

Factors Influencing the Improved Academic Success in Literacy at the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) Schools in the Delta Region According to Adult Perceptions

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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This qualitative case study explored factors that have influenced literacy success of Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) students in the low-income, poverty stricken Delta Region of Arkansas. The study examined progress made since implementation of the KIPP Program and the influence the program had made upon student achievement in literacy at the KIPP College Preparatory and KIPP Delta Collegiate High Schools, according to administrators' and teachers' perceptions. The study explored factors influencing improvement of previously at-risk students and adopted the theoretical framework of Gene Bottoms' High Schools That Work (HSTW) Initiative that stated high expectations plus rigor, relevance, and relationships increased student achievement (2005). The factors that emerged from the study were high expectations, rigor, relevance, relationship, and accountability. These factors were identified as helping students master skills and state standards in literacy at the KIPP Delta Public Schools. It is imperative that public school leaders narrow the academic gap that exists between white students, black students, and students from poverty in the public schools (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2009). Only 8.3% of students from low-income backgrounds have earned college degrees by their mid-20s (McDonald, Ross, Abney, & Zoblotsky, 2008). The numbers are more dismal from students from the Delta Region. However, students at KIPP Schools are taking the same state-wide assessments and are scoring at proficient or advanced levels (McDonald, Ross, Abney, & Zoblotsky, 2008). If KIPP Schools are successful in educating students who were failing in traditional public schools, the question remained: What factors have influenced the increased academic improvements in literacy of previously at-risk students in the Delta Region, according to adult perceptions?

NCPEA Education Leadership Review of Doctoral Research, Vol. 1, No. 2 – October 2014
ISSN: 1532-0723 © 2014 National Council of Professors of Educational Administration
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Introduction

For decades a debate existed on whether or not minority students received a quality education from the American public school system. Organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) argued there are gross inequities in the quality of education that minority and low-income students received (NAACP, 2009). The federal government recognized that many students of color and low-socioeconomic status were at-risk of failing or dropping out of school. As a result, the federal government, under the previous No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) provided federal monies to schools under Title I to provide various interventions for students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds to become successful and graduate from high school (NCLB, 2002). Schools were designated Title I when 40% or more of the student population was from low-income or poverty-stricken backgrounds, and received free or reduced lunch. The Arkansas Department of Education estimated that 1,043 public schools were designated Title I schools (Arkansas Department of Education, 2012).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002)

Prior to the approval of Flexibility Waivers under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2012, Title I schools had to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals set by Arkansas' Department of Education. Arkansas' AYP was the annual target that schools met in mathematics, literacy, and writing on augmented state benchmark examinations and end-of-course examinations (Arkansas Department of Education, 2012). Combined school populations and subpopulations had to demonstrate proficiency in literacy, mathematics, and writing for the school to meet AYP. The subpopulations were (a) Caucasian, (b) African-American, (c) Hispanic, (d) Limited English Proficient, (e) economically disadvantaged, and (f) students with disabilities (Arkansas Department of Education, 2012; NCLB, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

Too many minority students are at-risk of failing in our public schools (Southern Education Foundation, 2002; National Association Advancement of Colored People, 2009). In the study, at-risk of failing was defined as either not proficient, not on grade level, or not being promoted to the next grade. At-risk students were typically poor, African American students who had not realized their full potential, talents, and skills. As a result, many minority students in public schools became statistics for low academic achievement, discipline problems, dropout rates, or failure (NAACP, 2009; Southern Education Foundation, 2002). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), white students scored an average of 26 points higher than African American students on all 2007 administered assessments (Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin-Anderson, & Rahman, 2009).

KIPP students were typically one or two grade levels below upon enrollment (Woodworth, David, Guha Wang, & Lopez-Torkos (2008). Woodworth et al., (2008) found scores of KIPP students entering the fifth grade, ranged from the 9th to the 60th percentile in reading and mathematics on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT10).

Main Research Question

The main research question addressed in the research study was, “What factors influenced the increased academic success of at-risk students in the KIPP Schools in Literacy in the Delta Region, according to administrators’ and English Language Arts (ELA) teachers’ perceptions?” The factors perceived by administrators and ELA teachers to have a positive effect upon student achievement in literacy were (a) KIPP’s commitment of academic excellence, (b) KIPP’s culture of high expectations, (c) a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum and practices, and (d) accountability of all stakeholders. KIPP’s practices included the Power to Lead Pillar, data-driven instruction and decision-making, research-based instructional strategies, professional development, lesson cycle, and teacher collaboration.

