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Leadership Ecosystems: Navigating the Synergies of Relationship-Building, Trust, and Community to Foster Student Success in Experienced US Principals' Practice

By

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Abstract

An effective instructional and shared leader fosters student success and school sustainability through fostering relationship-building, trust-based learning, and community engagement. This descriptive qualitative study investigates how US principals explore relationship-building, trust, and community for student learning outcomes and school effectiveness. A total of 12 principals participated in this study, including male (n=6) and female (n=6), through purposive and snowball sampling in the United States. Findings show principals face three challenges: (1) establishing effective communication channels, (2) managing diverse stakeholder expectations, and (3) developing leadership capacities for trust and stakeholder relationships. Findings also shows that principals have three benefits, including (1) a solid relationship between school stakeholders, (2) community engagement, and (3) sustainable success. Three strategic approaches emerged, including (1) fostering personal connections, (2) cultivating inclusive communities, and (3) sharing leadership for success. Based on the findings, a convergent mixed-methods study will survey 3,000 principals and conduct interviews with 600 principals across 50 states in the United States.

Keywords: *Principals, Trust, Sense of Community, Qualitative Research, Academic Achievement, Sustainable Development*

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INTRODUCTION

The growing emphasis on school effectiveness and student success has increased the intensity and complexity of school principals' work and shifted their leadership capacity in diverse school contexts (Fullan, 2015; Hallinger, 2018; Zhang, 2024). Principals are not expected to be effective instructional leaders, human resource managers, financial planners, strategic advisors, counselors, staff, parent mediators, mentors, or coaches, and each of these roles must be sensitive to the context of the school (Fullan, 2023; Zhang, 2023).

Previous studies have shown that principals need to have the capacity to build relationships with teachers, parents, students, staff, superintendents, and all other school stakeholders for school effectiveness. Bacon (2006) pointed out that a principal, as a manager, needs to build a relationship with teachers and parents to encourage students to work hard and intelligently for learning

outcomes. Horsager (2012) emphasized that building a relationship with school stakeholders could help students achieve higher learning performance and school effectiveness. Schein and Schein (2018) suggested that practicing a humble leadership style could help principals make a positive connection with teachers, parents, and staff for students' learning outcomes and create a supportive school climate. Wong and Leung (2001) pointed out that principals must realize how school culture and demographic characteristics, such as social status, impact school performance, and leadership style, such as Guanxi, in Chinese school contexts. Wang et al. (2023) indicated that creating a solid relationship among school stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and partners could foster stakeholders to contribute their talents for students' learning outcomes. In their logistic regression study, Young et al. (2024) suggested that principals need to promote relationship-building among school stakeholders for school effectiveness and sustainability.



In addition, principals could foster teachers for students' success by building a trust-based learning culture and making a solid teacher commitment to their contribution and service in their daily teaching performance. For example, Bryk and Schneider (2002) claimed that forming a trust-based school climate is a core resource for school effectiveness, teacher commitment, and student learning outcomes. Kochanek (2005) confirmed that building a trust-based school culture improves performance. Ehren and Baxter (2021) stated that principals effectively drive school reform if they can create a trust-based school culture among school stakeholders. Forsyth et al. (2011) concluded that principals could not progress in school effectiveness, reform, teacher commitment, and student success without a trust-based culture among school stakeholders. In their single-site case study, Williams and Richardson (2023) found that principals forming a trust-based school climate could make teacher effectiveness and long-term commitment with a high contribution to student learning outcomes. Keravnos and Symeou (2024), in their mixed-methods study with 1,320 samplings and interviews with 40 teachers and 5 principals, found that school principals create a trusting learning and teaching environment that could improve teacher retention and student achievement. Their viewings pointed out that principals must build a trust-based school culture for effectiveness and student success.

Furthermore, principals could foster teachers' commitment to student learning outcomes through community engagement for student success and school-sustainable effectiveness. For example, Putnam and Feldstein (2003) suggested that principals need to work with teachers, parents, students, staff, and the superintendent for school sustainable development and student learning outcomes. Hands (2023) claimed that principals foster a sense of community to have a higher level of teacher collaboration and student engagement for student achievement. In their hierarchical linear model study, Saleem et al. (2020) suggested that principals use servant leadership to work with all school stakeholders to build a sense of service community for student learning outcomes. Chalwell et al. (2024), in their multi-site qualitative case study, found that principals play a central role in community building for teacher commitment and student learning outcomes influence students in classrooms directly and impact curriculum, pedagogy, and formation among teachers, students, and staff in the school community. Torres (2024) claimed that effective school principals must build a supportive community for teacher commitment and student success in a diverse school community for school effectiveness.

