003). In conclusion, teachers believed that NCLB had negative effects on students due to stressors in how students performed on state assessments. The study found that students may have had higher scores, but the scores may not have indicated actual improvement that led to overall student achievement.

Implications showed that teacher practices in preparing students for the assessments were artificial, questionable, and possibly unethical. The study was conducted in order to describe teachers' beliefs about specific classroom-based instructional and assessment practices. Unfortunately, the findings did not validate the extent of beliefs consistent with actual classroom practices because NCLB changed that. Moving forward, the method of preparing students in advance could be done in an ethical and acceptable way resulting in student achievement. The review of this study indicated how data can be useful when implementing instructional practices and strategies that support students in targeted areas as found in the study by Smith (2019).

Past research and what it revealed about student achievement

The remainder of this literature review revealed the limited nature of research available the last fifteen years on the topic to support the purpose and importance of teacher attitudes and beliefs as to student success. Therefore, the studies that follow provide findings and conclusions on what past research said about student achievement and why it was reviewed.

The quantitative nature of the study by Mayer et al. (2016) was to determine predictors of student achievement through two criterion variables as measured on the standardized state assessment in reading and mathematics for the 2009-2010 school year. Participants came from a targeted population of 106 schools (Title I and non-Title 1) along with the criterion-referenced competency test scores for approximately 16,000 fifth-graders (Mayer et al., 2016). The level of teachers' education was merged to identify the average years of education level typical of

the teachers in each school. The data also reported Title I status, teachers' years of experience, and school demographics.

The findings indicated that Title I schools have a greater percentage of students who obtained scores showing students who did not meet the state's criteria for proficiency in reading and mathematics. The Title I classification appeared to benefit student achievement when only examining the percentage of students who met the standards (Mayer et al., 2016). However, a Title I designation for a school does not always positively influence positive results on these tests. The finding was concerning and led to future implications. One implication specified as crucial was that stakeholders should determine what could make the greatest difference for all students and make every attempt to apply those results in future academic settings. Other interesting results were that teacher quality as supported by teachers' years of experience and education level varied results when related to student achievement (Mayer et.al, 2016). In addition, there were contradictions to past research stating that small class sizes were a determining factor for student achievement. One potential reason could be an issue of homogeneous versus heterogeneous classes. Therefore, further research may be conducive to study teachers in classrooms where students repeatedly score well on the standardized testing to try to identify what other variables may have played a part in teacher quality. Conducting further research could also determine the result that teacher quality was not the answer-it may have been that teachers got lucky in getting a bright group of students. Nonetheless, additional information on specific characteristics a quality teacher may possess could result in explicit factors and their impact on achievement. Ultimately, this study showed reliance on assessment scores as perhaps the only predictor of student achievement.

Overreliance on data results could counteract other factors that could be at work that have elicited student achievement. The lack of baseline data on student background, parental involvement, and school funding created a difficulty in correlating the achievement of students. On the other hand, teachers' years of experience positively contributed to student achievement while class size did not contribute to student success despite the expectation. A potential cause could have been the class construct creating the explanation for the discrepancy. The implications of further research analyzing the other possible contributing factors mentioned in the study could have determined other predictors for student achievement. Therefore, the importance and significance regarding other factors still need to be identified.

Next, an explorative qualitative study examined the impact of elementary students and the influence made through specific caring behaviors offered by teachers (Garza et al., 2014). Teacher behaviors were observed and expressed as

genuine to upper elementary and middle school students. The authentic teacher behaviors and patterns of interactions resulted in a safe and caring environment. Moreover, this study is tangential due to the nature that it shows another connection to support the perspective this author is taking to defend the impact of teachers' perceptions and beliefs as to what contributes to student achievement. Selective sampling was used in the collection of four female teachers in suburban schools in the southern part of the United States. The researchers chose the participants because they were believed as being compassionate and possessed a reputation for creating caring and nurturing relationships with all students by their administrators (Garza et al., 2014). Data collection included classroom observations, teacher interviews, and teacher self-reflection. The data analysis process was conducted by two of the authors through a coding process. Next, the procedures were then independently repeated with constant comparative analysis to ensure intercoder reliability. Six themes were recognized and submitted to the research team for feedback.