Significance of the Study

It was imperative that public school leaders narrow the academic gap that existed between white students, black students, and students of poverty in public schools (NAACP, 2009). Only 8.3% of students from low-income backgrounds had earned college degrees by their mid-20s (McDonald, Ross, Abney, & Zoblotsky, 2008). The numbers were even more dismal for students from the Delta Region. However, students at KIPP Schools were taking the same state-wide assessments and were scoring at proficient or advanced levels (McDonald, Ross, Abney, & Zoblotsky, 2008). If KIPP Schools were successful in educating students who were previously failing in traditional public schools, the question remained: “What factors have influenced academic improvements in literacy at the KIPP Delta Public Schools?” After identifying what factors have influenced improvements in literacy, can components of the KIPP Program be used as an instructional model for improvement in public school systems to effect the same increased student achievement for all students and narrow the academic gap for African American students and students of poverty (KIPP, 2012)?

Results of this study were beneficial to educators and the community in general because of the information concerning KIPP’s structure, learning environment, graduation rates, college matriculation rate, and college graduation rates. These factors helped KIPP students graduate from high schools, universities, and colleges around the nation. KIPP graduates had a plethora of opportunities that had not been realized in their former public schools. For example, more than 90% of middle school KIPP students enrolled in college preparatory high schools throughout the country. More than 80% of KIPP high school students attended college (KIPP, 2012). Eighty percent college matriculation rate was significant when compared to 40% of the nation’s students with similar backgrounds. For every 100 black and Hispanic students, less than 20 earned a college degree (Mathews, 2009). As future leaders empowered with content knowledge, skills, and character, KIPP students may change the landscape of the 21st century workforce. Furthermore, educating previously at-risk students may also help to decrease the nation’s poverty rate, crime statistics, and high unemployment rate.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that had influenced academic literacy success of KIPP Schools in the Delta Region, according to administrators’ and teachers’ perceptions. This research was significant because, at the time, it was the only study that had interviewed and captured the experience of the first graduates of the KIPP Delta Collegiate High School in the

Delta Region in Arkansas. The students had an opportunity to share their experiences with the researchers.

Literature Review

Review of related literature focused on the following: the alarming illiteracy rate in the Delta Region, background of the KIPP Delta Public Schools, and the theory advocated by Gene Bottoms' *High Schools That Work* Initiative of high expectations, rigor, relevance, and relationships, which may be the catalyst surrounding the success of KIPP Delta Public Schools. The goal was to provide educators with a complete, evaluative, and modern literature review related to KIPP Delta Public Schools' impact upon student achievement in literacy (2005).

Illiteracy in the Delta Region

Illiteracy in the Delta Region is an economic problem for Arkansas. Inadequate literacy skills were next to the lowest level of literacy skills and prevented individuals from fully functioning in society. Examples, from the National Institute for Literacy, illustrated the devastating effects for individuals with inadequate literacy skills: they were unable to read and summarize a news article or complete employment applications. Counties that were part of the Delta Region: Lee, Phillips, and Chicot had the highest illiteracy rates in Arkansas. Forty to 45% of the adults in those counties had inadequate literacy skills. In St. Francis and Monroe counties, also part of the Delta Region, thirty-five to 39% of the adults had inadequate literacy skills (Dillaha & Rodgers, 2007).

Furthermore, as cotton and manufacturing jobs disappeared, so did the Delta Region's economic base. As a result, many counties in this area had double-digit unemployment percentages. More than half of the residents in the Delta Region lived below the federal poverty line. Twenty percent of the Delta Region's population relocated due to high unemployment, which currently left the area with an unskilled labor force (Elliot, 2005). Thus, the Delta Region had the highest level of poverty and dropout rate, and the least number of college graduates in Arkansas.

Charter Schools

Researchers of charter schools had concluded that little innovation had taken place in terms of curriculum or instruction (Good & Braden, 2000). According to the research provided by Good and Braden, there was little difference in charter schools and regular public schools. One exception was the KIPP Schools, a charter school founded in inner-city Houston, Texas, in 1994 by co-founders Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin. KIPP Schools had received national attention for increasing student achievement among minority students, who were previously failing in public schools (McDonald, Ross, Abney, & Zoblotzky, 2008). KIPP Schools were located throughout major urban cities with large populations of minority and low-socioeconomic students.