Previous studies have investigated the importance of relationship-building, trust, and community for principal job effectiveness, teacher commitment, and student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2017; Zhang, 2024). However, the intersections between relationship-building, trust, and community have received limited attention. The results of this finding are to address this gap by exploring the intersections of relationship-building, trust, and community for student success and school sustainability (Zhang, 2024). The results of this study also offer the effective leadership practices insights and provide a strong principal preparation

programs, professional development initiatives, and educational policy for school sustainability (Zhang, 2024). Therefore, the purpose of this descriptive qualitative is to investigate the role of principals of promoting the intersection of relationship-building, trust, and community for students' success and school sustainability. Specifically, three research questions guide this study:

1. What challenges have US school principals faced when they explore the intersection of building-relationship, trust, and community for student success and school sustainability?
2. What benefits have US school principals gotten when they promote the intersections of relationship-building, trust, and community for student success and school sustainability?
3. What strategies do US school principals use when they promote the intersection of relationship-building, trust, and community for student success and school sustainability?

Literature Review

The literature that informs this paper has three distinct themes. The themes are literature on the intersections between relationship-building and trust, between trust and community, and between relationship-building and community. The three themes explore US principals' challenges, benefits, and strategies for student success and school sustainability.

Intersections between Relationship-Building and Trust

A great relationship between principals and teachers could build a trust-based learning community for student success and school sustainability and vice versa. Principals need to develop solid relationships among school stakeholders such as teachers, parents, students, superintendents, and staff to build a supportive, trust-based culture for school sustainability (Zhang, 2023). A great relationship is a cornerstone for principals to build a trust-based learning environment in multicultural school contexts. Previous studies found that good relationship-building could help principals build trust-based learning communities for student success and school sustainability (Zhang, 2024). For example, Young et al. (2024), in their logistic regression study from 35 US states, found that a health relationship could help principals raise student academic outcomes and school stakeholders' connectedness in diverse school contexts and have more opportunities for principals to foster school community members engagement for student success. Williams and Richardson (2023) highlighted that principals who build trust with teachers can leverage to improve their instruction capacity for student success. Welsh (2024) claimed that a great relationship between principals and teachers could foster them to serve students for their learning outcomes and inspire them to concentrate on their learning target for highly academic learning outcomes. Zhang (2024) suggested that a good relationship building between principals and teachers and between principals and parents could foster principals in creating a trust-based learning community for student success and school sustainability.

The intersections between relationship-building and trust are correlated for principals in fostering teachers' engagement with students' success and school sustainability. Howard et al. (2020) claimed that a positive relationship between principals and teachers does not affect student learning outcomes, and principals need help making schools sustainable development. Heim and Heim (2023) supported Howard et al.'s (2020) points that a good relationship between school stakeholders could allow principals to create a supportive learning climate for students' integrity growth. Park (2024), in a survey study of 400 undergraduate students, found that principals work with teachers to create a supportive, trust-based relationship for students to have better learning outcomes because of good behavior.

Shaked (2024) stated that principals have a great relationship with teachers, parents, and students, which could help them build trust for their responsibility and contribution to service to student achievement. For example, Altun and Bora (2024), in their essential qualitative study from the social-ecological perspective with 876 students, found that a solid relationship between students, families, teachers, administrators, and staff could increase students' learning outcomes. Those previous studies claimed that principals have a solid relationship with school stakeholders such as teachers and parents, which helps them to build a positive school culture and foster teachers to serve students for their learning outcomes. Principals could build a trust-based culture within a good relationship, fostering a sense of community for student outcomes and integrated life conditions. Therefore, the previous studies highlighted the importance of creating a relationship and trust between teachers, parents, students, and staff for school effectiveness and sustainability for students' high academic outcomes.

Intersections between Trust and Community

A trust-based school culture between teachers, parents, students, and staff in a multicultural school context could foster principals to build a sense of community that drives students' engagement, motivation, and achievement. Previous studies indicated that experienced US principals build trust with teachers, parents, and students to create a sense of belonging for student learning outcomes (Zhang, 2023). For example, Heckscher (2015) claimed that principals build trust by enriching the community for student success. Putnam and Feldstein (2003) indicated that principals must restore the school community by promoting trust among school stakeholders. Hands (2023) suggested that principals enhance community engagement for student success, teacher commitment, and school sustainable development. Cleveland et al. (2023) stated that principals need to build a trust-based culture in building a supportive school community serving students for their learning success. Those previous studies claimed that principals realize a trust-based culture could build a supportive learning community for students' learning outcomes and effectiveness (Zhang, 2023).

The intersections between trust and community can foster principals to drive school effectiveness, sustainability, and student success. A supportive learning community could help principals

build a trust-based culture for school effectiveness (Zhang, 2023). For example, Gundlach (2024) stated that principals must build a respectful, positive, and supportive community among all school stakeholders for school sustainability and student achievement. Antonetti and Sauers (2024) indicated that principals develop and maintain trust among school stakeholders for student success and sustainability. Once principals build trust between principals and teachers for community engagement and school effectiveness, they also stated that building trust among school stakeholders is effective for experienced US principals regarding student success and school sustainability. In their single-site case study, Williams and Richardson (2023) indicated that building a trust-based culture between school stakeholders is adequate and appropriate for principals to work with teachers and students for student success. Zhang (2023) stated that principals build a trust-based learning culture between school members' connections, which could foster a positive, supportive learning community for student success. Also, Zhang (2024) claimed that trust-based learning and community engagement are linked to student success and school sustainability. Therefore, principals need to build a trust-based learning culture and encourage community engagement for student academic achievement and integrity growth.

