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Concordia University (Portland)

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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Merit Pay, Teacher Job Satisfaction, and Retention: A Descriptive Study

Desiree Hall

Concordia University – Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Teacher Leadership

Connie Sue Greiner, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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2017

Abstract

Teacher attrition is a costly issue for districts in the United States. Few studies closely examine the link between merit pay, teacher retention, and job satisfaction. This descriptive study measured teacher perspectives of merit pay in relation to job satisfaction and retention in order to provide essential feedback to stakeholders for future financial and strategic planning. A total of 353 teachers in a district located in the southwestern United States were targeted for this study. Of those 353 teachers, 235 participants responded to the survey. After analyzing the descriptive data, three participants were selected to complete a series of interviews to explore patterns and anomalies from the survey results and to clarify and bring deeper understanding whether merit pay and district improvement to compensation influence teacher job satisfaction and retention. Analysis of the descriptive data revealed teachers significantly believed that earning awards was relevant to academic growth. Further, they believed that all teachers regardless of area of study should have the same opportunities. The qualitative interviews revealed miscommunication associated with the merit pay program, revealed the participants found job satisfaction from the students with whom they work, and remain in their current teaching positions due to the school environment, culture, and colleagues.

Keywords: teacher perspective on merit pay, merit pay and teacher retention, merit pay and job satisfaction, merit pay in education, retention, and performance pay

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Solacia Davis, my daughter and inspiration, who has spent the first 14 years of her life watching me complete homework and waiting for me to finish reading one last chapter or writing one last page before we can spend time together. This dissertation is dedicated to her for all the nights she sat beside me drawing and reading while I completed schoolwork. Solacia, I love you to the moon and back.

Acknowlegements

I would like to acknowledge and express appreciation to the people who encouraged, supported, and lifted me up during this journey.

To my mother and stepfather, Becky and Joe: You always believed in me, even when I did not seem to be on the right path. You both knew what I had in me and encouraged me to go the distance. Thank you for your unwavering support and believing in me.

To my daughter: Thank you for your patience. I could not have asked for a more understanding, kind, and loving daughter. Thank you for reminding me I could do this. Thank you for waiting so long for my undivided attention.

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To Dr. Deborah Nattress: Thank you for challenging me with your insightful feedback and pushing me to go the extra mile in my writing. Your critiques allowed me to grow not only as a writer, but as a professional as well.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The issue of teacher turnover and retention has gained a growing interest for scholars in the field of education. The magnitude and implications of the high costs of teacher attrition, financially and academically, is a forefront subject across the nation. Approximately half a million teachers in the United States either move or leave the field of education each year, which costs the United States nearly $7.3 billion dollars annually (Kavanagh, 2016). The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) piloted a study of the real costs related to replacing teachers. The study found that the cost to recruit, hire, and train a replacement teacher is substantial, ranging between $10,000–$17,872 per teacher (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007). Texas spent approximately $235 million in 2013 to replace teachers in the classroom (Haynes, 2014).

Studies indicated turnover is highest among beginning teachers (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). Perda (2013) recently analyzed national longitudinal data and found more than 42% of new teachers leave teaching within five years of entering the field of education indicating teacher attrition is on the rise. Researchers found there has been a steady increase in first-year teacher attrition over the past two decades (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2013). In 2001, teacher attrition was measured at 25.6% (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008). Successful schools are staffed with highly qualified teachers. Researchers and educational leaders are aware that for a school to be successful, they must address the problem of teacher turnover (Haynes, 2014).

Compensation is a cited reason for educators leaving their current placement (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). The step and lock salary scale, developed at the turn of the 20th century, accounts for 96% of compensation plans for educators in the United States (Podgursky, 2008). The step and lock salary scales vary from district to district and state to state, indicating the

possibility of significant differences in teacher salaries between districts. Current compensation models provide little incentive for educators to remain within their current district or the field of education (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). Establishing effective methods to retain quality educators is essential for districts to remain financially stable and provide quality educational experiences for students.

Background of the Study

Researchers have debated about the best means for retaining educators. Caillier (2010) determined public school teachers are motivated by work-related conditions, rather than incentive pay, to stay in their current placement. Jones (2013) asserted older female teachers do not respond favorably to merit pay, but younger teachers of both genders entering the field of education are more open to the idea of merit pay. Due to educators being viewed as altruistic individuals who are not motivated by money, there are few studies that closely examined the link between merit pay, teacher retention, and job satisfaction. However, Liu (2007) examined data from the 1995 Teacher Follow-up Survey given to 862 beginning, novice, and experienced teachers to analyze what factors influenced teacher attrition and found 37% of the teachers surveyed indicated higher salaries would increase teacher retention. Teachers may value increased compensation, and merit pay may be a motivator for educators to remain in the field of education.

There are many studies in print focused on various aspects of merit pay (Figlio & Kenny, 2007; Glazerman & Seifullah, 2010; Goldhaber, De Armond, & De Burgomaster, 2011; Goldhaber & Walch, 2012; Goodman & Turner, 2013; Jones, 2013; Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2011; Schacter & Thum, 2005; Springer et al., 2010; Woessmann, 2011); however, there is a lack of recent concrete data to determine if there is a link between merit pay,

teacher retention, and job satisfaction.

The survey implemented in this study was adapted the survey instrument implemented in a published dissertation authored by Stephens (2015) and utilized in a study investigating teacher perceptions of merit pay in Mississippi. Stephens took several steps to ensure the validity and reliability of the survey, including a panel of experts assessing the survey to confirm the content validity and conducting a pilot study with a group of teachers who completed the questionnaire. Then the researcher reviewed the results in order to ensure the validity and reliability of the questions included in the survey. I adjusted the questions slightly to reflect local merit pay implementation and adjusted the Likert scale to seven categories. I acquired permission to use Stephens instrument for this study because it was both applicable and exhibited a successful implementation previously.In this study, I examined teacher perceptions of a locally designed merit pay program and how the pay for performance system influenced job satisfaction and teacher retention. I expected the study to reveal and explain if there were connections between merit pay, job satisfaction, and retention.

Conceptual Framework for the Problem

The transformative paradigm is about change and leads to reframing the understanding of worldviews. The transformative paradigm is a framework designed to examine social justice and power issues with effective research methods (Mertens, 2007). Jack Mezirow (1978) presented his theory of transformative learning based upon his groundbreaking study about women returning to college; however, his work is founded on Freire's (1970) theory of conscientization, Habermas's (1971) early work on domains of learning, and Kuhn's (1962) concept of paradigms.

The transformative learning theory was selected as the guiding paradigm for this descriptive study because of the social injustice associated with teacher compensation. I implemented the use of critical reflection to allow educators to explore their assumptions regarding merit pay, teacher job satisfaction, and retention. Mezirow (1990) determined critical reflection or "reflections of presuppositions" (p. 6) as a cognitive process, which involves premise reflection or "becoming aware of why we perceive, think, feel, or act as we do" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 108). The aim of this study was to allow teachers to reflect on their perceptions of merit pay in order to provide essential feedback to local school district leaders and transform the ways in which local districts determine pay for educators.

Statement of the Problem

The ways in which merit pay influences job satisfaction and retention is not fully understood. Currently, the study district does not have sufficient district-wide data on teacher perceptions concerning the current merit pay system, equitable compensation, and job satisfaction. Stakeholders of the study district have instituted a locally designed teacher merit pay program to retain teachers and improve student performance based primarily on student achievement on the state standardized test (Administrator A, personal communication, February 4, 2016). However, educators are typically against merit pay programs or systems that base teacher incentives on student achievement on high stakes tests, such as the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, or STAAR. According to Leigh (2013), 83% of teachers oppose merit pay that is based on standardized test scores.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this descriptive study was to solicit teacher perceptions on the current merit pay compensation system in relation to job satisfaction and retention in order to provide

essential feedback to stakeholders for future financial and strategic planning. The study is significant because there is currently a nationwide shortage of teachers (Kopkowski, 2011). Goldring et al. (2014) reported 7% of public school teachers with 1 to 3 years of experience left teaching in 2012–2013. Teachers who left the field of education cited inequitable compensation and job dissatisfaction as reasons for abandoning the classroom (Goldring et al., 2014). Goldring et al. incorporated descriptive quantitative and qualitative methods to determine perceptions teachers have regarding merit pay and how the current incentive pay system affected job satisfaction and retention.

Research Questions

During the 2016–2017 school year, the study district implemented a locally designed merit pay program in an effort to increase teacher retention, job satisfaction, and student achievement. This descriptive study was designed to analyze the teacher perceptions regarding merit pay in relation to teacher job satisfaction and retention. The following questions guided this study:

1. In a school district implementing merit pay, what are teachers' perceptions of the initiative?
2. How does merit pay influence teacher job satisfaction and retention?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

Retaining educators is a national issue in the United States. Ingersoll (2001) estimated teacher turnover range between 13%–15% per academic school year. The expenses associated with teacher turnover are staggering. The estimated financial impacts of hiring and training new teachers on a national level are assessed at a total of $2.2 billion per year (Borman & Dowling, 2008). With the student population on the rise, examining how to retain high-quality educators

is important (Texas Education Agency, 2016). One factor often associated with educators leaving the field is pay. Goldring et al. (2014) found educators often referred to low pay or inequitable compensation as a primary reason for leaving the field of education. It is essential to determine if the current merit pay system will benefit the study district by supporting job satisfaction and retention in order to curb the high costs associated with recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers. The study is significant because districts across the United States experience similar issues with finding effective methods to retain educators. The intent of the study was to solicit teacher perspectives on merit-based compensation about job satisfaction and retention at a southern school district in the southwestern United States to provide essential feedback to stakeholders for current and future financial and strategic planning.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used throughout this study and defined the terms based on the intention of the study.

Teacher Retention: continued employment in the education workforce, specifically remaining within the original district of employment (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Merit Pay Program: a school or district performance based compensation system that provides financial rewards beyond the annual salary for educators (Liang & Akiba, 2011).

Step and Lock Salary Scale: the primary method for compensating teachers in the United States; salary is based on two components: years of experience and advanced degree(s) earned (Nelson, 1994).

Stakeholder: "anyone who is invested in the welfare and success of a school and its students, including: administrators, teachers, staff members, students, parents, families,

community members, local business leaders, and elected officials" (Hidden Curriculum, 2014, para. 1).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

The following limitations were identified within this study:

1. The level of teachers' knowledge and interaction with the current merit pay program were not taken into consideration for the survey portion of the study.
2. I produced the interview questions. Data was triangulated during the interview portion of the study to ensure precise representation of the data and avoid researcher bias.

The following delimitation was identified:

1. The study was delimited geographically to K–12 teachers in a school district in the Southwestern United States.

The following assumptions were accepted:

1. I relied on accurate self-reporting. The assumption was that teachers would respond to survey and interview questions based on their personal experiences and understanding of the locally designed merit pay program.
2. The supposition was teachers would interpret the survey questions and interview questions as intended.
3. The assumption was the findings of this study could be relevant to districts interested in implementing a merit pay program. I anticipated the findings could assist districts in planning for an accepted, financially stable, and effective merit program that aids in increased teacher job satisfaction and retention of teachers.

Chapter 1 Summary

Retaining high-quality educators is essential for school districts in the United States. The high costs associated with the replacement of educators are overwhelming and negatively impact district budgets. The implementation of a merit pay program may be a cost-effective measure to entice teachers to stay within their current district. Current literature included some information regarding different aspects of merit pay; however, there was a gap in the literature regarding the teachers' perceptions of merit pay in relation to teacher job satisfaction and retention. I designed the study to investigate teachers' perceptions of a merit pay system and explore whether a connection existed between merit pay, job satisfaction, and teacher retention.

In Chapter 2, I present the analysis of the research and review of literature associated with merit pay. In Chapter 3, I detail the methodology related to the study, and in Chapter 4, I present the data and findings in a detailed and logical order, beginning with survey results followed by the data from the interview cycle. Chapter 5 includes the summary and discussion of the results, as well as the implications of the results for future practice, policy, and theory.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

Merit pay has been a long-standing issue in education (Brevetti, 2014; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011; Leigh, 2013). The overarching reason for the implementation of incentive programs is to reward top-performing educators (Lavy, 2007). Race to the Top legislation introduced during the Obama administration was primarily designed to fund merit pay programs that attract and retain high-performing teachers (Hunter, 2010). In Texas, 198 school districts currently have some form of a merit pay program, with the majority of schools using student performance data in the plans (Terry, 2008).

Through the analysis of the research, I found a significant issue with job satisfaction and retention concerning merit pay on a local and national level in education. I gathered information for the literature review from several sources, such as peer-reviewed journals, doctoral dissertations, and current media. I complied the research using the Concordia Library website, Google Scholar, the Mendeley literature search tool, education related books and websites, and books on merit pay. Search terms included *teacher perspective on merit pay, merit pay and teacher retention, merit pay in education, retention,* and *performance pay.* The research findings from the educational database ProQuest were vast. Therefore, the focus was limited to literature from the past 5 years. However, some literature that was older than 5 years was included, if it contained historical information or information directly relevant to the study.

The Context

In this study, I examined teacher perceptions of the locally designed merit pay program and how the pay for performance system influenced teacher job satisfaction and retention. While the previous merit pay system in the district, Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), used

a combination of teacher evaluation scores and student growth to determine monetary incentives, the locally designed program uses a student passing percentage on the state test as the primary means to determine the incentive payout. In this investigation, I revealed and explained if there were any connections between merit pay and teacher job satisfaction and retention.

The Significance

The purpose of this study was to examine the current merit pay system in place at a school district in the southwestern United States and how the district can improve teacher job satisfaction and retention by soliciting teacher insight and perspectives on merit pay. The study is significant because there is currently a nationwide shortage of teachers (Kopkowski, 2011). Goldring et al. (2014) reported 7% of public school teachers with one to three years of experience left teaching in 2012–2013. Teachers who leave the field of education cite inequitable compensation and job satisfaction as reasons for abandoning the classroom (Goldring et al., 2014). The intent of the study was to solicit teacher perspectives on compensation about job satisfaction and retention to provide essential feedback to stakeholders for current and future financial and strategic planning.

The Problem

Currently, the study district does not have sufficient district-wide data on teacher perceptions concerning equitable compensation and job satisfaction. Stakeholders of the study district have instituted a locally designed teacher merit pay program based primarily on student achievement on the state standardized test to retain teachers and improve student performance (Administrator A, personal communication, February 4, 2016). However, educators are typically against merit pay programs or systems that base teacher incentives on student

achievement on high stakes tests, such as the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, or STAAR. According to Leigh (2013), 83% of teachers oppose a merit pay system that is based on standardized test scores.