Advocates of KIPP Delta Public Schools would agree that Arkansas was fortunate to have KIPP Delta Public Schools in the Delta Region (KIPP, 2012). Future plans included chartering 13 additional KIPP Schools throughout Arkansas in communities similar to the Delta Region by 2019. KIPP Schools were normally found in urban areas. KIPP Schools in the Delta

Region were anomalies. The question remained, “What conditions in KIPP Delta Public Schools allowed them to be successful with minority students, who were originally deemed to fail in traditional public schools?”

Background of KIPP Schools

KIPP Schools started in 1994 with co-founders, Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin in inner-city Houston, Texas. KIPP Schools were non-profit charter schools with a large population of minority and other students from poverty-stricken backgrounds. More than 85% of KIPP students qualified for the federal free and reduced-price meal program, and 95% were African American, Hispanic, or Latino. Students entered KIPP Schools one or two grades below in both reading and mathematics.

Nevertheless, these same minority students made tremendous improvements in academics, discipline, and motivation with the KIPP Program. They became the American success stories that public schools were striving to deliver. Students who entered KIPP Schools below grade level dramatically increased from below basic to proficient or advanced students (McDonald, Ross, Abney, & Zoblotsky, 2008). KIPP students earned \$21 million dollars in scholarships to attend some of the top high schools in the nation. At the time of the study, there were 141 KIPP Schools throughout the nation and in Washington, DC (KIPP, 2012).

KIPP’s Mission

The mission of KIPP Schools was to provide a high-quality education for underserved minority students who graduate with the skills, knowledge, and character to be successful in the 21st century global market (KIPP, 2012). KIPP Schools operated on central beliefs known as the Five Pillars:

1. Students had a longer school day, beginning at 7:30 A.M. and ending at 5:30 P.M. Students attended Saturdays bi-weekly from 8:00 A.M. until noon. They also attended Summer School.
2. Students completed two to three hours of homework daily.
3. Teachers, parents, and students signed a Commitment to Excellence form, holding all three parties accountable for students’ attendance, homework, and behavior at KIPP Schools.
4. Students participated in extracurricular activities, such as chess, band, orchestra, athletics, and martial arts in the afternoons.
5. Students attended field trips to college campuses and important national historical sites (KIPP, 2012).

Students were expected to achieve, behave, and excel at KIPP Schools. Incentives were in place for student achievement. For example, they were awarded points toward a weekly paycheck that they could spend in the school’s bookstore for various items, such as t-shirts, backpacks, and pencils. Other incentives include skating, bowling, and end-of-year field trips.

The rules for student behavior were strict. Consequences for students who misbehaved or did not complete their assignments were given. For example, students who talked without

permission or failed to complete an assignment lost points toward their weekly paycheck. Some students stayed after school or forfeited field trips for their misbehavior.

KIPP Critics

Creaming Argument

Critics of KIPP Delta Public Schools accused the school officials of creaming or skimming the best and brightest students from the Helena-West-Helena Public Schools. However, the researchers at the University of Arkansas Educational Policy found that KIPP students were “slightly more successful than their prior peers, but were no means the best and brightest upon entering KIPP” (Office of Educational Policy, 2011, p. 3). KIPP students who attended were more likely to be female, African American, and from low-income and high poverty backgrounds. Ninety percent of the KIPP student body in 2009-2010 were eligible for free or reduced lunch, as compared to 60% of students across Arkansas.

More importantly, these students entered KIPP Delta Public Schools at academic levels lower than the average student performance in mathematics across the state. For instance, students entering KIPP scored in the bottom 30% of the state’s distribution in mathematics prior to KIPP’s entrance. However, they scored slightly higher than their classmates who remained at the Helena-West Helena Public Schools. For example, 46% of KIPP students were proficient or advanced in mathematics compared to 35% of their peers who remained at the traditional public schools. “However, once at KIPP, these students outperformed other students with a similar record of academic performance within the state” (Office for Education Policy, 2011, p. 7).

Creaming through Attrition Argument

Similarly, KIPP Delta Public Schools had been accused of creaming through their attrition and returning those students who were not likely to be the best and brightest, or those students who were discipline problems back to their former schools. The University of Arkansas found that on average 15% of KIPP students left each year, with 17% leaving after fifth grade. They found that KIPP students who left were more likely to be a male, black, white or Hispanic, and from higher poverty backgrounds than their peers who remained at KIPP. They also found that the students who chose to leave KIPP were not performing as well as the KIPP students who remained. The students, however, had improved tremendously upon entering and studying at KIPP Delta Public Schools and as a result, were doing as well as the average student in mathematics upon leaving the KIPP Schools. For example, 38% of the students who left KIPP were in the 50th percentile of state’s distribution on the math assessments. Similarly, 45% of those students who left KIPP scored in the upper half on the literacy assessments (Office for Education Policy, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

In designing a qualitative research study, not only should researchers develop the research question to be studied, but also adopt a framework from which they will conduct the study. In qualitative research, theories are used as a broad explanation for people’s behavior and attitudes.