Intersections between Relationship-Building and Community

Principals build a solid relationship between teachers, parents, staff, and students for community engagement for student success and school sustainability. With a solid relationship between teachers and students, principals could form an inclusive community for student success. Previous studies pointed out that a great relationship can help principals foster a sense of community for student success and school sustainability (Zhang & Koshmanova, 2022). For example, Torres (2024) stated that a good relationship allows principals to form a sense of community for student success and school effectiveness. Schein and Schein (2018) suggested that principals build relationships among students, parents, staff, principals, and all other school stakeholders to form a positive learning community for student success. Also, Wong and Leung (2001) claimed that a good relationship is an adequate chance to foster a community for student success and school sustainability. Dou et al. (2017) pointed out that a great relationship between teachers, parents, and all other school stakeholders could effectively build a positive learning community for student outcomes. Those previous studies indicated that building relationships among students, parents, staff, teachers, and superintendents could effectively build a learning community for student success and school sustainability (Zhang & Koshmanova, 2022). Therefore, relationship-building and community are interconnected, with a positive relationship among school stakeholders for student success and sustainability. This, in turn, builds a positive learning community to drive student engagement, teachers' commitment, and parent involvement for student success and school sustainability (Xie & Zhang, 2022).

The previous studies pointed out that intersections between relationship-building, trust, and community effectively guide principals to foster teachers' commitment and service for student



learning outcomes and contribute their talents and capacities for sustainable school development (Zhang & Koshmanova, 2021). Zhang (2024) suggested that principals suggested that principals need to promote the intersections of relationship-building, trust-based learning, and community member engagement for student success and school sustainability. The intersections between trust and community emphasize the need for principals to build an inclusive community, driving student engagement, parent involvement, and teacher commitment. Also, relationship-building can help principals create a learning community for school sustainable development and student success. Finally, the previous studies suggested that principals need to explore the intersections of relationship-building, trust-based learning, and community engagement for student achievement and school effectiveness in the multicultural school setting.

Methodology

Overview Research Design

A descriptive qualitative research study was employed in this study to investigate the intersections between relationship-building, trust, and community for student success and school sustainability in multicultural school settings in the United States. The descriptive qualitative research design is appropriate in this study because it seeks to gain a deeper understanding of how the experienced US principals' experiences, practices, and perceptions guide their daily school operation for student progressive learning outcomes and school development (Doyle et al., 2020; Hall & Liebenberg, 2024; Zhang & Koshmanova, 2021). This descriptive qualitative study explores how experienced US principals describe and interpret their experiences to foster students' success and school sustainability (Adu, 2019; Zhang & Koshmanova, 2021). Specifically, the thematic, descriptive, and interpretative analysis approaches were used to code, categorize, and emerge the major themes and categories to answer each research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Saldana, 2016; Smith et al., 2009; Zhang & Koshmanova, 2021). So, the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1 guides this study.

Conceptual Framework in this Study

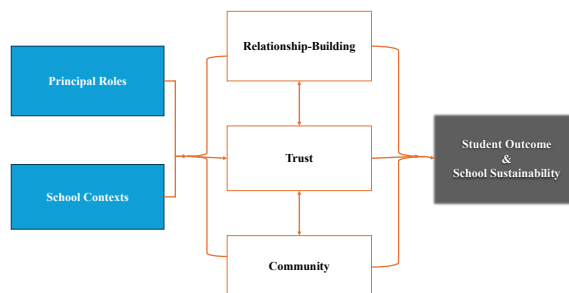
Figure 1 shows that experienced US principals play a vital role in integrating relationship-building, trust, and community in the contexts of student success and school sustainability. As for experienced US principals in multicultural school contexts, principals explore relationship-building to encourage teacher's commitment to student outcomes and school sustainability (Zhang & Koshmanova, 2021). Howard et al. (2020) emphasized that building a strong relationship among all school stakeholders could help principals foster teacher commitment to student success. Heim and Heim (2023) claimed that a good relationship between teachers and principals and all other stakeholders could foster principals to effectively work with all teachers, staff, students, and parents for school effectiveness and stakeholders' engagement and commitment.

Torres (2024) indicated that principals could work together and create conditions of trust such that goals become more aligned

through relationship building for students' learning outcomes and school supportive environment.