Major findings resulted in what behaviors may have fostered a sense of belonging, why it was important to develop a rapport with students, the need to attend to physiological needs, and how the teachers' behaviors supported academic success. In conclusion, given that the study was investigative, further examination of a bigger sample of diversified teachers might have enhanced and extended the themes. Yet again, this author provides an indication to conduct further research with this study and many others mentioned in this literature review with larger sample sizes. The literature review has demonstrated limitations and a caution for review of such studies due to the lack of participation and available research.

Canto and Proctor (2013) showed student-level predictors of reading achievement among third grade regular education students. Hierarchical linear regression results indicated that oral reading fluency (ORF) and reading grade were statistically significant predictors of high-stakes reading achievement (Canto & Proctor, 2013). A large southeastern school district participated in the study and supplied 145 third grade students. There was variability in student demographics across the participating students and were in both high and low-performing classrooms with respect to scores on the previous year's statewide high-stakes assessment. Teachers were provided a questionnaire and of those disseminated, approximately 28% of the questionnaires were not returned (Canto & Proctor, 2013).

Predictors included student demographics (gender and socioeconomic status), direct observations of oral reading fluency skills, word decoding skills, academic grades, and attendance rate. Findings showed that when teachers used ORF data they were able to initiate individualized student achievement goals,

progress monitor the impact of instructional programs, and differentiate interventions (Canto & Proctor, 2013). The results were motivating to show an increase in achievement.

In contrast, the reading grades had solely contributed to the reading success in addition to ORF and due to all of the other types of variables in the model was unforeseen. Putting ORF results in the hierarchical regression analysis enabled the exploration of how reading grades added predictive power. In total, ORF research suggested that it was an acceptable predictor of reading achievement, but that caution should be taken when interpreting the predictive effectiveness for specific subgroups (Canto & Proctor, 2013).

At the time of this study, there was little known about the impact other student-level variables (students' reading grades, attendance rate, and prior grade retention) had on reading achievement. To conclude, the study was interested in duplicating previous research based upon the prediction of reading achievement on high-stakes standardized assessments for third grade students that used ORF. It was speculated that the findings would have been similar to those from earlier examinations on the predictive nature of ORF. Limitations in the study were firmly established in the absence of participants, missing data, and implementation adherences with irregularities of subtests (Canto & Proctor, 2013).

Further study of a larger and more diversified sample would increase transferability of results and would indicate further comparisons. The quantitative data analysis of this study has indicated direct links of using a specific assessment system such as DIBELS and reading achievement outcomes. However, the findings also stated that other variables have potential for similar results. Again, an article worthy of review and its implications for a reason to continue uncovering what teachers believe as additional contributions to student achievement. Concrete numerical data was provided in this study to show student achievement. However, this author is still interested in going from another angle of finding what may surpass hard data analyses. One could postulate determining what other variables could contribute to student achievement based upon perceptions that elementary teachers possess and report.

To continue with the review of past literature, an observational study by Gage et al. (2017) investigated the degree to which teachers implemented distinct classroom management practices and how these practices related to student behaviors that were most predictive of student success and failure. A sample of 65 elementary schools across various schools in Southeastern Florida with 1,242 teacher-student pairs were observed during normal classroom instruction. Schools differed in size from 251 to 832 students and represented a cross section of urban and rural schools with diverse percentages pertaining to ethnicity, socio-economic status, and special education. As part of a state-funded response-to-intervention

(RTI) education project, seventy schools were approached to participate. The study used qualitative research where four groups of teachers were observed to identify different patterns of classroom management practices.