The theory becomes a lens or a perspective from which researchers conduct the study (Creswell, 2007).

According to Creswell, theoretical lenses shaped the research questions to be asked, indicated how the researchers should position themselves in the study, informed how data should be collected and analyzed, and concluded with how the final paper should be written. Sometimes a call for action or change was needed. (Creswell, 2007). Creswell recommended identifying a theory that was applicable to the study, and its relevance.

The theory used for this study was based upon research from Gene Bottoms' *High Schools That Work* Initiative that stated rigor, relevance, relationships, and high expectations increased student achievement (Bottoms, 2005). The study explored whether or not the factors that influenced the improvement of previously at-risk students were the high expectations of literacy teachers, rigor of the KIPP Program, relevance of the lessons, positive teacher-student relationships developed, and accountability of all stakeholders.

Methodology

In terms of qualitative research, the study was an illustrative, case study describing in-depth details of the KIPP Delta Public Schools, the learning environment, and the people within the school. A case study was appropriate because KIPP Schools in the Delta Region were anomalies that allowed the researchers to gain previously inaccessible knowledge about the schools and confirm or disconfirm the theory that high expectations, rigor, relevance, and relationships increased student achievement.

To conduct this illustrative, case study and obtain a complete and accurate picture of the KIPP Delta Public Schools, multiple quantitative methods were used, including semi-structured interviews of administrators and literacy teachers, classroom observations, and document analysis. Behaviors that motivated and encouraged students to excel in literacy were documented and included making lessons rigorous and relevant to students, conferencing with students on their writing, spelling, vocabulary, and oratory skills, and modeling the skills they needed to be proficient or advanced in literacy and writing (Little Rock School District Literacy Protocol, 2009).

Research Site

The researchers chose the KIPP Schools because they had been recognized for their academic success with students in the Delta Region (Office for Education Policy, 2011). KIPP Delta Public Schools opened in 2002 in Helena, Arkansas. The school opened with 75 fifth-grade students who were recruited from local housing projects. The following year the school added sixth-grade students. In 2004-2005, they added an eighth grade class. At the time of the study, there were approximately 700 students in elementary, middle, and high schools. KIPP planned to open 13 additional schools throughout communities similar to the Delta Region by 2019. Ninety-seven percent of KIPP students were African American, and 87% of them qualified for free or reduced price meals. KIPP Schools were located in Phillips County, the second poorest county in Arkansas. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, less than 63% of adults in Phillips County had high school diplomas and 12.4% had college degrees.

Nevertheless, in 2008, the KIPP School was named as a Blue Ribbon School by the United States Department of Education because of the academic success it had demonstrated on

the state’s benchmarks and end-of-course examinations. KIPP Delta Collegiate High was also ranked second in Arkansas by the Washington Post High School Challenge Index for preparing students for college and university readiness (Maranto & Shuls, 2011; see Table 1 and 2).

Table 1
*KIPP Proficiency or Advanced Percentages
 Grades 5-8 Literacy Benchmarks and 11th Grade End of Course Examination*

Grade	5	6	7	8	11
Year 2006-2007	71	56	57	78	
Year 2007-2008	68	53	60	82	
Year 2008-2009	57	67	73	82	91
Year 2009-2010	69	62	74	88	80
Year 2010-2011	67	82	65	80	64
Year 2011-2012	82	66	78	81	93

Source: NORMES (2012).

Table 2
*Helena-West Helena School District Proficiency or Advanced Percentages
 Grades 5-8 Literacy Benchmarks and 11th Grade End of Course Examination*

Grade	5	6	7	8	11
Year 2006-2007	43	49	29	35	17
Year 2007-2008	48	39	30	39	21
Year 2008-2009	54	51	38	44	27
Year 2009-2010	65	57	56	52	37
Year 2010-2011	62	52	50	60	36

Year					
2011-2012	66	45	67	64	34

Source: NORMES (2012)

Research Participants

The selection of research participants included the Executive Director, principals of the school, and literacy teachers. In semi-structured interviews, administrators and literacy teachers shared the instructional strategies they utilized at the KIPP Schools and believed were influencing increased student achievement in literacy, according to their professional experiences and perceptions.