In addition, principals explore trust-based school culture among all school stakeholders to not only minimize conflicts but also foster a collaborative spirit, enabling all teachers, parents, students, superintendent, and partners to work towards school community goals with a shared sense of vision, mission, and purpose (Torres, 2024; Zhang, 2021). The trust-based culture could help principals bind all community members together for student success and school effectiveness for a long-term goal. For example, Singh and Khatri (2024) pointed out that principals could reduce the school community issues through building a trust-based culture for students learning outcomes. Zhang (2024) claimed that principals could create an inclusive community between school members for student success and school sustainability.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework in this Study



Finally, principals build a trust-based learning environment via relationship-building among school stakeholders that could help principals build a supportive learning community to improve student outcomes and the school's long-term goals (Rothaermel, 2024; Zhang & Koshmanova, 2020). Therefore, the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1 provides a strategic guideline for principals to build a relationship between school members, trust-based learning, and community member engagement for student success and school sustainability.

Participation

A total of 12 experienced US principals, shown in Table 1, participated in this study (6 males and 6 females through purposively, snowball, and professional network field sampling in the diverse school context. The principals' ages range from 29 to 46, with 3 to 20 years of experience, master's, Master of Science, and Educational Specialist and principals' licensees. The participants were from a variety of high school types, including public (n=7), Catholic (n=1), and Christian (n=4). The criteria for selecting participants include (1) a minimum of 5 years' teaching experience and 3 years' principal experience; (2) college credentials, degrees, and certificates; and (3) leadership management knowledge.

Table 1
Demographic Participants of School Principals in this Study

Pseudonym Participants	Age	Gender	Level of Education	Years of Principal Experiences	Position
1. Joshua	37	M	MS	12	Public School Principal
2. Sophie	36	F	MA	11	Public School Principal
3. Kai	38	M	Ed.S.	10	Catholic High School Principal
4. Natalie	40	F	MS	15	Christian High School Principal
5. Lincoln	45	M	MAT	20	Public High School Principal
6. Josephine	41	F	MA	16	Public High School Principal
7. Andrew	33	M	Ed.S.	8	Christian High School Principal
8. Alice	29	F	MA	3	Christian High School Principal
9. Roman	35	M	MA	9	Public High School Principal
10. Ruby	46	F	MA	17	Public High School Principal
11. Weston	43	M	MS	18	Public High School Principal
12. Eden	32	F	MA	6	Christian High School Principal

Data Collection

Data were collected after I gathered all the signed consent form, I gather all the signed consent forms from the participants per the ethical requirements of the human body. During the consent process, I invited the participants to have an average of 60 minutes of interviews via Zoom or Webex, and I transcribed it verbatim. The range of interviews is about 90 minutes through semi-structured and open-ended interview protocol from May 2020 to March 2023. Specifically, I used the interview questions to conduct this study and collect the primary data. After reviewing the previous studies associated with experiences validated by two principals, one teacher, and one college professor, I finalized the interview protocol as a sample, as shown in Table 2. The thoughts of previous scholars, such as Grant and Ray (2019), Glaude (2024), Hands (2023), Hallinger and Kovacevic (2019), Kelly (2018), Lo and Xu (2019), Meier (2002), Vacchi and Zatta (2024), Zhang and Koshmanova (2020), helped me to create my interview questions. After I wrote my interview questions, I invited two principals, one teacher, and one college professor to give me comments, and then I revised and finalized the interview questions. The sample of interview questions is shown in Table 2. Finally, my study reached 96% saturation in codes because of 12 interviews with random selection (Zhang, 2023).

Table 2

Sample of Interview Questions

No.	Sample of Questions
1	Please talk about your educational background, teaching experiences, leadership experiences, and anything related to relationship-building, trust, and community your views.
2	What challenges do you face while you build a relationship, trust, and community among school stakeholders?
3	How can you strengthen a relationship between school stakeholders, such as between principal and teachers, between principal and parents, between principal and students, between principal and partners, and between principal and superintendent?
4	How can you build a trust with teachers for student success, parent engagement, and staff involvement?
5	What benefits do you think when you promote intersections of relationship building, trust, and community for student success and school sustainability?
6	How can you prioritize relationship-building in your daily school operation?



7	What do you think about trust-based learning school environment impacting school sustainability and student success, such as higher academic performance?
8	What strategies can you use to promote relationship-building, trust, and community in your school daily operation for student success and school sustainability?
9	In your experience, how does trust impact student achievement and school community engagement?
10	What do you think about relationship-building, trust, and community for student success and school sustainability?
11	What do you think about the intersections between relationship-building, trust, and community for student success and school sustainability?
12	Are there any thoughts, concerns, and questions I have not ask for and would you like to share them with me?