A Brief History of Teacher Compensation and Merit Pay

The practice of merit pay in education can be traced as far back as 1860 in England. England utilized the merit pay system until 1900, where the practice was eliminated due to the prevalence of cheating scandals and an overall corruption of the educational system (Gratz, 2009). In the United States, there were primarily two forms of teacher compensation in the early 1900s: the "grade based" compensation model, which was based on what grade level the teacher taught, and the "single salary" schedule (Prostik, 1995). The single salary schedule was considered to be highly inequitable and discriminatory towards female and minority educators as merit-like bonuses based primarily on administrator recommendations were granted (Adkins, 1983). In acknowledgment of the unfair practices of the grade based compensation model, Des Moines and Denver school districts implemented the "single salary schedule" in 1921 (Odden & Kelley, 2001). In 1950, the National Education Association (NEA) suggested a nationwide expansion of the single salary schedule for all teachers, based on years of experience and additional education. This compensation system is the predominant method used in the United States today (Jones, 2011).

Two published reports in the 1980s rallied reformers and prompted legislatures to reexamine compensation models. Gardner (1983) and Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) emphasized the need for standards-based reform and indicated under-compensated teachers negatively affect underachieving students, and measurable inputs have a limited effect on student achievement. Gardner and the Carnegie Forum on Education and the

Economy suggested an increase in teachers' base salaries and merit pay as potential solutions to the problems in education. Gardner (1983) asserted, "salaries for the teaching profession should be increased and should be professionally competitive, market sensitive, and performance based" (p. 3). While several districts employed merit pay programs in various forms, the practice fizzled out after approximately six years. Data revealed problems associated with administering the program such as negotiating with the teachers and a lack of funding (Murnane & Cohen, 1986).

During the Bush administration in the early 2000s, No Child Left Behind (2001) was passed on the federal level. The new law changed school accountability and performance and required schools to be held accountable for student performance at a building level and district level. Rather than measure the individual growth of each student, longitudinal standardized test data were used to track performance. This legislation also provided the motivation for many school districts in the United States to tie teacher pay to test scores (West, 2003). Barack Obama enforced such measures during his presidency. His reformations to the original No Child Left Behind legislation included schools and districts currently failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) required the adoption of a teacher evaluation system that included student scores on standardized tests as a part of teacher evaluations. President Obama presented Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), which reinforced and mandated all schools, regardless of academic standing, to include student achievement data as a significant part of teacher and administration evaluations; however, data may be derived from a variety of sources including portfolios, district testing data, and standardized tests (Civic Impulse, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

The transformative paradigm guided the framework for this study as America's public schools are continually transforming their views and policies on curricula, leadership, personnel, student achievement, assessment options, evaluation, and teacher compensation. Mertens (2007) described the transformative paradigm as a framework designed to examine "power issues, social justice, and cultural complexity throughout the research process" (p. 213). The transformative paradigm is directly linked to social justice and advocacy: in this case, the social justice is represented as an attempt to advocate for public schools to offer equitable compensation for all teachers, which impacts job satisfaction and teacher retention.

Philosophers such as Freire (1970), Habermas (1971), and Kuhn (1962) influenced modern day transformative theories of learning and education. Freire's (1970) theory of conscientization, Habermas's (1971) early work on domains of learning, and Kuhn's (1962) concept of paradigms provided a foundation for Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning. Mezirow (1997) noted that theory defined transformative learning experiences as challenges of "the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings" (p. 5). The transformative learning theory is currently utilized in universities and colleges around the world to challenge adult learners and shape their thinking (National Science Board, 2007).

The transformative paradigm is rooted in the research of modern scientist Charles Townes, Albert Einstein, and Barbara McClintock (National Science Board, 2007). Their research was associated with the fundamental transformation of science and engineering, and advancing the lives of people through technology and commerce. The transformative paradigm is connected to research that is groundbreaking and provides benefits to humankind. In

present times, the National Science Board described transformative research including discoveries that "radically change our understanding of an important existing scientific or engineering concept or educational practice" (para. 2). Transformative research challenges current theories and research and leads to innovations.

The transformative learning theory was selected as the guiding paradigm for descriptive study for several reasons. I sought to uncover the social injustice associated with teacher compensation. The aim of the study was to transform the ways in which local districts determine pay for educators. I utilized praxis and critical reflection as methods to negotiate the new meanings and understandings gained from the research.

Paulo Freire and Transformation

Freire's theory of transformative learning was attributed to the classical philosophical approaches of Plato and modern Marxist theory. Freire noted education allows the socially oppressed to recoup their sense of humanity and overcome their current situations (Coté, De Peuter, & Day, 2007). For this to occur, the oppressed must take part in their liberation. Freire (1970) stated:

> No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption. (p. 54)

The process of the oppressed realizing and rectifying the oppressing situation is conscientization (Freire, 1970). Freire (1970) saw critical reflection as a necessary step in achieving conscientization. Critical thinking is essential and central to transformation and rediscovery of power. The more aware the learner is, the more authority and ability the learner

has in transforming society (Freire, 1970). The current merit pay system offered by the study district highlights the need for an investigation to permit educators to define their struggle, for change to occur, and the oppressed to find social justice.

Freire (1970) introduced the idea of a horizontal student-teacher relationship. The concept focuses on the educator (research for this study) working on equal footing with the students (participants) to engage in dialogue that builds a base of "love, humility, and faith…of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence" (pp. 79–80). This relationship between the participants and myself offered a research environment that was safe, where anything could be shared and talked about in the qualitative interviews. These interviews sought to raise participants' conscious understanding of the current compensation system and their reflected thoughts from the quantitative survey instrument, which lead to the emancipatory transformation of how districts fiscally plan for compensation.

Review of the Research Literature and Methodological Literature

There are numerous in-print quantitative studies which focused on various aspects of merit pay (Figlio & Kenny, 2007; Glazerman & Seifullah, 2010; Goldhaber et al. 2011; Goldhaber & Walch, 2012; Goodman & Turner, 2013; Jones, 2013; Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2011; Schacter & Thum, 2005; Springer et al., 2010; Woessmann, 2011). A significant study conducted by Goldhaber et al. (2011) for the National Center for the Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education added a substantial amount of literature to the field of study. Goldhaber et al. (2011) employed a quantitative method of study utilizing the Washington State Teacher Compensation Survey as the primary source of data collection. The survey of teacher attitudes regarding various types of compensation reform found monetary

incentives were preferred over improvement of workplace conditions (Goldhaber et al., 2011, p. 457). Each type of compensation reform had supporters and naysayers, whether merit pay, combat pay, subject specific incentive pay, or National Board Certified incentive pay (Goldhaber et al., 2011, p. 463). As with much of the research exploring merit pay, the method of investigation was quantitative, evidence-based analysis. The inclusion of qualitative evidence-based teacher perceptions and solutions was not included in the study by Goldhaber et al.

Additional investigations of the merit pay phenomenon offered both negative and positive viewpoints of incentive pay. Pay for performance is shrouded with a negative past, due to a series of failed and costly program implementations (Leigh, 2013). However, some researchers found evidence that novice educators entering the teaching profession have a different outlook on merit pay. Jones (2013) noted, "Since new teachers do not respond negatively to performance pay, results from a performance pay program may improve over time as experience teachers retire, and new teachers take their place" (p. 163).

Review of Methodological Issues

Investigations of teacher merit pay have various methodological deficiencies, some of which will be explored in this section. Researchers who examined merit pay found monetary incentives were preferred, but an in-depth investigation into the types of compensation and why teachers preferred those incentives was not included in their findings (Goldhaber et al., 2011). The inclusion of qualitative interviews would provide depth and breadth of teacher perceptions regarding merit pay. Also, this method will give educators a voice to factors that impact satisfaction and retention decisions.

Quantitative research designs are widely accepted as definitive approaches for investigating a phenomenon in the social sciences. However, these approaches fail to develop a deeper understanding of a research problem or an expansive grounds for decision making. Qualitative research designs adds depth to the understanding of a situation and unearths patterns such as possible causal links between variables (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). While many quantitative studies use a large sample and mathematical relationships to discover patterns, a qualitative study tries to explain patterns and make meaning of relationships between people or with systems through interviews (Creswell, 2009). The opportunity to gain these perceptions will provide a complete and greater understanding of the phenomenon.

Combining both quantitative and qualitative methods could yield additional information regarding perceptions teachers have regarding merit pay, teacher job satisfaction, and retention. Onwuegbuzie, Johnson, and Collins (2009) stated mixed methods research "Recognizes the existence and importance of the natural or physical world as well as the emergent social and psychological world that includes language, culture, human institutions, and subjective thoughts" (p. 18). However, there are several limitations of mixed method research. Conducting a mixed method study can be costly and time-consuming. The researcher must be skilled in gathering both quantitative and qualitative methods of gathering data. During the study, single researchers are challenged to concurrently collect qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2009). Despite the limitations, mixed method research can offer robust evidence for an explanation through merging and support findings (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Descriptive Research

Descriptive research allows for an in-depth exploration of a problem while offering statistical and comparative data that leads to enhanced information to create solutions. Researchers use descriptive research to describe characteristics of a population or phenomenon. Descriptive research offers an opportunity to combine both quantitative and qualitative data as a way to explore the "what" of a topic. (Fawcett & Garity, 2009). Descriptive research often begins with a survey investigation, followed by the researcher using qualitative research methods to examine the implications of the survey findings (Fawcett & Garity, 2009). While descriptive research is an innovative tool, the research method does have specific advantages and disadvantages. Descriptive research tends to focus on frequencies, averages, descriptive interviews, and other descriptive statistical calculations (Omair, 2015). However, descriptive research cannot describe what caused a situation and cannot be used establish a causal relationship (Lobo, 2005). While descriptive research tends to have low internal validity, the researcher can implement a descriptive research design that accounts for variables that may affect the validity and objective of the study.

Data Collection for Descriptive Research

Descriptive research typically necessitates the use of specific types of data collection, including case studies, observations, interviews, and/or surveys. These data collection techniques tend to provide a multi-layered approach and present several advantages for deeply exploring a phenomenon. Data collected from a survey can provide statistics about an event and also provide information about how people experienced that event (Cantrell, 2011). The use of descriptive interviews for data collection can be an organic means to study perceptions, life experiences, and feelings of subjects while eliminating the obstacles of strict academic

approaches and limitations.

Confidentiality and Objectivity

Descriptive research has several weaknesses. Confidentiality is a primary weakness of descriptive research. The researcher has the full responsibility to safeguard each participants' identity (Cantrell, 2011). The researcher must ensure participants in the research study are protected from public exposure by taking precautions to properly conceal the identity of each subject. Additionally, much of descriptive research is based on participant self-reporting. It is imperative the researcher develop working relationships with participants in order to encourage full participation and honesty (Omair, 2015). If participants are uncomfortable in an interview setting, they may refuse to answer questions or tell the researcher what they perceive the researcher wants to hear.

Another weakness of descriptive research is the possibility for error and subjectivity. Typically, researchers design their own research instruments and therefore, the study instruments may contain errors (Omair, 2015). In addition, the researcher may interject bias into the study by only recording data that aligns with or conforms the research project's hypothesis. Researchers must be aware of their own influence over the outcome of the study in order to prevent bias (Cantrell, 2011).

In regards to this study, the descriptive research design offers an in-depth understanding of teacher perceptions of merit pay programs that a purely statistical analysis would not provide. The use of a descriptive design for this study aided in revealing possible patterns and connections between merit pay, teacher job satisfaction, and retention. Furthermore, the descriptive design assisted in planning for resource allocation and identifying areas for future research.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Researchers have debated whether monetary incentives influence educators. Caillier (2010) asserted public school teachers were more motivated by work-related conditions than incentive pay. Research conducted in Florida public schools found older female teachers do not respond favorably to merit pay (Jones, 2013). The assumption is teachers are altruistic and enter the profession of education because of a passion for making a difference in society, rather than making a significant amount of money. In essence, teachers were not motivated by money.

The move towards merit pay was constructed around models that corporations used for years and have experienced some success (Cadsby & Tapon, 2007; Lazear, 2000). Some researchers believe there is nothing different between the private sector use of merit pay and the teaching profession. Ballou (2001) examined the effective use of merit pay in private, non-sectarian schools without union representation and theorized unions are creating obstacles for the implementation of merit pay and are in favor of the single salary schedule.

Lavy (2007) noted teachers and unions were against incentive pay, but recent studies have a differing view. Through results of a survey of teacher attitudes regarding various types of compensation reform, Goldhaber et al. (2011) found monetary incentives were preferred over improvement of workplace conditions. The newer generation of educators is increasingly supportive of merit pay. A study conducted in Florida schools by Jones (2013) found older females opposed incentive pay while a novice, male, and Hispanic teachers favored monetary incentive programs.

Leigh's (2013) study found 58% of teachers approved of merit pay based on evaluation, meaning teachers preferred merit pay systems based on their observed performance

in the classroom. Educators perceived merit pay programs based on teacher evaluations as more fair than incentives based on student performance on high stakes testing because evaluators look at teachers rather than students and the many uncontrollable variables that influence student test performance.

Motivational Theories

The most commonly linked theorist to merit pay is Vroom (1964) whose theory focuses on motivation and expectancy. The expectancy theory is based on the decision-making process, and the awareness employees develop as to how much effort is required to attain a particular level of performance (Heneman & Werner, 2005). The employee must find the output is directly related and equivalent to the reward. If the person deems the incentive as an operative, motivation increases. If the premium is considered as unequal to the amount of work needed for achievement, motivation decreases (Heneman & Werner, 2005).

The reinforcement theory is linked to operant conditioning and work completed by Skinner (1953), which suggested there is a relationship between a specified behavior and reward. Skinner further stated the more clearly the desired behavior is defined and the relationship to the reward, the more frequently the desired behavior will occur. According to Heneman and Werner (2005), "under reinforcement theory, merit pay should motivate increased performance because the monetary consequences of good performance are made known to the employee" (p. 29). For merit pay, programs to be effective there must be clearly established criteria for obtaining the incentive reward, as well as a defined connection between the reward and the behavior.

Economic Theories

In labor economics, advocates argue there is an incentive for employers to pay

employees a competitive wage to increase efficiency and productivity. Higher wages also counter high costs associated with turnover. Increased productivity and higher retention rates outweigh increased costs related to salaries. Efficiency wage theory suggested monetary incentive determines the level of motivation and productivity (Salop, 1979). Premium wages lead to premium productivity. Employees who feel compensated fairly will increase productivity when paid well and are less likely to leave and seek other employment. Retention is beneficial to the employer, as fewer resources are utilized for recruiting and the high cost of training replacements (Heneman & Werner, 2005). Based on the efficiency wage theory, equitable pay is fiscally responsible for school districts and reduces the high cost of teacher turnover.