Observers began the observation once the teacher started instruction in the content area. Classrooms were observed only one time for a fifteen-minute session to identify the amount to which teachers implemented evidenced-based classroom management practices and if there was a relationship between use of specific teachers' behaviors and students' time involved in instruction and rate of involvement. Target students were rotated between male and female students. The results from the observations would yield a snapshot of typical interactions between the teacher and a targeted student in the classroom. Recording software measured variables such as teachers' time teaching, student responses to questions, and frequency of positive feedback. In addition, student behaviors such as being active, passively engaged or disruptive behaviors were also recorded and measured.

Results showed no differences in disruptions in classrooms with low standards of classroom management practices compared to classrooms with high standards of classroom management practices. Teachers with average or above average management styles had students who were highly engaged compared to the classrooms that did not adhere to evidence-based practices and low standards regarding their management styles. Thus, the need for using evidence-based practices were supported as a major finding in the study. The results also showed that an increase in negative feedback may have directly affected student engagement despite the frequency of disruptions. On the other hand, teachers who implemented the evidence-based classroom management practices were more likely to have student engagement resulting in the likelihood that students were learning. Hence, future research should be replicated to examine the relationship of students who are at risk for emotional and behavior disorders and the relationship to the type of classroom management practices. Analysis of the results indicated that RTI showed evidence of statistically significant findings that discrete types of classroom management practices decreased challenging behaviors, and increased student success. According to the results, engagement, an opportunity to respond in class, and the impact of positive feedback given to students did contribute to student achievement. The results also showed students who were taught with below average management styles and teachers with low engagement levels demonstrated a lower level of success and something that would need to be addressed. The review of this study led to more questions on what perceptions elementary teachers' might have had about their classroom management skills and how effective classroom management would impact student achievement. Further research may address the impact of RTI with the use of effective classroom

management practices as a link to teachers' perceptions as to why students were successful. Past literature on classroom management methods has some limitations due to one grade level being studied or the failure to have examined the relationship between teacher behavior and student behavior (Gage et al., 2017).

The need to conduct future research on the relationship between teacher and student behavior led to the review of the study by Owens et al. (2017). The study explored the degree and stability of relationships between essential teacher behaviors and student rule infractions at a class wide level and for students at risk of ADHD. The purpose for the review of this research was to find out if elementary teachers' perceptions were part of the study in any way in identifying their skills or beliefs about misbehavior as contributing to student achievement. As stated before, what teachers do is not relevant to my research, but it does provide insight on what researchers have been looking at as predictors of student achievement. There were 55 elementary school teachers that participated in a multisite study designed to facilitate teachers' performance of effective classroom management strategies (Owens et al., 2017).

There was a diverse population at both school sites and the average teacher had taught for 14 years with 9 at the current school. The majority of the teachers held a master's degree. The students who participated were mostly male, Hispanic or of another race, and 93% with ADHD. Intelligence and socioeconomic status percentages of students were also noted. Teachers were recruited at each school and to enroll in the study were required to refer a student with inattentive or disruptive behavior and academic impairment (Owens et al., 2017). Once students were accepted into the study, inattentive or disruptive behavior baseline observations of the teachers and students began. Observations lasted between 15 and 45 minutes. Teachers were also provided details on classroom management methods in order to pinpoint the chosen behavior to be utilized.

The results showed an improved account of student and teacher behavior across the various elementary grades. The rates of class wide rule infractions and teacher praise fluctuated by grade level. The data suggested that past research was ineffective for the explanation of significant differences in development and classroom structure that more than likely falsified actual rates of student behaviors in each grade. The study provided proof that developmental reflection for child and teacher behavior should be emphasized along with the challenges teachers faced in classrooms (Owens et al., 2017). The evidence also provides another reason for this author to seek answers for what teachers believe and think about behavior challenges that may impact the teacher-student relationship that could contribute to student achievement. The study found that praise may have had little impact on lessening infractions, but could have increased the degree of

positive student results (e.g., behavioral conformity; time on task) and enhanced student–teacher relationships.

