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Coaching for Better Teaching: A Study on Student-Centered Instructional Coaching

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Abstract: As the appeal and need for greater student achievement have been increasing each day steadily, so does the wish to find ways to reach those levels. The student-centered coaching (SCC) model is designed to improve teachers' instructional abilities that will improve student achievement. This research study aimed to examine the perceived impact of SCC on teachers' instructional practices and the challenges to and facilitating factors in implementation. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to investigate the student-centered coaching practice of a school district in Northern USA. Qualitative data collected from seven teachers and three coaches who were conveniently available to participate in the study through semi-structured interviews were subjected to content analysis. The results suggested that the respondents considered SCC as an effective model to change teacher practice and ultimately impact student learning. Based on the qualitative data, a few recommendations were offered to help address potential challenges in implementing the SCC in the future.

Keywords: Coaching, instructional coaching, student-centered coaching, professional development of teachers

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Introduction

As a result of accountability efforts within today's education system, there have been reform movements to improve student achievement (Galey, 2016). Studies have suggested a direct link between the job-embedded professional development efforts and teacher capacity and student learning (Bean et al., 2010; Denton et al., 2007; Maclin, 2018; Martin & Dowson, 2009). Similarly, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) and Marzano (2011) claimed that the professional development of teachers is critical to advancing student learning.

Traditional professional development approaches, on the other hand, have been proven to have little or no effect in studies, claiming that these procedures use daylong out-of-class seminars to provide training to all teachers regardless of department, grade level, or school they teach in (Kraft, Blazar & Hogan 2018). Thus, the approach to professional teacher training has shifted to instructional coaching, which is a personalized and small-scale approach whereby an experienced mentor works one-to-one with teachers and provides constant feedback based on regular classroom observations (Garet et al., 2001).

Instructional coaching is a job-embedded professional development model which requires instructional coaches to work with teachers in their everyday positions. Different from typical coaching, instructional coaching is non-supervisory. Instructional coaching is not a position that gives coaches the authority to evaluate other adults. Instead, they use their expertise and relationships to create change rather than supervisory power (Taylor et al., 2003). This content-based (e.g., math coaching or literacy coaching) coaching model aims to enable teachers to achieve the goals in the instructional reform movements of their schools or districts (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008; Neufeld & Roper, 2003). An instructional coach's work is job and situation embedded, which consists of observing classroom teaching, demonstrating model practices, and conducting cycles of pre-and post-conference with practitioners (Neufeld & Roper, 2003).

Depending on the focus and practices, different instructional coaching types emerged, such as student-centered, teacher-centered, and relationship-driven coaching. The student-centered instructional coaching, which is the focus of the research study, is designed by Sweeney (2011) to improve student achievement by increasing classroom teachers' teaching effectiveness (Shernoff et al., 2015). This new instructional coaching model is intended to ensure student success by focusing on the movement between where they are and where they need to be. The use of standards and student data, such as their work and assessment results, is central for teachers to make informed decisions about their instruction.

Student-centered coachers use a set of practices in which the conversation is firmly rooted in student learning. As a result, teachers believe that the dialogue does not aim to judge their teaching performance but their students' learning. To ensure that students have met all the required standards, the coach and teacher design and implement instruction together as partners (Sweeney, 2011).

In student-centered coaching, conversations focus on specific learning outcomes and coaching is driven by evidence of student learning; thus, it involves regular analysis of student work. In addition, coaching is constant and conducted with individuals and teams of teachers, including collaborative planning and teaching (Sweeney, 2011).

Unlike other coaching models, student-centered coaching does not focus on teachers and their actions or does not propose the theory that improving teaching will improve student learning. Instead, Sweeney's work entails coaches setting specific targets for students based on the standards and curriculum and working in collaboration to make sure that these targets are achieved (Sweeney, 2011).

Although it came up with promising statements, the student-centered instructional coaching model, as a new model, needs to be studied to better understand it and ensure effective instructional coaching (Kraft et al., 2018). Research on this new instructional coaching model is very limited. Galvan (2016) is one of the researchers studying the model. He investigated principals' and coaches' roles in the planning and preparation of teachers using the student-centered coaching model. The researcher collected data through interviews from coaches and principals and teacher surveys conducted at the beginning and end of the coaching cycle. As a result, Galvan (2016) claimed that teachers receiving student-centered coaching improved their understanding of planning and preparing their instruction in line with student-centered instructional coaching and supported their coaches and principals.