Equity theory, developed by Adams (1965), proposed pay for performance relationship is related to the personal experience of the employee, as well as how other employees experience the merit pay system. Adams described the equity theory as the social contract created through the employee-employer relationship, which requires monetary and non-monetary rewards provided by the employer and performance by the employee. This theorist determined the balance between the employee and employer relationship is essential to increasing motivation. Employees compare their performance and the relationship between rewards to others around them, inside and outside of their place of employment. If employees feel compensation and rewards are fair and in line with those around them, their motivation remains steady. If employees detect or determine there is inequity in the workplace, performance and motivation may decrease. Merit pay systems that are understandable and equitable are effective incentive systems.

Marginal Productivity theory (Tobin, 1985) is also associated with pay for

performance. Tobin (1985) suggested employers pay employees according to the value they add to the company. Employees who achieve more are paid more, which is a profitable situation for the organization as well. Heneman and Werner (2005) stated three benefits associated with marginal productivity: (a) the system creates an incentive for increased performance, (b) the system attracts people who work hard, and (c) the system decreased chances of the most productive employees leaving and finding employment elsewhere because they feel valued. Merit pay is an incentive system designed with the intention of attracting, rewarding, and retaining the best teachers in education.

Merit Pay and Student Achievement

Quantitative examinations of cross-country evidence on effects of merit pay on student achievement found merit pay does seem to have a positive effect on student achievement scores but is limited in the ability to identify particular merit pay program designs or implementation strategies for incentive programs (Woessmann, 2011). Buck and Greene (2011) studied international data regarding merit pay systems in schools and found the 27 countries that utilized merit pay systems scored approximately 0.25 standard deviations higher on an international math test than countries that did not use merit pay.

Another example of an examination of survey data was the study conducted by Figlio and Kenny (2007). The researchers analyzed a combination of data from the National Education Longitudinal Study and their original study data to examine the influence of teacher incentives on student achievement. While Figlio and Kenny found a positive correlation between teacher incentive pay and higher student achievement, they noted "use of a cross-sectional identification strategy means that we cannot be certain whether the positive relationship that we report is due to the incentives themselves or to unobserved school quality" (p. 903).

The implementation of merit-based pay can have negative and positive effects on student achievement. Eberts, Hollenbeck, and Stone (2002) conducted a review of a merit-based program in an alternative high school that indicated while student retention was greater, courses were watered down to gain student satisfaction scores and decreased overall passing rates of the course. Eberts et al. (2002) noted, "Unintended consequences may have arisen as a direct result of the success of the merit pay system" (p. 18).

Goodman and Turner (2013) examined an incentive program in New York City that did not prove to have significant changes in student performance. Goodman and Turner inspected a group-based incentive program that targeted low socioeconomic schools. They found with group-based incentives; there was an instance of teachers simply benefiting from the hard work of other teachers. While Goodman and Turner provided substantial evidence that group merit pay programs are ineffective, the study was inconclusive and lacking adequate evidence for the rationale behind their proposed success of individual merit pay program designs.

Critique of Previous Research

The question of whether compensation and merit pay positively impacts teacher job satisfaction and retention has yet to be clearly determined. Liu (2007) examined the results of the 1995 Teacher Follow-up Survey given to beginning, novice, and experienced teachers to analyze what factors influence teacher attrition and included 862 respondents. Liu found 37% of teachers surveyed indicated improved benefits and higher salaries would increase teacher retention. Liu indicated merit pay might be a motivator for educators, and teachers may value increased compensation.

Anderson (2011) concluded merit pay is not the best system for rewarding effective

educators because teachers enter the field of education to improve the lives of students. Anderson indicated a system for recognizing teachers for a job well done would be more effective than a merit pay system because money does not motivate educators. Anderson also suggested proficient teachers should be rewarded and recognized through promotions, such as assigning leadership roles. Anderson assumed recognition would increase teacher job satisfaction and teacher retention and increase professional recruits to the field of education.

Some studies found teacher retention was improved with the implementation of merit pay. Laine, Potemski, and Rowland (2010) found while compensation is not the leading factor in teacher attrition, compensation was considered when educators decide whether to leave the field. Laine et al. (2010) established there was a trend of higher retention rates of teachers in North Carolina when merit pay was included in compensation package. The findings indicated teacher retention also improved when several measures for evaluating teacher performance and professional learning communities were included (Laine et al., 2010).

There are still issues with merit pay that may influence the morale of teachers. Ramirez (2011) concluded merit pay might affect the morale of teachers due to the increased competition amongst educators. Ramirez indicated school climate could be negatively impacted when teachers do not feel a sense of belonging. The lack of cohesion can influence the success of the school negatively. Hess (2011) suggested performance pay can lead to teachers feeling appreciated, and believed merit pay does breed a culture of competition and decreases cooperation amongst educators.

Chapter 2 Summary

Many educational issues focus on student achievement and teacher job satisfaction,

retention, and performance pay. Research regarding the effect of merit pay on student achievement does not prove or disprove significant increases in student performance (Figlio & Kenny, 2007). Past researchers have utilized various standardized tests to determine if student achievement was increased with the implementation of merit pay systems. Some studies indicated growth when performance pay was in place (Woessmann, 2011), while other studies indicatedstudent achievement is not influenced by the implementation of merit pay programs (Goodman & Turner, 2013). Some researchers noted educators increase instructional rigor (Figlio & Kenny, 2007), while other research has found curriculum was watered down due to merit pay evaluation systems (Eberts et al., 2002).

There also seems to be diverse results in the literature in regards to teacher job satisfaction and retention. There are several economic and motivational theories associated with merit pay, including: Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, Skinner's (1953) reinforcement theory, Salop's (1979) efficiency wage theory, Adams' (1965) equity theory, and Tobin's (1985) marginal productivity theory. The economic theories related to merit pay indicated if teachers view the goals associated with merit pay are attainable, and the reward is appropriate for the amount of work expected, there will be an increase in motivation, retention, and satisfaction.

Research has indicated money is not a motivating factor for many teachers (Anderson, 2011). Research needs to be conducted to understand teacher perceptions of merit pay and how compensation influences teacher job satisfaction and retention. In Chapter 3, I will present the methodology associated with the study.

Chapter 3: The Methodology

Introduction

My review of the literature revealed the use of merit pay in education is not a new phenomenon; however, additional information on teacher perceptions of merit pay and how merit pay influences teacher job satisfaction and retention is needed. While merit pay is rooted in many economic and psychological theories, implementation of incentive pay in the educational setting has proven to be lackluster in practice. There is limited current research regarding merit pay and the impact on job satisfaction and teacher retention. The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of teachers in a school district in the southwestern United States regarding merit pay and how the current merit pay system influenced teacher job satisfaction and retention. The results of this study may aid policymakers, school districts, and stakeholders by offering data on teachers' perceptions of merit pay and how the pay for performance programs influence job satisfaction and a teacher's decision to remain in their position. The insight gained from this study may assist school district leadership in saving school districts the high costs associated with replacing teachers.

Research Questions

During the 2016-2017 school year, the study district implemented a locally designed merit pay program in an effort to increase teacher retention, job satisfaction, and student achievement. This descriptive study was designed to analyze the teacher perceptions regarding merit pay in relation to teacher job satisfaction and retention. The following questions guided this study:

1. In a school district implementing merit pay, what are teachers' perceptions of the initiative?
2. How does merit pay influence teacher job satisfaction and retention?

Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this descriptive study was to solicit teacher perceptions on the current merit pay compensation system in relation to job satisfaction and retention in order to provide essential feedback to stakeholders for future financial and strategic planning. The study is significant because there is currently a nationwide shortage of teachers (Kopkowski, 2011). Goldring et al. (2014) reported 7% of public school teachers with 1 to 3 years of experience left teaching in 2012–2013. Teachers who left the field of education cited inequitable compensation and job dissatisfaction as reasons for abandoning the classroom (Goldring et al., 2014). Goldring et al. incorporated descriptive quantitative and qualitative methods to determine perceptions teachers have regarding merit pay and how the current incentive pay system affected job satisfaction and retention.

Research Design

I chose a descriptive design for this study in order to understand if teachers perceived a connection between merit pay and teacher job satisfaction and retention. The main purpose of descriptive research is to explore unnoticed phenomena, organize the findings in order to discover explanations, and validate those explanations (Krathwohl, 1993). Researchers use a descriptive design to provide a stronger conclusion and produce a more comprehensive understanding essential to inform theory and practice. Creswell and Clark (2007) noted, "Rigorous research designs are important because they guide the methods decisions that researchers must make during their studies and set the logic by which they make interpretations at the end of studies" (p. 58).

The descriptive research design is appropriate for this study as I sought to employ both quantitative and qualitative methods. I chose to implement descriptive quantitative and

qualitative methods to improve the investigation of the possible connection between merit pay, teacher job satisfaction and retention, and provide in-depth descriptions of the presented phenomena. I used the qualitative interviews to clarify and strengthen conclusions determined through the analysis of data provided by the quantitative instrument. The selected research methods were necessary for this study in order to provide insight into teachers' perceptions of the current compensation system and offer feedback to stakeholders on how to improve job satisfaction and retention decisions.

Research Population and Sampling Method

The population for the study consisted of 353 public school district K-12 teachers in a suburb of a Southwestern state. The population of the teachers within the district was comprised of 75% African American, 17.8% Caucasian, 4.8% Hispanic, and 0.05% Asian educators. Approximately 67.9% of the teachers earned a bachelor's degree, while 31.4% earned a master's degree. A variety of teaching experience levels were presented: 9.5 % of teachers had 21 or more years of experience, 25.9% had 11 to 20 years of experience, 25.2% had 6 to 10 years, 21.1 % of teachers had between 1 to 5 years, and 18.3% of educators in the district were first year teachers.

Sample Method

I employed a self-selected voluntary response sampling method for the quantitative portion of the study because the entire teacher population was available for the study, and teachers were able to choose whether to respond to the survey. I conducted a power analysis to determine the minimum number of participants necessary to ensure the results were valid and reliable. I used the sample size calculator in the Survey Monkey software suite to determine that the minimum number of participants needed from the population of 353 teachers was 185. This

analysis was conducted at a confidence level of 95% with a margin of error of 5%. The researcher sets confidence levels (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). I determined the use of a confidence level of 95% was appropriate because this level indicates that 19 out of 20 samples from the same population will produce confidence intervals that contain the population parameter.

I utilized selective sampling as the method for determining participants for the qualitative portion of the study. Tongco (2007) determined selective sampling is a suitable method in order to study a certain perspective of knowledgeable professionals within the identified field. For the study, I interviewed three participants who were employed within the district since the fall of 2015, which ensured participants who are currently due for merit pay under the incentive program were involved in the reflection process. Teachers who left the district were not eligible for the merit pay program and were excluded from the qualitative portion of the study. Potential participants were contacted in person or through a direct phone call. I reviewed applicants to confirm gender, ethnicity, grade level taught (secondary or elementary), and years of experience. Demographic details for each participant were reviewed to ensure there was not an overrepresentation or underrepresentation of any demographics represented in the study.

Instruments

The study was comprised of two sections. The quantitative portion of the study employed a descriptive survey using the Likert Scale design. A survey instrument is an organized and uniform method of collecting data from participants (Fowler, 2014). A Likert Scale instrument pairs well with this study, as this type of survey allows the researcher to understand feelings and opinions of participants experiencing the studied phenomenon (Joshi, Kale, Chandel, & Pal, 2015). I adapted the research questions from a survey tool designed and

implemented by Stephens's (2015) to further investigate teacher perceptions of merit pay in the study district. After receiving site approval from the district research coordinator, the survey instrument was entered into the survey-hosting website Qualtrics and sent through electronic mail to 353 teachers in the study district who were experiencing the merit pay program (Texas Education Agency, 2016). The survey window remained open for two weeks, and I sent reminder emails periodically to encourage participation. No identifying information was required of survey participants for the completion of the survey, and a paper option was not available to ensure anonymity.

Qualitative interviews provided a broader understanding of the phenomena that presented in the survey data through patterns or discrepancies. I developed interview questions based on the data from the survey, in order to explore any presented patterns and provide more depth and breadth of the survey results. Open-ended questions were guided and derived from the survey results to prevent disgruntled employees from biasing the results.

Survey Instrument Reliability, Validity, and Reflexivity

Internal validity is relevant in studies that try to establish a causal relationship and is the estimated certainty about inferences regarding causal relationships (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). External validity is the generalizability or degree to which the conclusions in a study could apply to other locations or situations (Creswell & Clark, 2007). I reduced threats to external validity by ensuring the sample size had adequate power. I conducted a power analysis at a confidence level of 95% with a margin of error of 5% to determine the minimum minimum number of participants necessary. The minimum number of participants needed from the population of 353 teachers was 185. The number of participants exceeded the power analysis number, with 240 participants completing the survey. Half (52.1%, $n = 125$) of the teachers

taught for 0−10 years, and the remaining 47.9% (n = 115) teachers taught for over 11 years. About 18.75% (n = 45) of teachers responded that this was their first year of working for the school district in which they were currently employed. The majority 81.25% (n = 195) responded that it was not their first year of working for the school district in which they were currently employed. Regarding their current teaching positions, 44.1% (n = 106) were teaching in tested subject areas ("defined as students have to take a state standardized test at the end of the school year"); and 55.9% (n = 134) were teaching in non-tested subject areas.

I adapted the survey instrument implemented in this study from the published dissertation authored by Stephen (2015) and utilized in a study investigating teacher perceptions of merit pay in Mississippi. Stephens took several steps to ensure the validity and reliability of the survey, including a panel of experts assessing the survey to confirm the content validity and conducting a pilot study with a group of teachers who reviewed the questionnaire in order to ensure the validity and reliability of the questions included in the survey. Stephens entered the data collected from the pilot study into SPSS to calculate the reliability of the survey with Cronbach Alpha, which was calculated at 0.720 for teachers' perceptions (Stephen, 2015). Stephens reviewed feedback from the panel of experts, the feedback provided by teachers involved in the pilot study, and data analysis from the pilot study to improve the survey wording and validity and reliability of the instrument. I acquired permission to use Stephens instrument for this study because it was both applicable and exhibited a successful implementation previously.

Internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's alpha test. The use of this test provides support for the acquired results. The test was conducted because of the modification of the survey instrument. Since the instrument was adjusted by the researcher, the SPSS was used to analyze the data set for the reliability of the overall instrument. The reliability coefficient should

range between 0 and 1. The closer the coefficient is to 1, the greater the internal consistency. When the consistency was measured for the 21 question instrument, the Cronbach's alpha was determined to be .832. This score reflects a good level of consistency.