Data Collection

The results of interviews and classroom observations were transcribed and analyzed to identify factors that were influencing academic achievement in literacy. This data was meaningful in confirming or disconfirming the theory of high expectations, rigor, relevance, and relationship to encourage student achievement posited by Gene Bottoms' *High Schools That Work* Initiative as it related to this study (Bottoms, 2005).

Data Sources

Observations. More importantly, researchers observed the KIPP Delta Public Schools during the summer months. Field notes of the classroom observation and professional development were recorded using the observation protocol adapted from Creswell (2008). The researchers recorded their observations in the literacy classes and professional development sessions in order to understand the influences that were possibly contributing to the increase of literacy skills (Yin, 1989). Items researchers documented included interaction, language, routines, and nonverbal communication.

Documents. Documents were the third data source used to triangulate findings of the study. Documents, such as lesson plans, professional development handouts, and master schedules were collected during the three week observation.

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Executive Director, principals, and ELA teachers. According to Gall, Borg, & Gall, (2003), semi-structured, open-ended interviews were the preferred form and were utilized in qualitative research, because they allowed participants to fully express themselves in response to the questions being asked. The semi-structured, open-ended interview had the same questions for each participant (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2003). The open-ended questions allowed participants to share as much detailed information on factors they believed were influencing enhanced student achievement in literacy, according to their professional experiences and perceptions.

Interview Protocol: Interview Guide for Administrators and Teachers

1. Background Information

2. Tell me about KIPP Delta Public Schools.
3. How do KIPP Delta Public Schools differ from the public school you previously taught or attended as a student?
4. Describe the leadership's role in increasing student achievement at KIPP Delta Public Schools.
5. How do teachers motivate students to achieve and excel in their academic studies at KIPP Delta Public Schools?
6. As an instructor at KIPP Delta Public Schools, please explain the best teaching practices utilized at this school.
7. What interventions do KIPP Delta Public Schools have in place to prevent KIPP students from failing or falling through the cracks?
8. What is the role of parental involvement at KIPP Delta Public Schools?
9. Compare and contrast the parental involvement at KIPP Delta Public Schools versus public schools.
10. How do KIPP Delta Public Schools prepare students to be successful in high school, college, and the workplace?
11. What literacy strategies do the ELA teachers utilize with KIPP students to increase their literacy skills in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing?
12. How is it possible for KIPP students to have very different academic outcomes on the same assessments, that they scored basic or below basic previously a year or two ago at a traditional public school?
13. How has the KIPP Program affected teachers' practice, role, and professional development?

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Researchers used steps to ensure validity and reliability. Those steps included methodological triangulation, data source triangulation, member check, and audit trail. Triangulation was defined by researchers as the confirmation of research findings through several sources. Multiple data sources of the observation and interview transcriptions were used for triangulation. Silverman (1993) defined triangulation as comparing different kinds of data, such as quantitative and qualitative data, and different methods, such as observations and interviews, to determine whether or not they corroborate one another.

Methodological triangulation was the most common form utilized by qualitative researchers (Stake, 1995). According to Stake, for research findings to be valid, similar themes must emerge through multiple sources. The multiple sources used in this qualitative research were interviews, observations, and document analysis. These sources were used to strengthen the researchers' argument for validity.

Second, data source triangulation was utilized during the classroom and professional development analysis and interpretation. Observations of literacy classes and professional development were conducted over three weeks. Data from interviews and observations were compared to determine if there were similar findings or discrepancies within the data.

Third, member checks were conducted in this research. Participants were given the opportunity to review the analyses and interpretation to confirm the findings of the research.

Fourth, an audit trail was conducted, tracing any inferences or conclusions to the semi-structured interviews, taped classroom observations, or documents.

Additionally, the research was written in thick, rich detail to describe the KIPP Delta Public Schools, classroom observations, professional development, and the interviews. Attempts were made to be as objective as possible.

Lastly, two college professors familiar with schools that had success with minorities and students from high poverty backgrounds, read the research findings to search for inaccuracies (Yin, 1989). The peer debriefings allowed the researchers to clarify discrepancies within the data.

Findings

Main Research Question: What factors influenced the increased academic success of at-risk students in the KIPP School in Literacy in the Delta Region, according to administrators' and teachers' perceptions?