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

I used two cycle analysis frameworks to analyze the verbatim transcript from 12 US-experienced principals within the computerized aided qualitative analysis software, namely N-vivo 12 (Richards, 1999). I used N-vivo to code, analyze, categorize, and emerge the major themes and categories aligned with each research question (Adu, 2019; Saldana, 2016; Zhang & Koshmanova, 2020). Specifically, I used several steps to analyze the data. I firstly transcribed verbatim and uploaded the interview data into the N-vivo 12 for my analysis. I secondly read the transcripts multiple times to familiarize myself with the contents. Thirdly, I generate the initial codes using thematic, descriptive, and interpretative analysis approaches. Fourthly, I merged the major categories and identified the major themes that aligned with each research question. I, fifthly, reviewed the major themes and refined them to ensure they accurately represent the data, checking for coherence within themes and consistency across the entire dataset. Finally, I invited two scholars to validate my study’s trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Results

Results are presented per research question below in this study.

1. What challenges have US school principals faced when they explore the intersection of building relationships, trust, and community for student success and school sustainability?

Findings show that the experienced US principals face three major challenges, as shown in Table 3, including (1) building effective communication and collaboration; (2)navigating diverse stakeholder expectations and needs; and (3)leadership capacities for building trust and sustainability. Each theme has three categories, and I cited quotes from the US principals to support the challenges below.

Firstly, the US-experienced principals faced the challenge of building effective communication and collaboration. I cited quotes from the US principals to support these challenges.

Joshua said, "I am one who likes to, especially if I have someone who's upset. I'd much rather have a phone conversation or a meeting...."

Sophie indicated: "You can't allow [parents] to feel alienated; you have to have a strategy."

Kai stated: "Kids email me, or they go, they instant messenger chat with me, like, hey, are you available?"

Natalie believed: "When you get pushback from staff, that's entirely what it's based on their discrete experiences."

Lincoln stated, "We are going to be in best practices building; we are going to be driven by what we know about the art and science of teaching."

Those quotes above show that experienced US principals have the challenges of building an effective communication school environment that promotes student success and school sustainability.

Secondly, the experienced principals faced the challenges of making all school stakeholders' satisfaction. I cited quotes from them to support this theme.

Josephine said: "Yeah, I [can]imagine it is a little different in China. [This mean that principals need to use culturally responsive practice to contextually lead the school daily operation for student success and school sustainability]."

Andrew stated: "like my experiences, I never have a chance to talk with the principal. [This viewing indicated that principals need to make a connection with teachers, parents, students, staff, and all other school stakeholders for student learning outcomes and school sustainable development]."

Alice indicated: "We published a really nice magazine...highlighting, we do stuff related to alumni."

Roman expressed, "We try to build goodwill all the time by putting out stories about any innovative positive story we can find about our district."

Ruby mentioned: "I believe that competition among school system...is only going to become more and more the norm."

Those quotes above show that experienced US principals always consider how to respond to stakeholders' needs and expectations. Regarding the US principals' voices, principals need to consider various approaches to meeting the parents' and stakeholders' expectations for students' success and school sustainability.

Table 3
Major Themes and Categories of Challenges for US Principals within Frequencies

Major Themes	Categories	Selected Codes
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		with Frequency
1: Building Effective Communication and Collaboration	1.1. Fostering Open Communication Channels	Communication (7), Interaction (3), Accessibility (2)
	1.2. Encouraging Teacher Engagement	Teacher (2), Engagement (3), Motivation (1)
	1.3. Managing Resistance to Change	Change (4), Resistance (2), Pushback (1)
2: Navigating Diverse Stakeholder Expectations and Needs	2.1. Bridging Cultural and Socio-Economic Divides	Culture (3), Differences (2), China (2)
	2.2. Building Community Relationships and Partnerships	Community (5), Relationships (4), Engagement (3)
	2.3. Balancing Competing Interests and Priorities	Competition (2), Accountability (1), Sustainability (1)
3: Leadership Capacities for Building Trust and Sustainability	3.1. Fostering Trust and Credibility through Leadership	Trust (5), Credibility (2), Relationships (4)
	3.2. Cultivating Collaborative Professional Development	Professional Development (2), Coaching (1), Growth (2)
	3.3. Sustaining Innovation and Progress through Effective Leadership	Leadership (6), Innovation (3), Progress (2)

Thirdly, experienced US principals face the challenge of building trust and sustainable leadership capacity by promoting relationship-building, trust, and community. I cited quotes from the US principals in this study to support this challenge.

Weston said: "I am always trying to go to their staff and interact with them [teachers, staff, and students]."

Eden indicated: "Being successful is about just being a good leader. Good leaders...care about the people that they lead...."

Roman said, "We also take a very intentional approach to constantly developing our leaders; all of my leaders get coaching." Andrew stated, "We are going to be building best practices; we are going to be driven by what we know about the art and science of teaching."

Joshua mentioned: "We have a STEAM Innovation Center; those things are upfront in our building...."

Kai said: "I am always trying to interact with them [teachers, staff, students, and parents]."