Qualitative Interview Validity and Reliability

I used a variety of methods in order to increase the study's validity, reliability, transferability, generalizability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability while gathering and reporting data. I pursued credibility through prolonged engagement, member checking, peer debriefing, triangulation, and negative case analysis. Prolonged engagement is an action qualitative researchers use to closely examine the participants and build trust (Creswell & Clark, 2007). I used thick and rich descriptions to aid in deeply examining the subject, behavior, and data, and provide an understandable picture for the reader. I spent 6 months immersed in the research site in order to observe any misrepresentations and misconstruction of the questions. The initial interview included nine preliminary questions, and the remaining sessions included time for member checking and additional questions developed from the data collected from the survey. I utilized member checking to ensure credibility of the results as respondents validated the data, interpretations, and conclusions (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

I implemented peer debriefing, which is used to help eliminate biased researcher opinions from the study. Peer debriefing is a method that consists of the researcher utilizing a colleague or another person to review the study for credibility and examine if the results align with the data (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). I had two peers and my dissertation committee review the findings and data to ensure alignment. Triangulation, which was used to examine data from various sources and methods, was also implemented for this study (Creswell & Clark,

2007). Quantitative and qualitative data were collected for this study, including descriptive data and data from multiple qualitative interviews with three participants.

I also employed negative case analysis or cases that did not fit the data patterns to ensure data could be expanded, and findings could be transferred and applied to other educational settings. Negative case analysis allows the researcher to review, expand, and check the patterns developing during data analysis (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The qualitative sample size was determined by the time allotted and resources available to me, as well as ensuring the sample sizes was large enough to attain perceptions of teachers teaching in various grade levels and subjects, years of experience, and of each gender.

In order to show the consistency of the findings, I implemented methods to increase dependability. Throughout the study, I included detailed information regarding the exact methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation implemented within this study. Including detailed information about the methodology is essential in case another researcher decides to follow or replicate the study (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). I attempted to improve dependability by implementing a descriptive study and overlapping methods to triangulate data.

Transferability and generalizability are the degree to which the research findings can be generalized for other setting and is an additional process implemented by qualitative researchers to form reliability (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). I provided a thorough description of the study site, participants, and data collection procedures so other researchers could evaluate if the results of this study are generalizable and applicable. To further increase trustworthiness and reliability, I employed confirmability methods, which were used by researchers to ensure the data was presented without bias or assumption and allows other researchers to verify the results of the study (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). I kept an inventory

of raw data throughout the study, such as: field notes, paper and electronic records, and data stored electronically on a removable hard drive to improve confirmability.

Additionally, I implemented the use of a reflexive journal to strengthen validity and reliability for both the qualitative and qualitative portions of the study. The reflexive journal is used on a regular basis by a researcher to record a variety of information including field notes, plans for data analysis, observations, and other useful information (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The reflexive journal promoted reflection throughout the study and proved an asset when reviewing the outcomes of the study.

Procedures

After receiving district approval to conduct the study, I utilized electronic mail to invite all 353 teachers in the study district who were experiencing the locally designed merit pay program to participate in the descriptive survey instrument. I sent a follow-up reminder email to encourage participation approximately one week after the invite email was sent to participants. Before the two-week window for participation closed, I sent a final reminder.

I used selective sampling to select participants for the qualitative portion of the study. The three phase interviews included three selected participants, representing one teacher on each level presented in the district: elementary, middle, and high school. Prospective participants received an invitation detailing the study, the time commitment, and how their information would remain anonymous throughout the course of the study.

Individual interviews took place at a neutral location of the participant's choosing, followed the three-phase approach, and lasted between 45 to 60 minutes each. Seidman (2006) indicated the three-phase approach assists in understanding a participant's behavior. I established the context of the experience and reviewed the participant's demographic information such as

years of experience, education, and age during the first interview. I put participants' experiences in context by asking them to tell as much as possible about their familiarities with merit pay. This built my understanding of participants and their experiences with merit pay. The second phase of interviews focused on the details of the participant's present experience with merit pay in the study district (Seidman, 2006). During the third phase of interviews, participants reflected on the meaning of their experience (Seidman, 2006).

I audio-recorded all interviews with approval from each participant (See Appendix B). Recording allowed me to review interviews, explore commonalities, discrepancies, and determine possible questions for future interviews. I recorded interviews on a password-protected computer using password-protected software. Once the participant verified the transcript, I deleted the recording. I took note of specific reactions and behaviors of participants during each interview. Throughout the interview phases, participants received post interview summaries to ensure I correctly interpreted findings in the interviews and as a form of member checking. Member checking is the process of verifying data, information, and the interpretation of the data with study participants and aides in improving validity and ensuring data collection is reflective of participants' thoughts (Creswell, 2015). This process also contributed to triangulation for validity and reliability of data. Qualtrics professional software data management system stored, processed, and assisted in the analyzation of all qualitative data. I analyzed data using an electronic spreadsheet, sorting, and coding to determine any emergent patterns.

Data Collection

Many researchers conducted previous studies concerning merit pay using quantitative methods (Figlio & Kenny, 2007; Glazerman & Seifullah, 2010; Goldhaber et al., 2011; Goldhaber & Walch, 2012; Goodman & Turner, 2013; Jones, 2013; Muralidharan &

Sundararaman, 2011; Schacter & Thum, 2005; Springer et al., 2010; Woessmann, 2011). Data collection procedures typically involved a survey instrument to explore topics surrounding merit pay. As a result, the need for both quantitative and qualitative research is necessary to increase the depth of understanding of how merit pay influences teacher job satisfaction and retention decisions.

Data collection began with an online survey. The produced the descriptive survey using the Likert Scale design. A Likert Scale instrument paired well with this study, as a researcher is able to identify feelings and opinions of the participants experiencing the studied phenomenon through the analysis of collected data (Joshi et al., 2015). I adapted the survey questions from a survey tool originally implemented by Stephens (2015) and designed to investigate teacher perceptions of merit pay, the impact on teacher job satisfaction, and decisions to remain in the study district. I sent a survey link via electronic mail to all 353 teachers in the study district who were experiencing the locally designed merit pay program (Texas Education Agency, 2016). I sent a follow-up reminder email to encourage participation approximately 1 week after the original email was sent. Before the 2-week window for participation closed, I emailed a final reminder. Participants remained anonymous when answering the electronic survey, as no identifying information was required for participation, and emails were sent to participants via a third party. I downloaded all survey responses to an external hard drive, remained in a locked drawer in my home office, and will be destroyed after 3 years. I developed qualitative interview questions to clarify the findings of the survey research directly and allowed for a broader understanding of the phenomena revealed in the survey data.

Data Analysis Procedures

I managed survey data using the statistical software package in Qualtrics and analyzed central tendency by finding the mean, median, range, and standard deviation of each question presented on the survey and I used descriptive statistics to determine patterns, which I further explored in the interviews for the second phase of data collection. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) determined using descriptive statistical analysis when finding indicators or themes that describe relationships to variables within groups is necessary.

Each participant engaged in three semi-structured interviews over the course of 2 months. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy during the data analysis phase. I entered the interview response data manually into Qualtrics software and divided using the unitizing process. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) described the unitizing process as breaking narrative data into small pieces of meaningful information. I then used the comparative process to analyze data further. The comparative process allows the researcher to find themes, create categories, and review internal consistency.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions of the Research Design

I identified several limitations, delimitations, and assumptions within this study. I limited the study geographically to K−12 teachers in a local school district in a suburb of a Southwestern state. An identified limitation of the study is the teachers' levels of experience and interaction with the merit pay program. I considered experience with the merit pay program for the interviews; however, the survey was given to all teachers in the district, regardless of their time in the district, and therefore was not considered. Teachers with little experience with the locally designed merit pay program answered survey questions based on prior experience with other merit pay programs, which may impact the results of the survey. Additionally, the descriptive

survey implemented in the study had flaws and did not undergo the rigorous process of scale development.

Another limitation is I created the interview questions for the qualitative portion of the study. In order to increase the validity of the initial interview questions, I conducted a field test and had the interview questions reviewed by a panel of five teachers, to ensure the questions asked were what I intended and were easily interpreted by the participants. I triangulated data by using survey data, interviewing participants at different points in time during the study in both public and private settings (chosen by participants), acquiring and analyzing supporting documents, and comparing people with the various viewpoints during the interview process to ensure accurate representation of the data and prevent researcher bias.

An additional limitation included self-reporting; therefore, the supposition was teachers would base their responses to the survey and interview questions on their experiences with the locally designed merit pay program. Self-reporting could have inherent weaknesses because of participants' response bias (Creswell, 2009). Another supposition was teachers would interpret the survey questions and interview questions as intended.

It assumed the findings of the study to be applicable to districts with similar demographics situated in urban and rural areas that are considering adoption of a merit pay program. The transferable findings will allow districts to plan for a financially stable and accepted merit program that increases teacher job satisfaction and contributes to the retention of teachers.

Expected Findings

I expected the study to reveal and explain any connections between merit pay and teacher job satisfaction and retention. Jones (2013) determined teachers who are entering the field of

education are more receptive to merit pay programs and predicted as older teachers retire, the idea of merit pay will become more accepted in education. The findings of this study may show how teachers neutrally view the local merit pay program. Teachers will continue their work, regardless of the payout, but may reflect on the previous merit pay system as a more favorable incentive program. While I was coding data, clarifying study participants' word selection in order to prevent bias was imperative and use of triangulation was key to preventing bias in data coding. Allowing the participants to review their statements and the researcher's interpretation of the message ensures what the participant truly meant to say was reflected in the study (Creswell, 2009).

The findings of the study will apply to districts considering adopting a merit pay program and inform future literature regarding merit pay and the connection between teacher job satisfaction and retention. The transferable findings may allow district officials to plan for a financially stable and accepted merit pay program that increases teacher job satisfaction and impacts the retention of teachers. The findings may also allow me to test the projections set forth by Jones (2013) and determine if teachers who are newer to the classroom are in favor of merit pay programs.

Ethical Issues of the Study

The level of risk associated with this study was minimal, as the participants experienced no additional stress or benefits related to this study. I curtailed potential harm associated with the study by following established ethical codes and guidelines of the institutional review board (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Institutional review board (IRB) approval was obtained and consent from each participant was obtained before the collection of data began.

I acquired the first level of consent for permission to conduct the study within the study district. The study district granted permission through an onsite research approval committee. Once the research committee granted consent, the survey invitation and link were sent to each teacher's work email address (see Appendix C). I am a teacher in the district and do not hold a supervisory role. Participants were protected from added stress or harm by allowing them to determine whether not to participate, and participation was voluntary. The survey invitation contained information about the risks and benefits associated with the survey. Participants granted consent after reading the emailed consent form and clicking the link to complete the electronic survey. Identifiable information was not required or collected for the completion of the survey.

Potential participants were contacted via phone regarding the qualitative portion of the research study upon conclusion and analysis of the survey. Prospective participants received an invitation detailing the study, the time commitment, and how their information would remain anonymous throughout the course of the study. After participants responded with their continued interested in participating the study, I narrowed participants down based on demographic factors including: gender, years in education, and grade level taught. I selected participants from each level (elementary, middle, and high school) and ensured there was representation from the remaining demographic indicators. I provided all qualitative participants with written consent forms to sign, and each participant was made aware they could drop out of the study at any time (see Appendix B). No participants dropped out of the study. All collected data were encrypted and stored on a hard drive and locked in a desk drawer located in my home office. If any information that could identify participants was disclosed in the interview sessions, that information was not included or utilized in the study. Also, all participants received a random

number, which was used as their pseudonym, to protect their identity. Information concerning the purpose, methods, benefits, possible risks, data storage, ethic procedures, and confidentiality associated with the study are included in the appendices (see Appendix B & C).

Anonymity and confidentiality were assured in writing in accordance with the law (see Appendix C). Private and confidential information remained secure and undisclosed. The study school district and participants will have access to the final dissertation. I was available throughout the study and upon the completion of the study to address concerns and answer questions.

Summary

The central problem of this study is there is a lack of data and information about the relationship between merit pay, job satisfaction, and teacher retention for future financial and strategic planning in the identified school district. I implemented a descriptive design to explore and explain teachers' views regarding merit pay, job satisfaction, and teacher retention in the study district. The results of this study may contribute to the research for strategic and financial planning on the implementation of a merit pay program within a school district and whether implementing a merit pay program increases job satisfaction and leads to the retention of teachers. In Chapter 4, I presented data analysis from the survey and interviews. I offered findings in a detailed and logical order, beginning with survey results and followed with data from the interview cycle.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

The purpose of this descriptive study was to solicit teacher perspectives on the current merit pay compensation system about job satisfaction and retention to provide essential feedback to stakeholders for future financial and strategic planning. The study is significant because there is a nationwide shortage of teachers (Kopkowski, 2011). Goldring et al. (2014) reported 7% of public school teachers with one to three years of experience left the teaching profession in 2012–2013. Teachers who left the field of education cited inequitable compensation and job dissatisfaction as reasons for abandoning the classroom (Goldring et al., 2014). This study incorporated quantitative and qualitative methods to determine teacher perceptions regarding merit pay and how the current incentive pay system affects job satisfaction and retention.

Data collection began with an online survey, the "Mississippi Teachers' Perception of Merit Pay" survey by Stephens (2015) (MTPMP), which was hosted by Qualtrics, a web-based survey hosting site. The original MTPMP is a Likert Scale with values ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) and 5 (*don't know*) (Stephens, 2015). The survey questions were adapted from the MTPMP, which was initially implemented by Stephens (2015) and designed to investigate teacher perceptions of merit pay. I adapted the survey using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) because reliability is optimized with seven response categories (Colman, Norris & Preston, 1997). A survey link was sent via electronic mail to all 353 teachers in the study district who were experiencing the locally designed merit pay program.

Data collection culminated with a series of revealing qualitative interviews. I conducted three phases of interviews with selected participants based on demographic factors including gender, years in education, and grade level taught. Each interview was audio recorded, transcribed, and reviewed with participants to ensure accuracy for the data analysis phase. Interview data were entered into Atlas.ti software and divided using the unitizing process. I used the comparative process, which includes comparing any newly collected data to previously data that was collected, to analyze data further (Creswell, 2015). I compared interview data from the nine total interviews throughout the qualitative data collection phase. The comparative process allowed me to find themes, create categories, and review internal consistency.

Chapter 4 is organized by an introduction, description of the sample, summary of the results, detailed analysis, qualitative findings, and a summary. Quantitative data were exported from Qualtrics for descriptive analysis in SPSS 24 software program for Windows. Cases with incomplete responses were excluded from further analysis.