The researchers wanted to know what factors KIPP administrators and ELA teachers perceived to be positively making a difference in the literacy success of students from the Delta Region. In other words, what were the ELA teachers doing in the classrooms that appeared to be enhancing student literacy at the KIPP Schools in this area of the state that is known for its high illiteracy rate? KIPP Delta Public Schools had received a lot of public attention for its high academic achievement scores and had gained the interest of other educators throughout Arkansas. The data collected in this research study suggested that the administrators and ELA teachers believed the following factors positively impacted student achievement in literacy: (a) KIPP's commitment to academic excellence, (b) KIPP's culture of high expectations, (c) a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum and practices, and (d) accountability of all stakeholders. For example, one participant discussed the significance of the commitment by stating:

Parents sign a Commitment to Excellence form. It's basically like a contract between the school, the student, and the parents. I think the one thing we do have that is different from traditional public school is that, I think, we have a unique opportunity of getting everybody on the same page at one time (ADM3).

Another participant discussed the significance of KIPP's culture of high expectations by stating:

We put culture above everything else. It is expectations. We expect our students to achieve. That's our attitude all the time. The higher you put your expectations, the further students will climb. They may not always reach the bar, but it's a heck of a lot better to aim high and miss than to shoot low and hit. Expectations, that's the thing you immediately pick up on when you walk into our school (ADM1).

Still, a participant discussed the positive, teacher-student relationships developed at KIPP Delta Public Schools by stating:

The teachers form relationships here with their students. These relationships not only build trust amongst teachers and students, but they also help achieve student learning (ELA2).

Yet another participant discussed the significance of a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum by stating:

We expect that everyone will go on to a four-year college or university. One hundred percent of our kids will be college-ready. One hundred percent will attend a rigorous college, rigorous in terms of their own academic achievement. One hundred percent of students, that's the goal. One hundred percent will be accepted into a type of rigorous college or university... Not everyone is going to go to an Ivy League school, but we're going to find a school that's appropriate given their area of interest and their academic abilities that they have when they graduate (ELA1).

Last, another participant discussed the role of accountability at KIPP Schools

“KIPP differs from the public schools in terms of accountability” (ELA1). It was a general consensus among all of the staff participants interviewed that everyone was held accountable at KIPP including the students, teachers, and parents.

In summary, administrators and ELA teachers truly believed that the commitment of the staff, the culture of high expectations, the positive teacher-student relationships, a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum, relevance of the lessons, and accountability among all stakeholders significantly impacted student achievement in literacy at the KIPP Schools. Figure 1 illustrates those factors (See Figure 1).