In the end, the baseline observations did not indicate improvement made in the classroom management methods used that may have transformed student behaviors. If the findings of this study were to be replicated, professional development, teacher training and evaluation should help the development of the skills pertinent to respond to demanding and challenging behaviors. Future research should examine the result of praise and positive interactions, relationships, on-task behavior, and student positive behavior skills between students and teachers as a goal to go alongside the reduction of demanding and challenging behaviors. The recommendations of future research align with the premise of my research to find out if elementary teachers' perceptions would include what they think about positive interactions as possible contributors to student achievement. This study was not really relevant to my research, but insightful. The research was tailored towards behaviors of the teacher and students. This makes a case that future research is important to pursue because other researchers have not. Questions also begin to surface on what do elementary teachers perceive about their classroom behavior management skills and what impacts those perceptions have in dealing with challenging behaviors. Will effective skills result in positive outcomes perhaps contributing to student achievement?

Student engagement was the focus of the next study. Carter et al. (2012) measured the importance of student engagement in the classroom. The formative years of education and the degree of engagement revealed a part of why this author's investigation is important and to what researchers have focused on that depicts student achievement. There were 1,943 third through fifth graders from a diverse, large, urban school district in the Southeast who participated in this study. There were an equal number of girls and boys in the participating sample. A 4-point Likert-type rating survey was used and coded so that higher scores indicated higher levels of engagement. The results yielded a five-factored structure (student-teacher relationships, peer support for learning, relevance and control of work, future goals, and family support for learning). Data was collected, obtained, and monitored on-site to ensure validity.

The results showed that girls tended to report better quality of teacher-student relations, higher future goals and aspirations, and greater levels of support compared to boys. Third graders reported higher levels of engagement compared to fifth graders. However, third graders noted a lower quality in their relationship with their teachers. The results provided answers, but have now created more questions. What would elementary teachers perceive to be the reason for these

results? Do teachers believe quality teacher-student relationships to be a predictor of student achievement?

In conclusion, additional research should be conducted from other rural and regions of the United States and should examine other relevant student demographics such as gender, ethnicity, and maturational level. The review of this study added much needed information regarding student engagement and its impact. In addition, this study is tangential support for my basic premise of what elementary teachers perceive to contribute to student achievement.

Teacher quality has been identified as a key element of student academic success. This research study investigated how teacher licensure test scores and other teacher characteristics affect elementary student achievement. The study by Buddin & Zamarro (2009) focused on elementary school students in Los Angeles, California. Five years of student-level achievement data was gathered. There were over 16,000 teachers who taught over 300,000 students in grades 2 through 5. The data information collected was based upon new teacher licensure test scores and more conventional calculations of teacher credentials like educational background and experience for other teachers. Half of the student population was classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP), approximately 80 percent qualified for the free/reduced lunch program, and the majority were Hispanic. Three-fourths of the teachers were female and ethnically diverse. Approximately 20 percent of the teachers held master degrees. Low-scoring schools in the district had more new and less experienced teachers compared to teachers in the high-scoring schools. Ultimately, teacher licensure scores were invariably lower in the bottom performing schools compared to the scores in the highest performing schools (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009).

Results showed that teacher experience had a beneficial outcome on student achievement in math and reading. In addition, an increase of five years in teacher experience was related with less than a percentage point increase in math and reading scores (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009). Next, female teachers had greater student results compared to male teachers. The advanced level of education ultimately did not impact reading or math scores compared to those without higher degrees. In addition, a teacher's race or ethnicity impacted math more than reading achievement. The results showed huge differences in achievement across ethnicity and gender with LEP students performing worse than others. The effects are that heterogeneity remains due to differences in growth rates for particular groups. Social status was powerful in determining student success compared to students that participated in the free/reduced lunch program which had lower scores in both math and reading. Teacher quality was an important determinant of student success, but the research proof provided little evidence how teacher quality could be improved (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009). In the end, the various

results still did not provide answers to what teachers believe and think about teacher quality as being a contributor to student achievement.