Description of the Sample

The final sample consisted of 240 teachers. Approximately half (52.1%, n = 125) of the teachers taught for 0-10 years, and the remaining 47.9% (n = 115) teachers taught for over 11 years (See Figure 1).

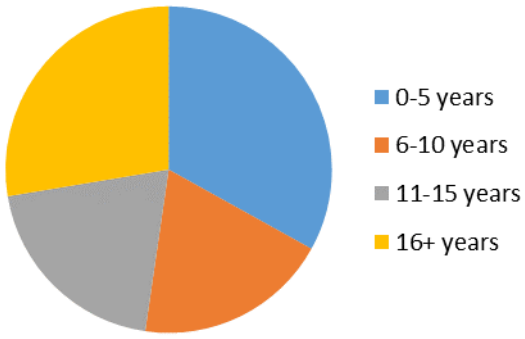

Figure 1. Years of Experience of Teachers Surveyed

About 18.75% (*n* = 45) of teachers responded that this was their first year of working for the school district in which they were currently employed. The majority 81.25% (*n* = 195) responded that it was not their first year of working for the school district in which they were currently employed (See Figure 2).

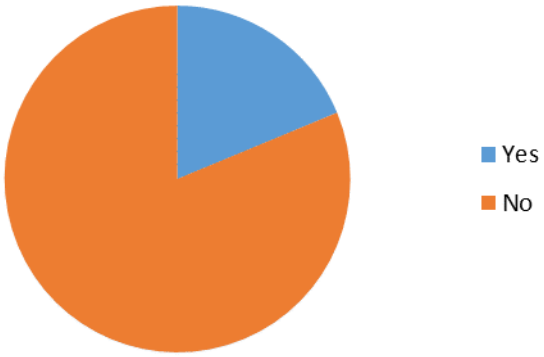

Figure 2. First Year in District for Teachers Surveyed

Regarding their current teaching positions, 44.1% (*n* = 106) were teaching in tested subject areas ("defined as students have to take a state standardized test at the end of the school year"); and 55.9% (*n* = 134) were teaching in non-tested subject areas (See Figure 3).

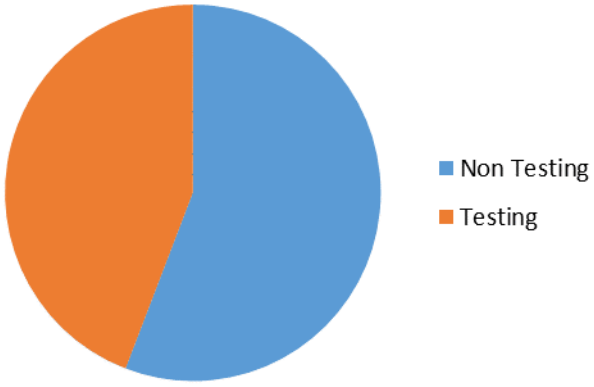

Figure 3. Nontested Versus Tested Subject Areas

Nearly all (98.3%, *n* = 236) teachers taught at Title I schools and 1.7% (*n* = 4) did not. Title I schools are defined as having 75% or higher of students on free or reduced lunch.

Summary of Results

Normality Testing

All data was inputted into the SPSS 24 software program after checking for accuracy. Further descriptive analysis was completed to determine the mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis with a 95% confidence level. Skewness is a measure of symmetry. It describes the distribution of a dataset and if the data set plots in a symmetric pattern, meaning it is reflective of a standard bell curve and looks the same to the right and left of the center point (Rindskopf & Shiyko, 2011). Kurtosis is the peak of a frequency distribution curve and measures if the data are heavy-tailed, light-tailed, or comparative to a normal distribution. Datasets with high kurtosis, or heavy tails, indicate outliers in the data set. If the data sets indicates low kurtosis, there is a lack of outliers. A normal distribution has skewness and excess kurtosis of 0 (Rindskopf & Shiyko, 2011). In SPSS, distributions are considered normal when the absolute values of skewness and kurtosis coefficients are less than two times the standard errors (Rindskopf & Shiyko, 2011). For this data set, distributions were not normal as compared to the normal skewness and kurtosis of

distribution of 0 and supported the choice of a descriptive study design.

Reliability of the Results

Internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's alpha test. The use of this test provides support for the acquired results. The test was conducted because of the modification of the survey instrument. Since the instrument was adjusted by the researcher, SPSS was used to analyze the data set for the reliability of the overall instrument. The reliability coefficient should range between 0 and 1. The closer the coefficient is to 1, the greater the internal consistency. When the consistency was measured for the 21 question instrument, the Cronbach's alpha was determined to be .832. This score reflects a good level of consistency.

General Descriptive Statistics

The mean response for each survey item was computed and then arranged in descending order for ease of interpretation. For instance, the three items with the highest agreement among teachers were items 12, 8, and 17, consecutively. Teachers believed earning awards was important when their students showed academic growth (M = 5.87, SD = 1.25). They believed all teachers in tested and non-tested areas should have the same opportunity to earn merit pay (M = 5.76, SD = 1.54). Teachers would change their teaching habits to make sure they earned merit pay if the monetary reward was more than $3,000 ($M$ = 5.37, SD = 1.74). The lowest agreement among teachers was observed for survey items 7, 18, and 13. The least amount of agreement was observed on item 7 in which the question asked teachers about their school district involving them in the process of creating the merit pay criteria for teachers to meet (M = 3.86, SD = 1.88). There was a similar agreement to the belief merit pay is unfair because students' academic levels are low, so showing growth is challenging (M = 3.90, SD = 1.79). Item 13 had the third least amount of agreement: Any amount of money would motivate me to teach to a higher standard (M

= 4.08, *SD* = 1.78) (see Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics by Individual Questions Arranged in Descending Order

Item	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*M*	*SD*
Q12. It is important for teachers to be rewarded when their students show academic growth.	1	7	5.87	1.25
Q8. It is important that all teachers in tested and non-tested areas have the opportunity to earn merit pay.	1	7	5.76	1.54
Q17. I would change my teaching habits to make sure I earn merit pay if the monetary reward was more than $3,000.	1	7	5.37	1.74
Q10. I feel that I am knowledgeable about the criteria I have to meet in order to earn merit pay.	1	7	5.23	1.63
Q15. All teachers in my school district have the opportunity to earn merit pay.	1	7	5.09	1.53
Q6. The merit pay program encourages me to change my teaching strategies to increase student achievement.	1	7	4.85	1.69

Q5. The merit pay program in my school district motivates me to work harder to increase student achievement.	1	7	4.76	1.77
Q11. It is important for veteran teachers (teachers with 5+ year's experience) to earn more money because they have been teaching longer.	1	7	4.62	1.90
Q9. Since tested areas have more impact on teacher and school accountability, merit pay should reward tested areas with a greater reward.	1	7	4.59	2.02
Q20. Money does not motivate me to be a better teacher.	1	7	4.51	1.93
Q14. The criteria my school district has set for teachers in the merit pay program are fair for all teachers.	1	7	4.42	1.65
Q21. Merit pay has increased the teamwork among the teachers I work with.	1	7	4.39	1.67
Q16. I would change my teaching habits to make sure I earn merit pay if the monetary reward was $100-$1,000.	1	7	4.34	1.64

Q19. When the merit pay program was set up, I changed my teaching habits to make sure I earned merit pay.	1	7	4.17	1.74
Q13. Any amount of money would motivate me to teach to a higher standard.	1	7	4.08	1.78
Q18. Merit pay is unfair because my students' academic level is low, and it is hard to show growth.	1	7	3.90	1.79
Q7. My school district involves teachers in the process of creating the merit pay criteria for teachers to meet.	1	7	3.86	1.88

Descriptive Statistics for Comparison

The general format of survey questions was applicable for statistical analysis. Since the distribution of data did not meet the normality standards, descriptive statistics was utilized to look for patterns, trends, and commonalities. The instrument used questions that employed a specific Likert scale. Each of the questions was designed to elicit specific feedback from the participants. The foundation of these questions can be seen in the two categories for which the questions are grouped. The questions were grouped as follows:

- General Thought Questions (Research Question 1): Items 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14
- Personal Thinking Questions (Research Question 2): Items 10, 16, 17
- Personal Action Questions (Research Question 1 and 2): Items 5, 6, 13, 18, 19, 21

Research question 1. This research question was designed to determine how the participants viewed the merit pay initiative. It was thought that the survey questions would provide preliminary thoughts on the experiences of teachers that have actually experienced the merit pay initiative. The six questions that required a respondent to initiate general thoughts regarding merit pay and overall academic growth were reviewed for patterns. It was thought that the mean score would change based on the years that they have been teaching. See Table 2 for a review of the means relative to the years of experience.

Table 2

A Comparison of Means between Years of Experience and General Thought Based Questions

Years of Teaching	*n*	Question 7	Question 8	Question 9	Question 11	Question 12	Question 14
0-5	79	4.20	5.73	4.80	4.42	5.91	4.51
6-10	46	3.57	5.59	4.74	4.65	5.87	4.22
11-15	48	3.48	6.00	4.35	4.56	5.96	4.46
+16	67	3.91	5.78	4.39	4.84	5.73	4.38

The data was further broken down into counts to establish how each age group addressed a specific question. The process of general counts can be used to provide a basis for additional qualitative questioning. As an example, Question 7 specifically addresses the general perception of teacher involvement in determining the merit criteria. It appeared from the initial data collection that the participants did not feel strongly in either direction as evidenced by a large number of neutral responses. See Table 3 below to see how groups of teachers at each experience level responded to this question.

Table 3

Question 7 Responses by Counts and Experience Subgroups

Years of Teaching	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
0-5	8	11	5	25	5	13	12
6-10	7	13	1	10	4	9	2
11-15	6	12	4	17	0	6	3
+16	8	15	2	13	11	15	3

Research question 2. This research question was designed to determine if the existing merit pay program had an influence on job satisfaction and retention. The three questions that required a respondent to address personal thoughts and perceptions relative to merit pay were reviewed for patterns. It was thought that the mean score would change based on the years that they have been teaching (See Table 4).

Table 4

A Comparison of Means between Years of Experience and Personal Thought Based Questions

Years of Teaching	*n*	Question 10	Question 16	Question 17
0-5	79	5.16	4.58	5.57
6-10	46	5.07	4.35	5.54
11-15	48	5.31	4.63	5.48
+16	67	5.34	3.88	4.88

The data was further broken down into counts to establish how groups of teachers at each experience level addressed a specific question. The process of general counts can be used to provide a basis for additional qualitative questioning. For example, Question 16 makes the respondent reflect upon what it would take to change their teaching strategies. The preliminary data indicates a hesitancy to address this question as observed by the significant number of responses in the neutral category. See Table 5 below to see how each group of teachers responded to this question.

Table 5

Question 16 Responses by Counts and Experience Subgroups

Years of Teaching	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
0-5	5	5	6	22	15	16	10
6-10	1	7	4	17	4	6	7
11-15	3	4	4	7	12	15	3
+16	8	7	4	23	15	8	1

The six questions that required a respondent to address personal thoughts and perceptions relative to merit pay were reviewed for patterns. It was thought that the mean score would change based on the years that they have been teaching (See Table 6). The questions in this category analyzed what the teachers believe would need to be done for retention as it relates to merit pay. These questions specifically addressed direct actions regarding merit pay programs.

Table 6

A Comparison of Means between Years of Experience and Personal Action Based Questions

Years of Teaching	N	Question 5	Question 6	Question 13	Question 18	Question 19	Question 21
0-5	79	4.99	5.00	4.25	4.20	4.44	4.44
6-10	46	4.48	4.72	4.39	3.80	3.96	4.50
11-15	48	4.81	4.94	4.13	3.85	4.15	4.25
+16	67	4.55	4.61	3.58	3.62	3.98	4.32

The data was further broken down into counts to establish how groups of teachers at each experience level responded to a question. The process of general counts can be used to provide a basis for additional qualitative questioning. As an example, Question 5 specifically addresses the impacts that a merit pay program can have on a teacher's actions and level of motivation. See Table 7 below to see how each group of teachers responded to this question.

Table 7

Question 5 Responses by Counts and Experience Subgroups

Years of Teaching	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
0-5	3	6	6	16	10	19	19
6-10	7	2	7	5	5	11	9
11-15	3	4	2	9	11	10	9
+16	3	7	3	21	11	14	8

Variables Measured

The years of experience was the only variable that could be analyzed in depth based on the

quantitative data received. While the demographic data showed that the percent of teachers that have taught less than 10 years was relatively equal to those that taught greater than 10 years, those with more experience seemed to have more relevant responses toward answering the research questions and allowed for a more expansive qualitative discussion. In contrast, the Title 1 versus Non Title 1 schools did not provide relevant data for further explanation since 98.3% (n = 236) of the teachers taught at Title I schools. Regarding their current teaching positions, 44.1% (n = 106) were teaching in tested subject areas ("defined as students have to take a state standardized test at the end of the school year"); and 55.9% (n = 134) were teaching in non-tested subject areas

Summary of the Quantitative Results

The Mississippi's Teacher's Perception of Merit Pay survey was adapted for the purpose of this study to a 7 point Likert scale. The survey was sent to 353 teachers with a final sample size of 240 teachers. The data was put into SPSS 24 for analysis and normality testing. The distribution of data was determined to be not normal and the reliability of the survey was established with a Cronbach's alpha of .832. The data was broken down by counts in order to analyze the specific results. This allowed for a determination of which results were significant and whoch variables could be further measured.

The survey results indicated that the teachers significantly believed that earning awards was relevant to academic growth. Further, they believed that all teachers regardless of area of study should have the same opportunities. Pay was relevant in how they designed their teaching habits. The idea of proper communication and fairness of the program were concepts found within the quantitative data that warranted further expansion through the qualitative interview process.

Qualitative Findings

The purpose of the qualitative interviewing protocol was to examine teacher perspectives on the current merit pay compensation system in relation to job satisfaction and retention. In this chapter, presented findings were based on the analysis of interview data with three teachers from a district in the southwestern United States. Each participant engaged in three interviews spanning the course of two months, beginning with the closure of the electronic survey and concluding with the final interview after participants received their merit pay payout. This portion of the descriptive study sought to better clarify and further explore the findings from the electronic survey.

Participants

This section provides a succinct description of the three teachers (one elementary, one middle school, and one high school) who participated in this study. Thirteen years of teaching experience was the average among participants. All of the participants were generally positive about working in the field of education and cited their personal reasons for remaining a teacher. Participants engaged in three qualitative interviews that began with the closing of the survey instruments and ended after the distribution of merit paychecks during the fall semester of 2016. I selected participants based on demographic factors including gender, years in education, and grade level taught to provide an understanding of the phenomenon as reflected from different perspectives.