Regarding the voices from the US principals above, the US principals need to use various communication tools to connect with teachers, parents, students, staff, superintendents, and school partners for their commitment and engagement for student success and school sustainability. Therefore, the US principals face the challenges described above, suggesting that the US principals need to seek various tools to build a solid relationship with teachers, parents, staff, and students to improve student learning outcomes and make schools have a long-term commitment among all school stakeholders.

2. What benefits have US school principals gotten when they promote the intersections of relationship-building, trust, and community for student success and school sustainability?

Findings show that experienced US principals have three major benefits when they practice the intersections of relationship-building, trust, and community for student success and school sustainability. The three benefits are (1) a solid relationship between school stakeholders, (2) community engagement, and (3) sustainable success. I cited quotes from the US principals in this study to support these benefits of promoting the intersection of relationship-building, trust, and community in multicultural school contexts.

Firstly, experienced US principals promote the intersections of relationship-building, trust, and community that can build solid relationships between school stakeholders for student success and school sustainability. For example, Joshua said, "[I think principals can build great relationships with teachers, parents, staff, and students via building trust and credibility.]"

Sophie stated: "I think we [principals] need to always think out different types of strategies to make students engage for their learning outcome."

Kai indicated: "I believe that we [school principals] need to establish or nurture a relationship between school stakeholders and students [for better outcomes]."

Lincoln stated: " I think we [school principals] want to convey and present an image that we are engaged in progressive, creative, and innovative learning."

Alice said: "Professional development, something that I always enjoyed."

Eden indicated: "They [principals] partner with teachers when they develop their improvement goals."

Those quotes above show that experienced US principals benefit from solid relationships among school stakeholders for student engagement, teacher commitment, and parent involvement when they promote the intersections of relationship-building, trust, and community for student success and school sustainability.

Secondly, experienced US principals benefit from community engagement by promoting relationship-building, trust, and community for student success and school sustainability. I cited quotes from the US principals' voices to support this theme in this study. For example, Roman said: "If people [parents] feel like they are an afterthought, you know, if this group, let's say, parents."

Andrew expressed: "My parents are really helping me now."

Alice indicated, "We [principals] celebrate success. We have athletic success, and we have classroom success."

Ruby stated: "We are a tight community in which people [principals, teachers, students] like to stay here a long time."

Weston indicated, "We [principals] highlighted innovative and creative practices that can help principals connect with teachers, staff, and students to improve school effectiveness."

"The quotes above show that experienced US principals can make all school stakeholders for students' school sustainability. Those quotes from principals suggest that US principals need to promote community engagement for students with high academic performance, personality integration, and school effectiveness.

Table 4

Major Themes and Categories of the Benefits for US Principals within Frequencies

Major Themes	Categories	Selected Codes with Frequency
1: A Solid Relationship between School Stakeholders	Building Trust	Trust (5), Credibility (2), Relationship (3)
	Student-Centered Focus	Students (9), relation (4), learning (3)
	Staff Collaboration	Teachers (4), Collaboration (2), Team (2)
2: Community Engagement	2.1. Parental Involvement	Parents (4), Communication (3), Engagement (2)

	2.2. School Culture	Culture (2), Community (4), Success (4)
	2.3. Community Partnership	Partnership (1), Collaboration (2), Community (4)
3: Sustainable Success	3.1. Academic Achievement	Achievement (2), Learning (3), Success (4)
	3.2. Teacher Retention	Teachers (7), Retention (1), Development (3)
	3.3. School Branding	Branding (1), Image (2), Reputation (1)

Thirdly, the experienced US principals have the benefit of making school sustainable success. I cited quotes from the US principals' voices to support this benefit. For example, Lincoln said: "They [principals] might do professional development training [for school effectiveness, student success, and school sustainable success]."

Natalie indicated: "They [principals] should partner with teachers when they develop their improvement goals."

Josephine expressed: "We [principals] publish a really nice magazine that makes a connection with parents for student success."

Kai said: "We want to convey and present an image [for student success and school sustainability]."

Those quotes above show that the experienced US principals highlighted the importance of teacher professional development, engagement, collaboration, and communication in achieving school sustainable success and student learning outcomes.

3. What strategies do US school principals use when they promote the intersection of relationship-building, trust, and community for student success and school sustainability?

Findings show that experienced US principals use three major strategies to foster student success and school sustainability: (1) fostering personal connection, (2) cultivating inclusive communities, and (3) shared leadership for success. I cited quotes from the US principals to support these strategies.

Firstly, experienced US principals use the strategy of fostering personal connection for student success and school sustainability. For example, Lincoln said: "I always gave them the professional literature and research citations to support what I was talking about."

Joshua indicated: “Being a good leader is about...caring about the people [students, teachers, and staff] that they lead.”

Sophie stated: “We [principals] ask our teachers to work with learning coaches and improve.”

Josephine indicated: “They [principals] partner with teachers when they develop their improvement.”

Natalie expressed: “You have to have a strategy...to attend to that, you know, at an individual level.”