Therefore, future examination must concentrate on the recognition of certain teacher characteristics and methods that could increase student success in the classroom. The California study suggested that education authorities should reconsider the mastery requirements for novice teachers and generate tests that may be more predictive of desirable classroom behavior. Teachers that are more experienced, skilled or better educated (as measured by licensure exams) may intrinsically be able to teach, but not have consistently practiced those skills in the classroom (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009). This review indicated that teacher qualifications/behaviors resulted in a problem of how to teach a diverse student population.

The teachers were confronted with special challenges in educating these youth and little to no training on how to resolve these difficulties in the classroom.

At this point of this review of past literature, it has become clear and evident of what researchers wanted to find and reveal of past contributions to student achievement. This review provided several important factors and variables as to what contributes to student achievement. Still my review indicates a need for further research on what elementary teachers perceive as contributing factors to student achievement.

Past research has been consistent in identifying teachers as a crucial quantifiable factor in student learning. The limitations are that not many teacher attributes are invariably related to student success or achievement. Past studies have implied that experience works similarly for all teachers. However, experience varies with teachers' qualities or abilities. Instead of going off past research implications, this study by Kukla-Acevedo (2009) looked at the common relationship between teacher qualifications and teacher experiences to ascertain if experience has a repeated positive result on student achievement.

Data from a specific school district in Kentucky paired 5th grade math students to individual teachers. Data was collected for three school years and once missing information was accounted for, 3812 students, 46 schools, and 120 teachers created the dataset. The measure was the state's standardized 5th grade math test score where the sample students performed somewhat higher than the other 5th grade math students in the state (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Student demographics included gender, race, and participation in the free/reduced lunch program.

The teacher dataset was detailed information based upon the teacher's preparation program coursework, overall math GPA, and education hours taken as teacher candidates. The number of teaching experience years was a continuous

variable that was included in order to gauge the non-linear effect of experience on student achievement (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

The results of this study informed the present policy discourse at the time concerning alternative and customary paths to teacher certification. Supporters for the customary pathway argued that teacher preparation program coursework provided chief educational activities and classroom management skills that are vital to teaching achievement, while advocates of alternative pathways declared that content mastery was a paramount characteristic of an excellent teacher (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Direct testing of the pathway effects was not permitted by the data, but it did impart assistance for both pedagogical and content methods to being an excellent teacher. Content knowledge was found to be an essential element of both alternative and customary pathways to teaching and was not emphasized. Substantial improvements were demonstrated in the first 3–5 years of teaching in the classroom and a tapering effect occurred after five years. Despite these reasonably trustworthy results, not all studies found a relationship between experience and student achievement (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

Teachers' knowledge and expertise were key factors considered when calculating the influence of teacher advice on student success. Limitations in the data forced researchers to use substitutes like degree attainment and number of college courses to catch these features (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). This statement alone points to the purpose to ascertain elementary teachers' perceptions about their experience or content knowledge as contributing to student achievement. Although these substitutes should be certainly congruous with content mastery, the teachers' ability to transfer knowledge in the classroom was not reflected. The study improved past investigations by including a number of factors that specified teacher achievement during teacher candidate training. In essence, a successful college student was expected to be a successful teacher (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

One could make a claim that content specific knowledge of a teacher could be applied as a factor increasing the ability of students to perform in that subject. The increase in student achievement could then be related to the teacher's efficacy and effectiveness; therefore, the perception that a teacher may have made a difference with students in a particular subject. Future research should be considered to determine if content area preparation and student achievement would result in a systematic relationship.

In summary, the review and implication of the past literature provided creates even more of a reason for future research to be conducted. The past research focused on teacher behavior, levels of education or years of teaching experience to classroom practices that elementary teacher utilized that resulted in student success. Standardized assessment results have been an indicator of student success and achievement and will continue to be of value. The past

literature on the topic of elementary teachers' perceptions about what contributes to student achievement was found in past literature back in the 1980s and 1990s, but not in recent studies. Moving forward into the future, researchers need to revisit and explore this topic once again.

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