Profiles of Participants

Participant One

Participant One has been teaching special needs students at the middle school level for four years. She chose teaching as a second career because “I am a lifelong learner. I love

technology, and I enjoy working with kids. Teaching was the ideal career for me." Participant One said, "Sometimes surviving on a teacher's salary is trying. There is not a lot leftover at the end of the month." Reflecting on her former career, Participant One indicated she would have earned more money in her former career, but she did not feel fulfilled. Participant One noted recent legislation, new rating systems, and the paperwork associated with being a special education teacher are becoming overwhelming.

Participant Two

Participant Two has been teaching math at the elementary school level for 13 years. Participant Two said he knew education was for him during student teaching:

> When I was student teaching, I worked with a student to help her with a tough math concept that she was having difficulty understanding. I was able to show her a different way to approach the problem, and she finally understood it. That is when I knew that I had chosen the right field!

Participant Two has worked in public and private education. He indicated compensation in public education is much better than compensation in private institutions, and he plans to remain in public education until retirement.

Participant Three

Participant Three has been in education for 22 years. Currently, she teaches at the high school level but has taught many subjects at various grade levels. She has taught in general education and special education settings. Participant Three reflected on her time in education and the nearing retirement saying, "I have watched the profession go through many ups and downs. One thing remains the same though, the students. They need us." Participant Three indicated she has seen many incarnations of merit pay over the years but looks at the extra pay

as a bonus. "One day it is here, but the next day it is gone. Do not get used to something that can be so fleeting," she warned.

Qualitative Methods

Methodology

I conducted three rounds of interviews with each participant, which were selected based on demographic factors including gender, years in education, and grade level taught. Individual interviews took place in a neutral location of the participant's choosing, with interviews lasting between 45 to 60 minutes each. Seidman (2006) indicated the three-phase approach assists in understanding participant's behavior. I implemented the three-phase interview process with three participants with varied experiences and demographic backgrounds to ensure data saturation. I attempted to gain thick and rich descriptions from participants, implemented thick and rich descriptions for data reporting, multi-layered data reviews, and a reflexive journal to ensure additional themes and further coding were no longer feasible. The first interview established the context of the participant's experience with merit pay and reviewed the participant's demographic information, such as years of experience, education, and age. All interviews were audio-recorded on a password-protected computer using password-protected software, with permission from participants.

The second phase of interviews included a review of the previous interview's transcript. The questioning in round two interviews focused on participant understanding of the local merit pay program. Participants shared their understanding of the criteria for earning merit pay based on the locally designed merit pay program and their perceptions of the locally designed merit pay program.

The third phase of interviews took place after participants received their merit payout, opening with participants reviewing the transcript for interview two to ensure I properly

recorded their perceptions. The third interview allowed participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience with the locally designed merit pay program and explore their perceptions of merit pay (Seidman, 2006). Participants also offered insight on how to improve the locally designed merit pay program. One week after the final interview, participants reviewed and approved their final transcript and reviewed and approved summaries. If the participant offered alternative perceptions or disagreed with any information provided in the summary, I used the informed feedback to ensure the correct information was portrayed and as a form of member checking. The audio recordings were destroyed after transcripts were verified and approved by participants.

Data Analysis

I reviewed all audio recordings of interviews and developed transcripts and summaries for participants to review. Approved transcripts were uploaded into the Atlas.ti data system to code and sort data to determine emergent patterns. I implemented an open and axial coding process to identify common words and phrases in each interview phase. I examined each interview for key words and common words and phrasing to determine codes. After analyzing each interview phase, I used the comparative process to analyze and compare data collected from the survey and throughout the three rounds of interviews. The comparative process allowed me to find themes, create categories, and review internal consistency. I also reviewed the data by printing all transcripts and highlighting key words to determine emergent themes and cross check my findings.

Throughout phase one interviews, the main code that presented was the general lack of understanding each participant held regarding the current merit pay system. Additional codes were uncovered concerning job satisfaction and school culture, and the overall impact of merit

pay in relation to retention. The second phase of interviews uncovered additional codes including the lack of teacher input during the development phase of the merit pay program, teacher perceptions of merit pay, and expanded on the lack of understanding of the merit pay program implemented in the district. Phase three interviews expanded on previous findings, and presented additional codes including teacher motivation in relation to the current merit pay system, the influence of teacher retention in relation to merit pay, the equity between work and the current merit pay program, as well as satisfaction with the merit pay payout. After analyzing and coding all three phases of interviews, I was able to review each presented code and compare and contrast the codes across all interviews to develop themes. The four emergent themes were: (a) No Explanation Given, (b) No Equity, (c) All About the Students, and (d) Environment Counts.

Summary of the Findings

The narrative data expanded on the finding from the survey and were organized by theme. As evidenced by this study, terms and conditions associated with the merit pay program were not adequately communicated with the teachers in the study district, and the teachers involved in the interview portion of the study did not find the current merit pay program fair. The interviews also revealed the participants found job satisfaction from the students with whom they work and remain in their current teaching positions due to the school environment, culture, and colleagues. Four main themes emerged in this study:

1. No Explanation Given: Participants shared their perception of a lack of communication provided to teachers regarding the locally designed merit pay program.
2. No Equity: Participants of the study shared their perception of the locally

designed merit pay program and why they consider this merit pay program unfair.

3. All About the Students: Participants in the study shared the students they work with contribute to teacher job satisfaction.
4. Environment Counts: Participants communicated environment, school culture, and colleagues contribute to teacher retention.

Presentation of Data and Results

Four themes across the nine interviews discovered from this study in response to the central research questions: (a) In a school district implementing merit pay, what are teachers' perceptions of the initiative? (b) How does merit pay influence teacher job satisfaction and retention? (c) How can the district improve the compensation system to increase teacher job satisfaction and retention? The themes included: (a) no explanation given, (b) no equity, (c) all about the students, and (d) environment counts.

No Explanation Given

All three interview participants expressed the perception that the district did not effectively communicate the terms of the locally designed merit pay program. The participants indicated they each lacked a clear understanding of how one is measured for the merit pay program and the amount of money one can earn with the merit pay program. During the first round of interviews, all participants specified there seemed to be a lack of communication about the merit pay program's terms and conditions. While the majority of teachers showed a clear understanding of the criteria to earn merit pay on survey question 10, some confusion associated with the specifics of the merit pay program became apparent during the interviews. Participant One indicated she believed the district still used the TAP program for both

evaluation and merit pay. Participants Two and Three indicated they were aware the district implemented a locally designed merit pay program, but they were not fully aware of the details surrounding the merit pay program.

The teachers who participated in the interview process held a general idea of the current merit pay program. Participant Two stated, "I am not completely certain of how the district incentive works. In my understanding, we are paid based on classroom evaluations and state scores." When asked about how information regarding the locally designed merit pay program was shared with teachers, each participant recalled a very brief staff meeting at the end of the year where information was shared that the former merit pay program had been replaced with a locally designed version. However, none of the participants could recall if detailed information about the merit pay program was shared in the meeting. An administrator at one of the campuses within the study district informed me that there was a meeting at the end of the previous school year, but there was not much information given at the meeting. The administrator explained the district was still working to determine the criteria for earning merit pay.

Each participant was asked to search emails and files between interview one and two to see if they could locate any written documentation of the terms of the locally designed merit pay program. All participants were unable to locate such documentation. Participant Three spoke of the frustration in not understanding the local merit pay program. "Honestly, it was not widely publicized that a new merit pay program was going to be implemented. I am concerned about the secrecy." In sum, it was the perception of the participants the locally designed merit pay program was not fully explained or shared with teachers within the district.

The common perception amongst the participants of a lack of explanation regarding the merit pay program could explain the finding of the descriptive analysis of survey question 7, which indicated teachers did not agree on whether or not they were involved with the creation of the local merit pay program. Participant Three elaborated on this finding stating, "It appears to have been done all in house at the administrative level." The participants agreed teacher input was not sought during the developmental phases of the local merit pay program. I reached out to several administrators and received no reply regarding teacher participation in the development of the local merit pay program, and I reviewed the Staff handbook for both the 2015−2016 and 2016−17 school year. I was unable to find any evidence teachers were included in the development of the locally designed merit pay program.

No Equity

Question 18 on the survey asked if merit pay is unfair because of students' academic levels are low, and therefore it is hard to show growth. An analysis of question 18 from the survey found teachers did not agree with one another. The interviews allowed for teachers to elaborate on their feelings of the fairness associated with the local merit pay program. The prevailing theme during the interviews concluded if merit pay was based on student growth, then the perception is the merit pay program is fair; however a merit pay program based on a percentage of students passing the state standardized exam is unfair. Participant Two explained,

> There are many students in my classes who are far below grade level. Many times, those students do not pass the state test but do show a year or more of growth. Basing merit pay on growth is fair because it really highlights how effective I am as an educator.

The current merit pay program in the district is partially based on the criteria of 70% of students assigned to the teacher passing the state standardized exam in their tested subject area, according to all three interview participants. Participant One, who primarily teaches students with learning disabilities, shared that she felt as though the current merit pay program was unfair. “The merit pay program shows a lack of understanding of our special populations.”

Participants were interviewed after the payout from the merit pay program was received and asked if they felt as though the amount received was equitable to the amount of work produced during the previous school year. Each participant shared the perception that the amount received and the work produced was not equitable. Participant Two discussed the disparity between the payout and work produced by explaining the amount of work expected of a teacher extends beyond the typical school day. “We stay late and come early. We give up personal time with our families to help our students grow.” Participant Three stated, “There are a lot of hardworking teachers that have students that are not successful on the STAAR test.” Participant One, who is very passionate about her students with learning disabilities and teaching those particular students, explained that setting the standard at 70% passing caused her to perceive the merit pay program as unfair.

> Without saying how much the payout was, it was well below what I am worth. With all the work I put in last year, I believe I deserve more than what was offered. I do not believe it was fair. The amount was very low and did not match all the hard work I did. Teachers who teach students with special needs should not have to adhere to the same standards a general education teacher does. To me, that is very unfair and unattainable.

The excerpts expressed the participants' disappointments in the perceived unfairness of the locally designed merit pay program. According to participants, the merit pay program was considered inequitable not only for the method in which the merit pay payout was calculated, but was considered unfair for teachers who taught students with special needs according to participants. Furthermore, teachers perceived the payout amount inequitable with the amount of work teachers put into working with students.

All About the Students

While survey results noted merit pay was significantly related to job satisfaction, as measured by question 20 on the survey, the interviews uncovered the altruistic nature of teacher participants and how interactions with their students influenced job satisfaction. In the first interview, participants indicated their work with students increased their job satisfaction. Participant Three summarized job satisfaction as,

> I believe that the teachers enjoy seeing their students learn and create. Teachers enjoy seeing that their students are successful in and outside of the classroom. Therefore, I believe that teachers are satisfied with the job they have done when a student passes a test they have struggled with all year long, or when a student finally learns a concept that has plagued them throughout the school year. A teacher's job satisfaction comes from knowing they did a good job and seeing their student surpass the goals that the student set for themselves.

The participants were asked to reflect on how the locally designed merit pay program influenced their job satisfaction after the participants received their merit payout. Participant Two stated, "I will continue working hard and try to motivate my students to do their best." Participant One concluded,

> After receiving my merit payout, I am more focused on my students. It does not influence my job satisfaction. I get satisfaction from my student's hard work and their motivation. The merit pay program does not influence my job satisfaction necessarily, but it does influence my satisfaction with the district.

During the third interviews, all three participants were apparently unhappy with their merit pay payouts and letters of explanation. However, the participants felt sharing that their job satisfaction comes from working with their students and not the monetary payout from the merit pay program was important. While merit pay did influence job satisfaction according to the survey findings, the interviews uncovered two main factors that contribute to job satisfaction for these three participants were personally experiencing students learning, growth, and interactions with their students.

Environment Counts

Results from the survey indicated teachers are not influenced to remain in education by merit pay, as measured by question one on the survey instrument. The participants of the interview portion of the study shared various factors that influence their choice to remain in education and within their current teaching position. The participants seemed to agree school environment, culture, and colleagues are the main factors and reasons for remaining in their current teaching positions and district.

In the first interview, Participant Two indicated he has remained in his current district the majority of his career because of the relationships he has built with coworkers and the community. "My desire to stay with my district is because of the people I work with in and out of this building." Participant Three, who has worked in several districts over the course of her career, shared she decided to stay in her current district until retirement because of the school

environment and culture. She shared the following in the first interview:

> I remain in my current teaching position because the teachers I work with show they care about educating the children. The teachers I work with are dedicated, loyal, and work hard which allows our students to perform so well. Additionally, the school I work with acts like a family. The environment is very uplifting and keeps me coming back day after day.

Participant One also indicated the school environment and culture are factors that influence retention in her current position. As someone who chose to teach as a second career, she shared she is willing to leave a job with which she is unhappy despite the compensation, as evidenced by her decision to leave her higher paying first career for a teaching position. Her desire to remain within her current position is influenced by the perception she is appreciated by the people with whom she works. She shared during the third interview, "I stay in this school because I feel like I am a valuable member of a successful team. I work hard, and it is noticed and celebrated by other teachers, administration, and parents."

Chapter 4 Summary

The purpose of the quantitative data analysis was to provide a basis for further examination of a particular phenomenon within the qualitative process. It was understood that the quantitative results alone would not provide a complete and detailed answer to the designated research question. The accumulated quantitative data from the survey instrument, once combined with the qualitative interview feedback, allowed for a more concise approach to the research question. The quanitative portion of the study was designed to address the research question as stated below:

- In a school district implementing merit pay, what are the teachers' perceptions of the

initiatives?

The use of perception within the quantitative framework allowed for each of the questions to be categorized as related to general or personal thought processes or actions. This categorization provides a basis for the idea that the answers to personal or general thought based questions can elicit different responses based upon one's perception of their own environment. This perception can drive how one acts or reacts to a given concept such as the implementation of a merit-based pay program.

The descriptive data indicated that the merit pay initiatives needed further evaluation. The counts derived from the answers to question 7 indicated that a large portion of the teachers appeared to be not involved with the development of the merit-based criteria. Overall, there seemed to be no real difference between age groups and responses except when considering the *agree* response. The data showed that those with the least experience as well as those with the most experience agreed to having some level of involvement in greater numbers than those in the other two experiences. The means for each of these groups (M = 4.20 and M = 3.91, respectively) were higher than the other two groups surveyed. Regardless of experience group, a limited number (n=58 or 24 %) of participants indicated that they would not change their teaching strategies for under $1000. The 24% of the participants can be thought to have a perception of increased merit in that they may have the view that "it would take more than that amount of money for me to change my ways." Further, a significant portion of the participants (112 or 47%) answered using some form of agreement. The overall mean for this question was greater than 5 for all experience ranges indicating that almost half of the participants would at least consider changing their strategies.