Those quotes above show that the US principals use personal connections for student success and school sustainability. Those quotes suggested that US principals need to use various approaches to make a connection with principals, teachers, staff, parents, and students for school sustainability.

Secondly, experienced US principals cultivate an inclusive community to ensure students’ success and school sustainability. I cited quotes from the US principals’ voices to support this strategy. For example, Kai said, “It is very different here...kids email me, or they go; they Instant Messenger chat with me.”

Andrew indicated: “We try to build goodwill all the time by putting out the stories.”

Eden stated: “They partner with teachers when they develop their improvement goals.”

Ruby expressed: “We [principals] have five full days built in during the school year for professional development.”

Those quotes above suggest that principals build an inclusive school community for student engagement.

Thirdly, the US principals promote shared leadership for success for student success and school sustainability. I cited quotes from the US principals to support this strategy. For example, Roman said: “They [principals] might do professional development training.” Alice stated: “We spend some money on making sure that we have good things.” Those quotes above suggest that US principals use leadership strategies to foster student success and school sustainability. Therefore, US principals use effective leadership to work with all school stakeholders for student success and sustainability.

Discussion

Five major findings were discussed in this study. First, the findings showed that experienced US principals need help to build an effective communication channel with teachers, parents, staff, students, and partnerships for student success and school sustainability. This finding is compatible with the previous studies. For example, Williams and Richardson (2023) claimed that principals need help creating effective communication between teachers, parents, and staff in serving students' learning outcomes. Jaynes (2022) suggested that principals need to think out different strategies to build effective communication between school stakeholders, such as principals, parents, and teachers, for school effectiveness. Jethwaney (2024) stated that leaders as principals always face the challenge of making a solid connection with other staff in the community. Those previous studies indicated principals must enhance their communication capacity for student learning outcomes. However, some previous studies emphasize that principals need help to make parents' engagement in school effective. For example, Grant and Ray (2019) stated that principals face challenges in making families actively engaged in school contributions and student learning outcomes. Kew and Fellus (2022) claimed that family engagement in school is challenging for any school district. Zhang (2024) suggested that school principals need to use effective communication tools for student engagement, teacher contribution, and parent involvement for school effectiveness and student academic achievement.

Secondly, the findings showed that principles helped build mutual trust between school stakeholders for student success and school

Table 5

Major Themes and Categories of Strategies for US Principals with Frequencies

Major Themes	Categories	Selected Codes with Frequency
1: Fostering Personal Connections	Student-centered approach	Students (7), leaders (5), caring (2)
	Teacher Empowerment	Teachers (13), coaching (3), empower (1)
	Family Engagement	Parents (5), Communication (7), Community (6)
2: Cultivating Inclusive Communities	2.1. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives	Diversity (2), Inclusion (1), Community (6)
	2.2. Community Partnerships	Partnerships (2), Collaboration (2), Community (6)
	2.3. Student Voice and Agency	Student Voice (2), Voice (2), Agency (1)
3: Shared Leadership for Success	3.1. Distributed Leadership	Leadership (5), Collaboration (2), Coaching (3)
	3.2. Professional Learning Networks	Professional Development (4), Training (2), Networks (1)
	3.3. Strategic Resource Development	Resources (4), Funding (1), Development (2)



sustainability. Several previous studies support my findings in this study. For example, Saleem et al. (2020), in their hierarchical linear modeling study, found that trust is a vital factor that relates to effectiveness, resilience, adoption, and school sustainability. Zhang and Koshmanova (2021) suggested that principals need to build a trust-based learning school culture for student learning outcomes and school effectiveness. Keravnos and Symeou (2024), in their mixed-methods study with 1,320 surveys and interviews with 40 teachers and 5 principals, found that school principals can implement to enhance faculty trust for student success and school sustainability. Meier (2002) claimed that building a trust-based culture and learning environment could foster teachers, parents, and staff to work together for student success with higher performance, such as higher testing scores. Ostafin, Robinson, and Meier (2015) suggested that principals must motivate students to build a trust-based teaching pedagogy for student learning outcomes, teachers' commitment, and school effectiveness. Therefore, the US principals claimed that principals need to develop a trust-based learning and teaching environment for student outcomes and school effectiveness.

Thirdly, the findings show that US principals can enhance a solid relationship between school stakeholders for student academic achievement and school sustainability. This study is compatible with the previous studies. For example, Young et al. (2024), in their logistic regression modeling with a repeated cross-sectional design, claimed that principals foster a relationship between student success and school effectiveness. Horsager (2012) contended that principals build a strong relationship with teachers, parents, and staff that could enhance their commitment to student learning outcomes and school sustainability. Wang, Yu, and Li (2023) suggested that building a solid relationship between principals and teachers could help students toward their learning goals, such as a higher test score. Howard et al. (2020) said that principals building a trust-based relationship between principals and teachers could foster principals to work with teachers for student effectiveness and school sustainability. Those previous studies claimed principals must build a positive, supportive learning and teaching culture for student learning outcomes. Therefore, principals foster a significant relationship between principals and teachers for student learning outcomes and school effectiveness. Thus, principals must enhance a significant relationship between scholars (Zhang & Koshmanova, 2020).