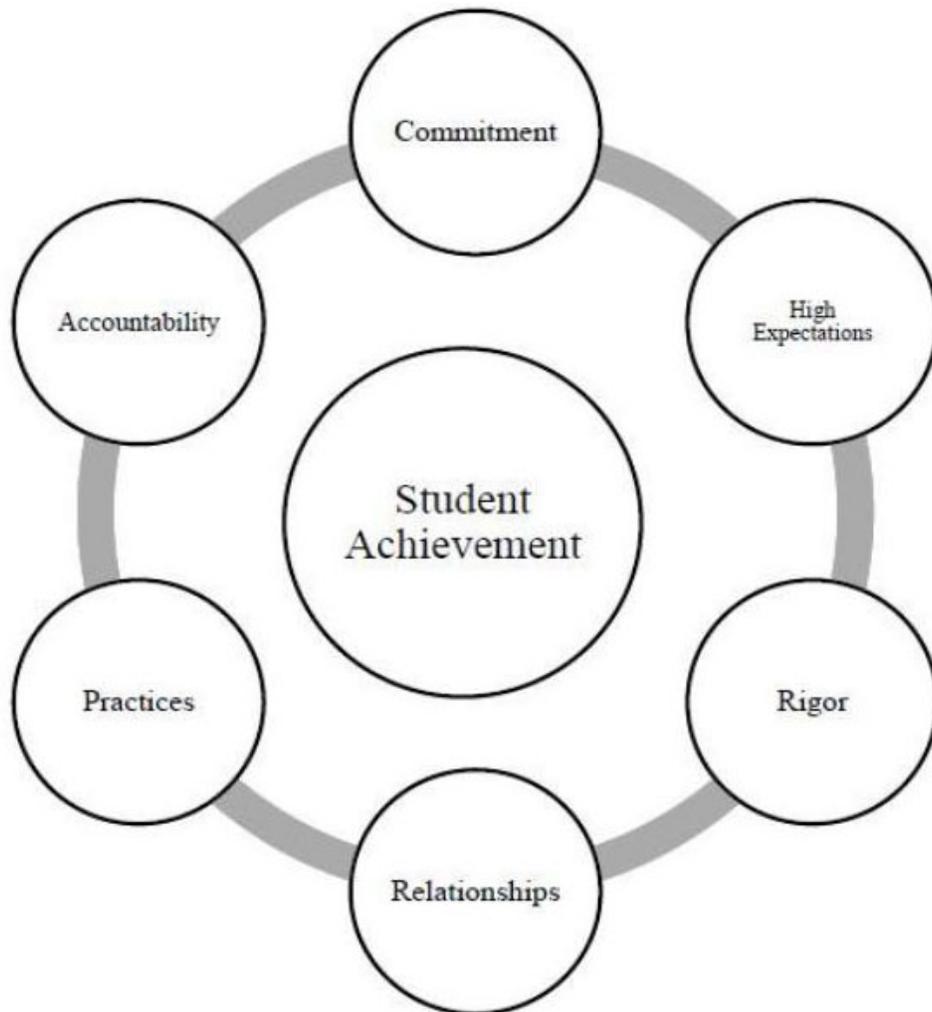


Figure 1. Factors enhancing student achievement according to administrators' and English language arts teachers' perceptions.

Theory Link

The theoretical framework driving this research study was *Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships plus High Expectations Theory* by Bottoms (2005). Bottoms and the Southern Regional Educational Board believed the combination of rigor, relevance, relationships, and high expectations of students increased and sustained student achievement. According to Bottoms (2005) over 1,000 schools were using the theory of rigor, relevance, relationships, and high expectations to raise student achievement.

High Schools That Work Schools used the following factors to increase student achievement: (a) a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, (b) high expectations, (c) lessons relevance (d) best teaching practices, (e) interventions (f) instructional leadership, and (g) professional development to sustain increased student achievement (Bottoms, 2005).

Furthermore, the SREB conducted a study analyzing 43 *HSTW* Schools in Arkansas to determine the program's effectiveness in 2008. Items that were analyzed included state report

cards, achievement data, stakeholders' surveys, and graduation rates. The 43 schools were categorized as high implementation, moderate implementation or low implementation schools. The categorizations were based upon how familiar the students were with the eleven indicators of the HSTW's design.

The most significant gain in the *HSTW* schools was the increase in the graduation rate. All HSTW schools' median graduation rate (82%) was higher than the state's mean graduation rate of 68% (Bottoms & Han, 2010). Bottom's theory was applicable in this research study. The adult participants identified high expectations, rigor, relevance, relationships, and accountability as factors increasing and sustaining student achievement in literacy at the KIPP Delta Public Schools.

Recommendations to KIPP Schools

Attrition Rate

One potential problem that may negatively impact the KIPP Delta Public Schools' ability to sustain its positive academic momentum long-term is its attrition rate of 22% since 2002 and currently 15% for the 2011-2012 school year. The attrition rate is measured yearly by using the enrollment on October 1 of each school year to determine the number of students who did not return. KIPP's goal was to retain a minimum of 85% of the students each school year. The beginning of 2011 school year had 84.6% of its students return. KIPP's highest mobility rate was in 2003 with a 28% attrition rate and in 2006 with a 27% attrition rate. Figure 2 shows the percentage of students leaving KIPP Delta Public Schools from inception to August 2011 school year (See Figure 2).