The quantitative data from the survey instrument and the qualitative interview feedback allowed for a more succinct approach to the research questions. The qualitative findings of this study suggest exploring teachers' perceptions of the current merit pay program is important to determine the connection, if any, to teacher job satisfaction and retention. The themes that were derived from the data included no explanation given, no equity, all about the students, and environment counts.

As evidenced by this study, terms and conditions associated with the merit pay program were not adequately communicated with the teachers in the study district, and the teachers involved in the interview portion of the study did not find the current merit pay program fair. The interviews also revealed the participants found job satisfaction from the students with whom they work, and remain in their current teaching positions due to the school environment, culture, and colleagues. Chapter 5 presents implications and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

Teacher retention is an expanding issue in the field of education, with teacher turnover rates estimated between 13−15% per academic school year across the nation (Ingersoll & Perda 2010). Recruiting and training educators is a costly expense. Texas spent approximately $235 million in 2013 to replace teachers in the classroom (Haynes, 2014). Establishing effective methods to retain quality educators is essential for districts to remain financially stable and provide quality educational experiences for students.

The purpose of this descriptive study was to solicit teacher perspectives on the current merit pay compensation system in relation to job satisfaction and retention in order to provide essential feedback to stakeholders for future financial and strategic planning. The study district implemented a locally designed merit pay program in an effort to increase teacher retention, job satisfaction, and student achievement. The following questions guided this study:

1. In a school district implementing merit pay, what are teachers' perceptions of the initiative?
2. How does merit pay influence teacher job satisfaction and retention?

The research questions stated above, which investigated teacher perspectives on the current merit pay compensation system in relation to job satisfaction and retention, were measured using a Likert scale survey created and implemented by Stephens (2015) and a series of three open-ended qaulitative interviews. Descriptive data were collected and analyzed using e statistics to determine teacher perceptions of merit pay. Qualitative data were collected and analyzed using Atlas.ti software and divided using the unitizing process. The comparative process was implemented in order to find themes, create categories, and review internal

consistency.

Chapter 5 is organized to include: an introduction, summary of the results, discussion of the results, discussion of the results in relation to the literature, limitations, implication of the results for practice, policy, theory, recommendations for further research, and conclusion. Chapter 5 includes the results of the research, interpretation of the results, and explains implications of the results on literature, practice, policy, and theory.

Summary of the Results

The purpose of this descriptive study was to solicit teacher perspectives on the current merit pay compensation system in relation to job satisfaction and retention in order to provide essential feedback to stakeholders for future financial and strategic planning. Data collection began with an online survey hosted by Qualtrics, a web-based survey hosting site that utilized a Likert Scale with values ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) (Stephens, 2015). After analyzing the quantitative data three participants were selected for the interviews, based on demographic factors including gender, years in education, and grade level taught. Questions for the interviews were developed from patterns found in the quantitative data and used to clarify findings from the survey. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed to determine the perceptions teachers hold regarding merit pay and if merit pay affects teacher job satisfaction and retention.

Research Question 1 Summary of Results

Research question #1 stated: In a school district implementing merit pay, what are teachers' perceptions of the initiative? Before the quantitative data was analyzed, the initial idea was that the survey questions would provide preliminary thoughts on the experiences of teachers that have actually experienced the merit pay initiative. It was thought that the mean score would

change based upon the *variable years of teaching*. This, however, was not evident in the quantitative data obtained from the survey as 69 out of the 240 participants were neutral in their views of the merit pay program. These views were primarily neutral in the 0-5 and 11-15 years of teaching groups, Those with greater than 16 years of teaching were evenly dispersed between disagree, neutral and agree.

Research Question 2 Summary of Results

Research question #2 stated: How does merit pay influence teacher job satisfaction and retention? The analysis of the quantitative data revealed merit pay was significantly and positively related to job satisfaction. Furthermore, as merit pay payouts increased, there was a corresponding increase in job satisfaction. However, analysis of the quantitative data indicated merit pay was significantly and negatively related to job retention. There was a decisive degree of hesitancy in the quantitative data when considering the responses regarding the merit pay system and job retention. This was evident in all years of teaching categories except 11-15 years.

The quantitative results for this catgory were used for further qualitative analysis. The analysis of the qualitative data indicated the participants specified that while merit pay does influence job satisfaction, interactions with students enhanced their job satisfaction even further. The primary themes revealed when considering the interview results focused on the persistent lack of communication, inequities within the program, increased job retention when the program was focused on the student's achievemnets, and the overall work environemnent.

Discussion of the Results

This study was designed to better understand teacher perceptions of a locally designed merit pay program and if merit pay and district improvement to compensation influences teacher job satisfaction and retention. The Likert scale survey link was hosted through

Qualtrics and sent through a third party email, who was not the study researcher, to ensure anonymity. After the survey had closed, teachers who responded to an additional link were contacted for the qualitative portion of the study. Three volunteer teachers engaged in three interview sessions to review findings of the survey and explore patterns. Data were successfully collected and analyzed to determine if merit pay and district compensation influenced teacher job satisfaction and retention.

The Implication of the Quantitative Results on the Research Question

The purpose of the quantitative data analysis was to provide a basis for further examination of a particular phenomenon within the qualitative process. It was understood that the quantitative results alone would not provide a complete and detailed answer to the designated research question. The accumulated quantitative data from the survey instrument, once combined with the qualitative interview feedback, allowed for a more concise approach to the research question. The descriptive portion of the study was designed to address the research question as stated below:

- In a school district implementing merit pay, what are the teachers' perceptions of the initiatives?

By definition, perception is an opinion derived by people based on what they construe within their own environment. For the basis of this study, their environment would constitute their particular school districts. The use of perception within the quantitative framework allowed for each of the questions to be categorized as related to general or personal thought processes or actions. This categorization provides a basis for the idea that the answers to personal or general thought based questions can elicit different responses based upon one's perception of their own environment. This perception can drive how one acts or reacts to a given concept such as the

implementation of a merit-based pay program.

The descriptive data reflected several facets of how the participants perceived the merit pay initiatives. Specifically, the counts derived from the answers to question 7 indicated that a large portion of the teachers appeared to be not involved with the development of the merit-based criteria and therefore had no concern regarding the response. This lack of concern was seen in the 65 (27 %) of responses that fell within the neutral category. Further, overall there seemed to be no real difference between age groups and responses except when considering the *agree* response. The data showed that those with the least experience as well as those with the most experience agreed to having some level of involvement in greater numbers than those in the other two experiences. The means for each of these groups (M = 4.20 and M = 3.91, respectively) were higher than the other two groups surveyed. This may be an indication that the teachers with 6 to 15 years of experience are not being recruited for the development process. The 6 to 15 year experience group may possess a decreased level of enthusiasm for a process for which they have a perception of non-involvement.

When considering personal thinking, question 16 was used to determine a teacher's personal feelings regarding the basis of the merit pay program. The question was based on the idea that a teacher may change their teaching strategies if they felt the award was relevant. The data provided interesting results for further study. Regardless of experience group, a limited number (n=58 or 24 %) of participants indicated that they would not change their teaching strategies for under $1000. The 24% of the participants can be thought to have a perception of increased merit in that they may have the view that "it would take more than that amount of money for me to change my ways." Further, a significant portion of the participants (112 or 47%) answered using some form of agreement. The overall mean for this question was greater

than 5 for all experience ranges indicating that almost half of the participants would at least consider changing their strategies.

Personal actions are derived from one's existing thoughts and perceptions. It can be seen from the data that one's perceptions of their environment can act as driving factor for any significant change. Ultimately, personal actions will reflect the overall feelings that a teacher has towards the merit pay initiative. A large portion of the respondents agreed that the existence of merit program would provide a basis for increasing their efforts for student achievement. The less experienced group (0−5 years) seemed to approve of using the initiative to drive student achievement. For the 0−5 group, 48 respondents indicated that they would use a merit pay program as an initiative to be motivated for student success. This can be compared to only 15 respondents from that group would not use the merit pay system as a stimulant for student achievement.

The survey results teachers significantly believed that earning awards was relevant to academic growth. The results indicated teachers believed, regardless of area of study, they should have the same opportunities. Teachers also indicated pay was relevant in how they designed their teaching habits. The idea of proper communication and fairness of the program were concepts found within the descriptive data that warranted further expansion through the qualitative interview process.

Teacher Job Satisfaction

While survey results noted merit pay was significantly related to job satisfaction, as measured by question 20 on the survey, the interviews uncovered the altruistic nature of teacher participants and how interactions with their students influenced job satisfaction. All interview participants indicated student interactions as a factor that contributed to increased

job satisfaction. The study results suggested merit pay and teacher interaction with students can work together to enhance teacher job satisfaction. Jones' (2013) study indicted teachers were not motivated by money. Jones discussed the assumption of the altruistic nature of teachers and concluded educators enter the profession due to a passion for making a difference in society, rather than making a significant amount of money. While money may be a factor that contributes to teacher job satisfaction, it is not the only means of obtaining such satisfaction in the profession.

Teacher Retention

Approximately 20% of teachers who responded to the online survey were new to the district, which indicated a teacher turnover rate of 20% between the 2015–2016 and 2016–2017 school years. Results from the survey indicated teachers are not influenced to remain in education by merit pay, as measured by question one on the survey instrument. The participants of the interview portion of the study shared various factors that influence their choice to remain in education and within their current teaching position. The participants seemed to agree school environment, culture, and colleagues are the main factors and reasons for remaining in their current teaching positions and district. This finding reinforced conclusions drawn by Caillier (2010), who asserted public school teachers are more motivated by work-related conditions than incentive pay.

Multiple factors could be contributing to the lack of a connection between teacher retention and merit pay. Based on survey question results, one factor could be teachers do not find the merit pay payout to be worth staying in the same position and district. Results from the interview indicated teachers perceived the payout amount inequitable with the amount of work teachers put into working with students. According to Heneman and Werner (2005), the

employee must find the output of work or effort necessary to gain the reward is directly related and equivalent to the reward. If the person deems the incentive as an operative, motivation increases. If the premium or work is considered as unequal to the amount of work needed for achievement, motivation decreases. The teacher interviews indicated participants do not feel as though the merit pay payout is equal to the amount of work put into the previous school year. Laine, Potemski, and Rowland (2010) found while compensation is not the leading factor in teacher attrition, compensation is considered when educators decide whether to leave the field.

Goodman and Turner (2013) determined monetary rewards must be large enough to influence teachers. Teachers surveyed did not agree as to whether or not any amount of money would motivate them to teach to a higher standard. However, teachers surveyed indicated they would change their teaching habits to make sure they earned merit pay if the monetary reward was more than $3,000. Currently, the maximum merit pay payout earned by teachers in the study district is $1,250, if all criteria are met. Therefore, it is possible the merit pay payout is not substantial enough to encourage teacher retention.

The switch from the TAP merit pay program to the locally designed merit pay program could be another factor that is contributing to a lower perception of merit pay, district improvement to compensation and the relationship to the teacher. The switch between the two merit pay programs was deemed confusing by all participants in the interview portion of the study. During the first round of interviews, all participants specified there seemed to be a lack of communication about the merit pay program terms and conditions. One participant indicated they believed they district was still following the original merit pay system. Leigh's (2013) indicated proper communication with teachers regarding the expectations and outcomes of implemented merit pay programs is essential to successful implementation. Teachers need

to fully undertand the goals and rewards of a merit pay program to buy in to the system.

The lack of communication and the switch between merit pay programs could also explain why newer teachers hold a higher perception of merit pay than veteran teachers, as the newer teachers may not have experience with a previous merit pay program to compare their perspectives on the current merit pay program.

Perceptions of the Locally Designed Merit Pay Program

The qualitative portion of the study indicated teachers do not fully understand the current merit pay program in place in the study district. The interview participants expressed they did not believe teachers were involved in the creation of the merit pay system, which could explain why survey participants were not in agreement with one another regarding question 7, which asked if teachers were involved with the creation of the local merit pay program. The lack of understanding and disagreement as to whether teachers were involved with the creation of the merit pay program and lack of understanding of the locally designed merit pay program could explain the why survey participants did not agree as to whether or not the merit pay program was unfair. The teacher survey participants did not agree on question 18 on the survey, which asked if merit pay is unfair because of students' academic level. Interview participants indicated the perception the merit pay program is unfair due to the majority of criteria for earning merit pay based on 70% of students passing the state standardized exam. Leigh (2013) determined 83% of teachers oppose merit pay based on standardized test scores.

Teachers agreed earning awards was important when their students showed academic growth, and that all teachers, whether teaching tested or non-tested subjects should have the opportunity to earn merit pay. The disagreements presented within the survey results could

be a result of teacher participants not fully understanding the changing criteria from the TAP merit pay program from the 2015-2016 school year to the locally designed merit pay program in the 2016-2017 school year. Muralidharan and Sundararaman (2011) indicated a merit pay program that is transparent with designated and measurable goals would increase a teacher's intrinsic motivation.

The criteria of a student's passing percentage were only fully realized by interview participants before the third interview, which was scheduled for after the participants received their merit pay payout. The perception of the merit pay program being unfair and not well understood by interview participants could be a contributing factor as to why merit pay or district improvement to compensation does not influence teacher retention.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

National teacher turnover rates are estimated between 13−15% (Ingersoll & Perda 2010). The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) found that the cost to recruit, hire, and train a replacement teacher is ranges between $10,000–$17,872 per teacher (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007). In the study district, approximately 20% of survey respondents were new to the district teachers. This study indicated the study district is above the state average for teacher attrition. Factors contributing to teacher job satisfaction and retention have been studied for several years. However the rate of attrition has risen (Perda, 2013). The literature review for this research study was focused on merit pay, the various studies surrounding merit pay and theories surrounding merit pay in education.

There are many studies in print focused on various aspects of merit pay (Figlio & Kenny, 2007; Glazerman & Seifullah, 2010; Goldhaber, De Armond, & De Burgomaster, 2011; Goldhaber & Walch, 2012; Goodman & Turner, 2013; Jones, 2013; Muralidharan &

Sundararaman, 2011; Schacter & Thum, 2005; Springer et al., 2010; Woessmann, 2011); however, research uncovered a lack of existing data or studies to determine if there is a link between merit pay, teacher job satisfaction, and retention. The literature review revealed a gap in the literature and the necessity for a mixed-method study to explore the connection, if any, between teacher job satisfaction and retention to merit pay.

