

ABSTRACT

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF U.S. SCHOOL PRINCIPAL PREPARATION IN LEADING MANDARIN CHINESE IMMERSION PROGRAMS

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This qualitative phenomenological research inquiry aims to explore U.S. principals' challenges, successes, and best practices in leading Mandarin Chinese immersion program improvements in schools with high needs in a rural area in a Midwestern state of the United States. Specifically, this study addresses cultural efficiency, increasing student enrollment through principalship preparation, and attracting the interest of parents and students.

The purposive and snowball sampling associated with semi-structured and open-ended interview protocols were used to interview 12 participants (n=12), including 10 females (n=10) and 1 male (n=1). The participants consisted of elementary principals (n=2), secondary principals (n=2), an administrative assistant to the principal (n=1), a paraprofessional (n=1), English language teachers for the Chinese immersion program (n=3), and native Mandarin Chinese immersion homeroom teachers (n=3).

The findings of the study revealed that U.S. principals have three major successes: (1) integrated capacity, (2) more choices with bilingual talents, and (3) a unique multicultural learning community. Additionally, the study identified three major challenges U.S. principals face: (1) resource deficiency, (2) behavioral issues, and (3) cross-cultural communication barriers. The study also highlighted three major areas that U.S. principals need to strengthen: (1) cross-cultural competence, (2) professional knowledge for building a multicultural community, and (3) developing culturally responsive pedagogy and leadership strategies. Furthermore, the study found three best practices: (1) festival celebration and cultural activities, (2) teamwork, and (3) community support. The study identified three strategies to promote transformational leadership to create communities of practice, including (1) community engagement, (2) shared vision, knowledge, and resources, and (3) network and partnership.

A qualitative study will explore the crucial role of principals in creating a leadership framework that enhances engagement among students, teachers, parents, and superintendents to foster partnerships for the sustainability of Chinese immersion programs. A longitudinal study analyzes the past decade (2014-2024) of student learning data in Mandarin Chinese immersion programs, including math, science, literacy, and Chinese, to identify factors correlating with students' academic performance and well-being. Additionally, a systematic qualitative literature review will examine studies on the performance of immersion program students and school effectiveness in the United States from 1994 to 2024 and beyond.