Hebgen (2017) conducted a qualitative study examining the strengths and challenges of implementing a professional learning opportunity focused on student-centered coaching. The researcher conducted surveys, focus groups, and interviews with coaches to answer questions such as: What is the impact of student-centered coaching on teachers' knowledge and skills in a school; what aspects of professional learning opportunities positively impact teachers' practice; what aspects of professional learning opportunities could be eliminated or added; and how do teachers describe their work and its impact on student achievement. At the end of the study, the research revealed useful findings. First, the learning communities that developed because of this training have shown to be valuable in informing future coaching practices and support within the district. Second, instructional coaches do not believe they have adequate time to engage in coaching cycles due to their current roles and responsibilities. Third, instructional coaches do not believe the communication between school leaders and teachers regarding the value of student-centered coaching has been effective.

Collins (2021) is another researcher who examined SCC in his study. He conducted a qualitative exploratory case study to explore how participating in student-centered coaching affects teachers' self-efficacy. Within the study, qualitative data were received through various ways, such as through pre and post-implementation interviews, reflective journals kept by teachers, and planning documents. At the end of his study, Collins (2021) found that the model improved the self-efficacy of the participating teachers and working collaboratively with an instructional coach and focusing on student success were the two main factors within the model contributing to the teachers' self-efficacy.

The previous research on SCC has revealed very useful information but there is still a need for more research to help us understand the student-centered instructional model and its potential for the instructional practices of teachers (Galvan, 2015). The current literature gap that this study addressed is how key stakeholders (i.e., teachers and coaches) perceive the student-centered coaching model as a professional development model, what influences the model's implementation positively and negatively, and how stakeholders perceive the model's impact on teachers' instructional practices. This study aims to add to the current literature on understanding the influence and implementation of the model via teachers' and coaches' descriptions of their perceptions as they have experienced student-centered instructional coaching. The following questions guided the study.

1. What are the stakeholders' perceptions of student-centered coaching as a professional development model?
2. What are the facilitating factors and challenges reported by the stakeholders in implementing student-centered coaching?
3. How do the stakeholders perceive the impact of the model on the instructional practices of teachers?

The findings of the study are expected to develop an understanding of a new coaching model, student-centered instructional coaching, to show how this model will make sure that instructional coaches using the model could be more useful while trying to support the instructional practices of the teachers they are working with. This study will contribute to the scholarly research and literature by providing additional information about a new professional teacher training model.

Method

Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological research design was utilized in this study to evaluate the effectiveness and practices of student-centered coaching implemented by a school district in Northern USA from the stakeholders' perspectives. In order to thoroughly understand the phenomenon of SCC, the study was purposely structured as a phenomenological study in accordance with Yildirim and Simsek's description (2016). Additionally, so as to explore how the phenomenon, that is, the program under consideration, was perceived, how the implementation process was described and how the participating teachers and coaches defined its impact on teaching practices, the phenomenological research design was utilized in accordance with its definition in the literature (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Patton, 2002).

Participants

This research study was conducted within a school district in the Northern USA in the 2018-2019 academic year. The school district was the second largest in the States and had about 27 thousand students in 52 schools in the specific academic year. To support the professional development of the teachers in the district, district leaders decided to pilot the student-centered instructional coaching in seven schools located in the metropolitan area. To gather a range of perspectives across the school district, the researcher invited all the seven schools participating in the student-centered instructional coaching program in the district to take part in the study. All seven school leaders agreed to participate in the study. Of these schools, three were elementary schools, two were middle schools, and the other two were high schools. There were ten teachers and five coaches working in these schools. The researcher sent them all an e-mail about the purpose of the study and the confidentiality issue and invited them to participate in the semi-structured interview protocol. Seven teachers received student-centered coaching support, and three instructional coaches responded positively to the e-mail and gave their consent to participate in the study. The study used convenience sampling as data were collected from these seven teachers and three coaches who were conveniently available to participate in the study.

Table 1.

Demographic Information about the Participants

Participants	Age	Gender	Degree	Experience/yrs.
T1	22	Female	Ba	1
T2	24	Male	Ba	2
T3	31	Male	Ma	4
T4	25	Female	Ba	2
T5	29	Female	Ma	3
T6	23	Female	Ba	1
T7	24	Female	Ba	1
C1	34	Female	Ma	2
C2	42	Female	Ma	3
C3	45	Male	Ma	4

As table 1 shows, the teacher participants had varying ages, education, and experience levels. They ranged in age from 22 to 31 years and in experience from one year to four years, and two had master's degrees while the others held bachelor's degrees. All teacher participants were credentialed and licensed to teach in the district. Two of the participating teachers were male, while the others were female. All three coaches have a master's degree in education and have taught for at least three years. Their coaching experience ranged from two to four years. Two of the coaches were women, and the other was a man.