Fourthly, the new finding shows that experienced US principals promote personal connections for student success and school effectiveness (Zhang & Koshmanova, 2020). The previous study supports This new finding (Zhang & Koshmanova, 2020). For example, Howard et al. (2020) suggested that principals need to connect with students to foster them toward their learning goals. Baron (2023) claimed that principals could foster teacher commitment to student success through a personal connection. Also, Iwai (2023) stated that making a connection between school stakeholders could effectively foster student success and school effectiveness. Lis (2023) claimed that principals use strategies such as personal connection for effectiveness in school. Those previous

studies expressed that principals could foster student success through making positive and supportive relationships. Therefore, this study found that connecting principals and teachers could improve students' success and effectiveness.

Finally, findings show that experienced US principals use professional networks and students' voices to support students' success and school sustainability. This means that principals build a trust-based school culture by listening to students' voices for student engagement (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2015; Zhang & Koshmanova, 2020). Zhang, Bower, and Mao (2020) stated that principals need to take advantage of their professional network by associating hearing student voices, such as school administrators' conferences and activities, to enlarge their work for school effectiveness. Tulowitzki et al. (2024), in their literature from 2017 to 2023 on shadowing school principals, inspired me to realize that principals need to pay attention to the students, teachers, parents, staff, and all stakeholders' voices for school sustainability building. This viewing emphasizes that paying attention to the stakeholders' voices is effective for principals to make a connection and to effectively foster all stakeholders to contribute their talents for student success.

This finding also suggested that principals must explore the intersection of relationship-building, trust, and community for student success and school sustainability through professional networks and hearing voices from all stakeholders. By doing so, principals could motivate all stakeholders to commit to student academic and personal integrity. For example, Tamadoni et al. (2024) in their systematic literature between 2001 and 2020 on principals' challenges and a coping solution found that principals face 734 contextual challenges such as socio-cultural (11%), parents (5.2), student performance (11.2%), staff (6%), and teachers (7.9%), which call the experienced US principals to promote intersections of relationship-building, trust, and community for student learning outcomes and school sustainability.

Previous studies such as Zhang (2024), suggested that exploring intersections of relationship-building, trust-based learning, and community member engagement could effectively foster principals for school effectiveness. For example, Glass et al. (2024) claimed that a trust-based school environment could help principals foster teachers for students' learning outcomes. Kibtiyah et al. (2024) confirmed that principals build mutual trust among school members to formulate goals, create culture, develop curriculum, management students for school effectiveness. Their findings show that building a relationship between school stakeholders could effectively help students engage in their learning outcomes. Therefore, school principals need to build a relationship between school members via responding students' voices for school professional community building for student learning outcomes and school sustainable development.

Conclusions

Three new findings are concluded in this study. First, principals take advantage of using open communication tools to build a

strong relationship with students, parents, and teachers for student success and school sustainable development. Most participants in this study claimed that principals enhance the intersections between relationship-building, trust, and community in the multicultural school setting for effectiveness. Second, principals promote shared leadership associated with distributed leadership, virtue leadership, and transformational leadership for student engagement, teacher commitment, and parent involvement for school effectiveness. Third, principals improve student learning outcomes and enhance school sustainable development by responding to students' voices in multicultural school contexts.

Limitations and Recommendations

Two limitations are recommended. First, a small sample size of 12 US principals participated in this study from a state in the United States. Second, the findings in this study cannot be generalized in other cultural-social school contexts. Regarding the two limitations, three recommendations are proposed. The purpose of the first descriptive qualitative study is to investigate how principals use relationship-building, trust-based learning, and community engagement in the 50 states in the United States for student success and school effectiveness. The purposive and snowball snowballing sampling will be used to conduct interviews with 600 principals across the 50 states in the United States. The 12 participants from each state will be interviewed, and they will discover how each state uses the intersection of relationship-building, trust-based learning, and community engagement.

This second convergent mixed-method research study examines how principals explore relationship-building, trust-based learning, and community engagement for school effectiveness in the United States. A total of 600 principals across the 50 states in the United States will be interviewed through purposive and snowball sampling, and a total of 3,000 principals' surveys will be examined to predict what variables impact student learning outcomes and school effectiveness, such as higher academic performance. The purpose of the third multiple case study will be to compare the different perspectives of using relationship-building, trust-based learning, and community engagement for each state among 50 states in the United States. The interview data from the first proposed study and the second proposed study above will be re-analyzed. Therefore, the three proposed studies will comprehensively explore how principals use relationship-building, trust-based learning, and community engagement for school stakeholder commitment, student success, and effectiveness.

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