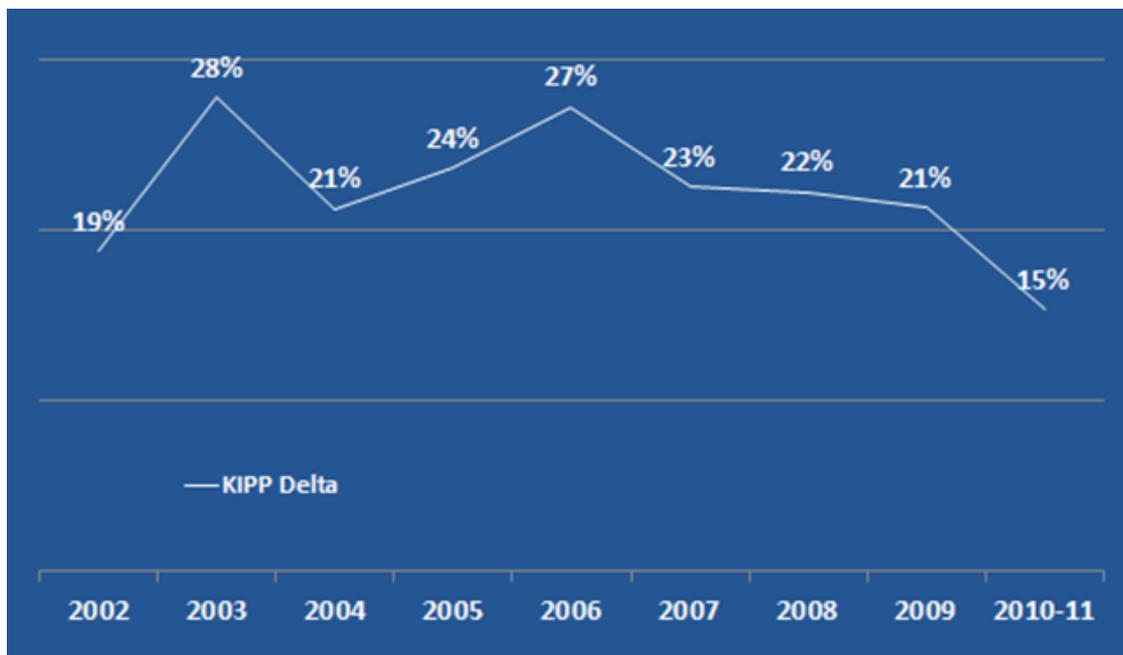


Figure 2. KIPP attrition rate from 2002- 2011 (KIPP Schools, 2012).

The Executive Director of KIPP Delta Public Schools stated,

We see the highest mobility at our entry grades of 5th, 9th and Kindergarten. We also see higher attrition at newer schools. From this data, it is clear that we need to do a better job orienting new families. Once they make it through the first year, they are much more likely to stay; therefore, we are focusing some of energies there. The other challenge is giving a school time to build its reputation. Last year, Blytheville had the highest attrition which was to be expected.

The other piece of information is that you could subtract 5-10% each year for students who moved. We consider this non-regrettable attrition as it was beyond our control. If we exclude movers, last year 90% of our KIPPsters decided to return and we were pleased with that progress (KIPP Interview, 2012).

Contribution to Field of Education

Public school administrators may want to replicate the components of the KIPP model that are cost-effective and feasible such as having high expectations, implementing a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum, developing positive teacher-student relationships, teaching relevant and practical lessons, and holding all stakeholders accountable. According to KIPP's stakeholders, these factors, when implemented collectively, significantly impacted student achievement.

Recommendation for Future Research

The researchers recommended KIPP Delta Public Schools to explore the factors contributing to the high student attrition rate among the students and develop a plan of action to prevent students leaving KIPP Delta Public Schools. Factors may include the reasons or causes the students or parents identified in their exit conference. If KIPP Schools do not have an exit conference to gather this information, they may implement one to gather additional information from the students and parents. KIPP administrators may ask for suggestions on what they may do to improve or rectify the problem, if it is something that the school feels is feasible. KIPP administrators may also want to revisit the interventions they have in place for struggling students who left. Also, in the exit conference, the administrative staff may want to ask the students or parents what interventions they could implement or improve on in order to help the students become more successful academically in literacy at KIPP. This information should be gathered and presented to the staff. The researchers recommended KIPP administrators to develop a plan of action for each school to explore the causes, effects, and implication of the high attrition rate.

Future research studies may include examining the causes and effects of student attrition upon student achievement of KIPP students. What effect, if any, is student attrition affecting student achievement from one year to another? How consistent is student achievement if high mobility and attrition are concerns of the schools? Lastly, what long term residual effects do KIPP Delta Public Schools have upon students who left and returned to the traditional public schools?

Conclusion

It was difficult to claim one factor such as high expectations alone may be influencing the increased student achievement of KIPP students. The researchers found that not only were high expectations influencing student achievement at KIPP Delta Public Schools, but also additional factors such as a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum, relevant lessons, positive teacher-student relationships, and accountability were present and influencing the overall enhanced student achievement among the students at the KIPP Delta Public Schools in Helena, Arkansas. Similarly, Woodworth et al., (2008) posited that the five KIPP Pillars or guiding principles of high expectations, choice and commitment, more time, power to lead, and focus on results contributed to the increased student achievement and positive student behavior at KIPP Schools.

Regardless, more longitudinal research is needed to conclude that the KIPP Delta Public Schools will maintain their effectiveness in increasing student achievement in the years to come. Potential problems such as high student attrition, if not addressed, may stifle the long-term results of the KIPP Delta Public Schools.

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