Limitations

The target population during the study was 353 K−12 teachers. The participation rate for this study was above the minimum statistical sample size with 240 or 67.9% of teachers having completed the online survey. However, due to time constraints, only three teachers participated in the interview sessions, which is a small sample size. Since the district has created a unique merit pay program framework, the findings of this study may not be generalizable. Districts may find some transferability and apply the findings of this study when implementing merit pay programs in schools across the United States.

The scope of the qualitative investigation portion of this study was narrow. The qualitative data were gathered from semi-structured open-ended interviews with three participants. Questions were developed to explore the findings of the survey and research questions. The format of the interviews allowed for the participants freely share their personal perspectives regarding merit pay and the influence merit pay has (if any) on teacher job satisfaction and retention. The interviews revealed that all three of the participants were unfamiliar with the framework of the locally designed merit pay program. This lack of knowledge of the merit pay program may have affected the survey results, as it was my assumption all teachers in the study district were familiar with the merit pay program.

Wide-ranging triangulation of the data was not possible for this study, as I was unable to locate any documentation or artifacts from the study district regarding the merit pay program. However, the study did have internal triangulation based on the structure of the study. Data collected from the survey were triangulated through the data collected in semi-structured interview sessions, which were conducted from the closing of the survey until the teachers received their merit pay payouts. Additionally, interviews were divided into three sessions, with questions often repeating to review consistency with the interviewees. At the start of each session, participants were given a transcript of the previous interview to ensure what the interviewee said was recorded correctly. Also, it is possible that there are non-participants teachers within the study district with differing perspectives, as there were limited participants for the qualitative portion of the study

While the survey was previously field tested, piloted, and implemented by Stephens (2015), survey had flaws and had not undergone the rigorous process of scale development. Additionally, I created the interview questions for the qualitative portion of the study based on the findings of the survey instruments and based the development of the questions on the academic principles studied during qualitative coursework and additional readings (Adler, Adler, & Weiss, 1995; Foddy, 1993; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002; Myers, & Newman, 2007). Additionally, the first set of interview questions were approved by the Concordia University Institutional Review Board, and the remaining two sets of interview questions were reviewed and approved by my dissertation committee before implementation. The three interview process allowed the participants ample opportunity for reflection concerning their perspectives of merit pay, teacher job satisfaction, and retention. The process also allowed me to ensure perspectives were recorded and conveyed correctly and for internal

consistency with the participants' responses.

Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

Based on the findings of the present study, there are several recommendations for policy, practice, and theory associated with merit pay worth considering. Based on the results from the interviews, the district officials should consider including teachers on a team to work on redesigning the local merit pay program. All stakeholders need to work together to define the merit pay program to ensure the program is viable and aides in increasing teacher job satisfaction and retention. Including teachers in the development of the merit pay program is vital to the success of any merit pay program and to increase recruiting and retaining quality teachers. District officials should develop merit pay programs without criteria based student test scores. Merit pay programs should be based on teacher performance and student growth rather than student achievement on standardized tests.

Additionally, district officials should ensure teachers understand the merit pay program. School districts must be transparent with the criteria associated with merit pay. All stakeholders should have a clear understanding of the merit pay program, how teachers are evaluated, and how merit payouts are earned. Ensuring educators are aware of how the merit pay program works increases buy-in. Finally, researchers should continue to explore what factors influence teacher job satisfaction and retention. Stakeholders should implement programs that increase teacher job satisfaction and retention based on the feedback received from teachers.

Recommendations for Further Research

Recommendations for future research come directly from the limitations of the study. If the study is replicated, a full scale development of the survey is necessary. The survey

developed by Stephen's lacked many factors that increase validty, realibility, and interpretation of survey results. According to Hinkin (1995), questionaires require item generation, content adequacy assessment, questionnaire administration, factor analysis, internal consistency assessment, construct validity, and replication. Future researchers will need to review and develop sound scales to increase the validity and realiabilty of the survey and results derived from the survey.

An additional recommendation is to increase the number of questions regarding teacher job satisfaction on the survey instrument. The survey included in this study contains one question that can be linked directly to teacher job satisfaction. Including additional questions, which further explore teacher job satisfaction, will improve the reliability of the survey instrument. I conducted this study as a single researcher and time constraints limited the number of participants who took part in the qualitative portion of this mixed-method study. Future researchers who wish to replicate the study should consider creating a team to conduct the study and increase the sample size for the qualitative portion of the study. The study could also be divided by levels, such as elementary, middle, and high school.

Further exploration of what factors influence teacher retention is necessary. Future research could focus on the monetary ranges associated with merit pay and if increased merit pay results in increased teacher job satisfaction and retention. One finding of the study was teachers with five or fewer years of experience had a more favorable view of merit pay. An additional recommendation is to study how and why merit pay motivates newer generations of teachers.

Conclusion

This doctoral research study examined teacher perceptions of the locally designed merit pay program and how the pay for performance system and district improvement to compensation influenced teacher job satisfaction and retention. My study explored possible monetary and non- monetary factors that contribute to teacher job satisfaction and teacher retention, in order to reduce district costs associated with recruiting and training replacement teachers. The findings from my descriptive study enhance the body of knowledge that adds to understanding how or if job satisfaction and retention is influenced by merit pay.

Teacher interviews uncovered teacher retention is related to the work environment, school culture, and colleagues. Also, it is clear districts need to ensure teachers understand the criteria associated with merit pay program and design merit pay programs with teacher involvement to increase buy-in. Further research and exploration of factors that influence teacher retention are necessary to support these findings and enhance future literature. I am optimistic continued expansion of understanding the influence of merit pay on teacher job satisfaction could positively increase teacher decisions to remain in their position and decrease expenses related to recruiting and training teachers.

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Appendix A: Survey Permission Letter

Dear Dr. Stephens,

I am a doctoral student from Concordia University writing my dissertation tentatively titled Merit Pay, Job Satisfaction, and Retention: A Mixed-Methods Study, under the direction of my dissertation committee chair Dr. Connie Greiner.

I would like your permission to adapt and use the survey instrument from your dissertation entitled: Mississippi Teachers' Perception of Merit Pay. I would like to use your survey under the following conditions:

- I will use this survey only for my research study.
- I will not sell or attempt to profit from the survey instrument
- I will include copyright information with the survey.
- I will send a copy of the adapted questions for you to review.
- I will send a copy of the completed research study (projected completion date April 2017).

If you chose to grant approval and find the above terms satisfactory, please indicate so by signing one copy of this letter or generating a response, and returning it to me via fax, email, or postal mail: [Researcher contact information redacted.]

Sincerely,

Desiree Hall

Doctoral Candidate

Expected completion date: 4/29/2017

I, Dr. D. Melissa Stephens, grant permission requested on the terms stated in the above letter.

Agreed and Accepted: Dr. D. Melissa Stephens Date: 4/5/16

Good Luck!

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Concordia University

2811 NE Holman Street

Portland, OR 97211

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Merit Pay, Job Satisfaction, and Teacher Retention: A Mixed-Methods Study

Principal Investigator: Desiree Hall Telephone: [Redacted] E-mail: [Redacted]

Participant _____ Contact info _____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Desiree Hall under the guidance of Dr. Connie Greiner. The purpose of this research is gather information about merit pay and how it relates to teacher job satisfaction and retention.
2. You were selected for participation because you participated in an electronic questionnaire, Qualtrics web-survey, and you are now asked to be a participant in this interview to help further study merit pay and how it relates to teacher job satisfaction and retention.
3. Your participation will involve:
    a. Sharing your perceptions of merit pay through a series of three personal interviews with the Primary Investigator.
    b. The interview will be audio recorded to guarantee your responses are transcribed accurately.
    c. Interviews can be conducted face-to-face, by telephone, or via video conference.
4. The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately three one-hour sessions for a total of no more than four hours over the course of one month.
5. There are no anticipated risks or benefits associated with your participation in this study.
6. Your participation will contribute to the knowledge about merit pay and its relationship to teacher job satisfaction and retention.

7. Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will not be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.
8. Your privacy will be protected. Your identity will be concealed using a randomized number and will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study. The information collected will remain in possession of the investigator in a locked file drawer inside a home office. To help protect privacy regarding the recording, any audio or video recording will be deleted as soon as the transcription can be confirmed. Other research data collection and analysis documents need to be retained for three years after the study, as required by law, but all these documents will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study.
9. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, would like a copy of the results, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Desiree Hall at [Researcher email redacted]; or email the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Connie Greiner at CGreiner@cu-portland.edu. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

Participant's Signature	Date	Participant's Printed Name
Investigator's Signature	Date	Investigator's Printed Name

Appendix C: Survey Invitation

Subject: You are invited to a research survey—*Merit Pay, Teacher Job Satisfaction, and Retention: A Mixed-Methods Study*

Dear Educators:

You are invited to participate in a research study titled *Merit Pay, Teacher Job Satisfaction, and Retention: A Mixed-Methods Study*. This study is being conducted by Desiree Hall with support from her research committee from the Department of Education at Concordia University. The purpose of this study is to investigate the possible connections between merit pay, job satisfaction, and retention in the field of education.

In this study, you will be asked to complete an electronic survey. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw your participation from this study at any time. The survey should take less than 15 minutes to complete.

This survey has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of Concordia University. There are no risks associated with participating in this study. Respondents will not be asked to provide identifying information, and all of the responses will be recorded anonymously. General identifiers are included in the survey in order to ensure a variety of experiences are included in the study. Qualtrics allows you to complete the survey anonymously.

While you will not experience any direct benefits from participation, information collected in this study may benefit the field of education in the future by providing a better understanding of the connection, if any, between merit pay, job satisfaction, and teacher retention.

If you have any questions regarding the survey or this research project in general, please contact Desiree Hall or her advisor Dr. Connie Greiner at CGreiner@cu-portland.edu. If you

have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB Director of Concordia University, Dr. OraLee Branch, at obranch@cu-portland.edu.

By completing and submitting this survey, you are indicating your consent to participate in the study. Your participation is appreciated.

Desiree Hall

Doctoral Candidate, Concordia University

Advisor Dr. Connie Greiner, Department of Education, Concordia University

Please click on the survey link below and provide your feedback no later than September 30, 2016.

INSERT SURVEY LINK HERE

This invitation does not imply any endorsement of the survey research and/or its findings. The survey contents and findings are the sole responsibility of the individual conducting the survey.

Appendix D: Survey Instrument

1. Including the current year, how many years have you taught?
    a. 0−5 years
    b. 6−10 years
    c. 11−15 years
    d. 16+ years

2. Is this your first year working for the school district with which you are currently employed?
    a. Yes
    b. No
3. What best describes your current teaching position?
    a. Tested subject area (defined as students have to take a state standardized test at the end of the school year)
    b. Non-tested subject area
4. Is your school considered a Title 1 school (75% or higher free or reduced lunch)?
    a. Yes – my school is a Title 1 school
    b. No – my school is not a Title 1 school

Directions: On the questions below chose: *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree*

	SD	D	SWD	N	SWA	A	SA
5. The merit pay program in my school district motivates me to work harder to increase student achievement.							
6. The merit pay program encourages me to change my teaching strategies to increase student achievement.							
7. My school district involves teachers in the process of creating the merit pay criteria for							

teachers to meet.							
8. It is important that all teachers in tested and non-tested areas have the opportunity to earn merit pay.							
9. Since tested areas have more impact on teacher and school accountability, merit pay should reward tested areas with a greater reward.							
10. I feel that I am knowledgeable about the criteria I have to meet in order to earn merit pay.							
11. It is important for veteran teachers (teachers with 5+ year's experience) to earn more money because they have been teaching longer.							
12. It is important for teachers to be rewarded when their students show academic growth.							
13. Any amount of money would motivate me to teach to a higher standard.							
14. The criteria my school district has set for teachers in the merit pay program are fair for all teachers.							
15. All teachers in my school district have the opportunity to earn merit pay.							
16. I would change my teaching habits to make							

sure I earn merit pay if the monetary reward was $100-$1,000.							
17. I would change my teaching habits to make sure I earn merit pay if the monetary reward was more than $3,000.							
18. Merit pay is unfair because my students' academic levels are low, and it is hard to show growth.							
19. When the merit pay program was set up, I changed my teaching habits to make sure I earned merit pay.							
20. Money does not motivate me to be a better teacher.							
21. Merit pay has increased the teamwork among the teachers I work with.							

Appendix E: Interview Questions

Interview 1

1. What are your professional experiences as an educator?
2. Explain the district incentive program.
3. What motivates educators to remain in their position?
4. What influences job satisfaction for teachers?
5. How have you responded to incentive pay opportunities?
6. Did the merit pay system influence your decision to remain in the district? Why? Why not?
7. Does the merit pay program increase your desire to stay within the study district? Why? Why not?
8. Does the current merit pay program relate to your job satisfaction? Why? Why not?
9. Could the district improve the current merit pay program? If so, how?

Interview 2

1. Describe the current merit pay program.
2. Why was the merit pay program established?
3. How did you learn about the current merit pay program?
4. How did the district involve teachers in the development of the current merit pay program?
5. What are your perceptions about how the district selected people to participate in the development of the current merit pay program?
6. What are your perceptions of the current merit pay program?
7. What are your perceptions of the fairness of the merit pay program for teachers in the district?

Interview 3

1. Do you feel as though the current merit pay program motivates you to work harder? If so, how? If not, what motivates you to work harder?
2. How does the current merit pay program influence or change your teaching strategies or methods?
3. Now that you have received your payout explanation, what is your understanding of the current merit pay program? (please remember to omit any information regarding your exact payout)
4. Does your current understanding of the merit pay program influence your desire to remain within the district?
5. Do you feel the merit pay award you received is equitable to the amount of work you did from the last year?
6. Are you satisfied with your payout? Why or why not? (please remember to omit any information regarding your exact payout)
7. After receiving your payout, how does the current merit pay program influence your job satisfaction?
8. Were any current or potential problems you discovered or observed after receiving the payout explanation or merit pay program?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to share about this topic?

Appendix F: Statement of Original Work

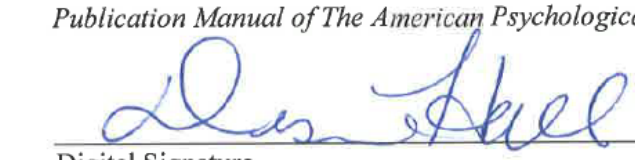
The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

> **Statement of academic integrity.**
>
> As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.
>
> **Explanations:**
>
> ***What does "fraudulent" mean?***
>
> "Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate's final work without full and complete documentation.
>
> ***What is "unauthorized" assistance?***
>
> "Unauthorized assistance" refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:
>
> - Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
> - Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
> - Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
> - Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*



Digital Signature

Desiree Hall

Name

4-10-17

Date