Coaching Practice in the District

The district coaches conducted coaching cycles with the teachers using the student-centered coaching model defined by Sweeney (2011) for six weeks during the 2018-2019 school year. They had both individual and group coaching sessions. The coaches and teachers met once per week for individual coaching, and they met twice a month for group coaching. During individual coaching, they talked about each individual student's academic needs, determined instructional objectives for them, and discussed the teacher's instructional needs. Group sessions focused on the assessment data of students.

At the beginning of the school year, the principals and the district authorities shared the previous year's student achievement data with the coaches. After analyzing the data, the coaches determined the areas where the students struggled to begin the coaching cycle. The coaches started the coaching cycles in the second week of September. The coach and the teachers came together each week to discuss lesson planning, data evaluation, and instructional strategies and skills that would be used.

The coaching cycles consisted of several stages. The coach and the teacher performed the tasks explained below in each stage.

Stage 1: The coach and the teacher set goals for coaching cycles. They voiced what they expected the students to learn at the end of their cooperation. They developed goals for the pupils that have been focused on standards, student participation, or behavior. The coach made it clear to the teacher that the coaching was intended for kids, not teachers, at this point. They also determined the focus of the coaching cycles in this stage.

Stage 2: They put the goal that they identified into smaller and measurable learning targets. In this way, they both understood what students should know or be able to do. They used a variety of student evidence such as performance assessment, conferences with the student and student work samples in coaching cycles.

Stage 3: They co-planed instruction focusing on the students' needs. While doing that, they considered the patterns and trends of student learning by categorizing student evidence, such as test results, written responses, or oral responses. For example, when students were reading a text and expected to write a response, the teacher could sort student work into different categories such as the ones who could think critically, the ones who need more strategies and the ones who show evidence of learning targets.

Stage 4: The coach and the teacher reflected on their decision-making and worked out how to modify the instruction for the learning targets they determined. To do that, they worked together 1-3 times per week in the classroom during instructional time and had a weekly planning conversation.

Stage 5: The teacher and the coach co-taught using effective instructional practices. In some classes, the coach taught, and the teacher observed the lesson. The teacher

focused on the instructional moves and the impact the instruction had on student learning.

Stage 6: They measured the impact on student and teacher learning. The coach asked the teacher to think about if it worked, if the students showed growth and where they should go next. When they were not satisfied with the result, they planned another action to take in order to ensure the expected student growth. The coach kept logs to track the work they did each day. To evaluate the impact, they used student performance data.

Stage 7: The coach worked with the school leader to plan student and teacher learning and growth. The coach met the school leader regularly and they directed coaching based on the school improvement plan as suggested by Sweeney and Harris (2017).

Data Collection Instruments

The researcher developed the semi-structured interview questions informed by literature on coaching, instructional coaching, and student-centered instructional coaching. The interview schedules included ten open-ended questions with their follow-up probes to clarify participants' perception of instructional coaching, particularly the implementation of the program, the challenges and the facilitating factors for implementation, and the changes the model led to in the teaching practice teachers.

Two experts in coaching and mentoring reviewed and provided feedback on the draft interview schedules. Also, the district leaders checked the schedules and recommended minor revisions to make some of the questions clearer. The suggested changes were made in the draft schedules. The draft schedules were piloted on two teachers and two coaches to make sure the questions were comprehended clearly by the participants. As a result, some of the items in the interview form were reworded to make them clear, and as a result the final version was developed. The questions in both schedules had the same purpose with minor changes in wording. The questions concerned implementation (for example, Could you please describe the instructional coaching program you attended/worked in?). (for coaches); their perceptions of the impact of the coaching program on teachers' instructional practices (e.g., How do you think the student-centered instructional coaching program improved your/the teachers' teaching practice?); the factors facilitating implementation (e.g., What helped the implementation of the student-centered instructional coaching program? Why?). The researcher also encouraged them to make additional comments regarding the program.

Data Collection Procedures

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which are appropriate for studies where the depth of meaning is crucial, and they mainly focus on gaining insight and understanding (Gillham, 2000; Ritchie & Lewis 2003). The researcher conducted all the semi-structured interviews in person between December 2 and December 27, 2018. The interviews with teachers were conducted at the

interviewees' schools, and the interviews with coaches were done in a room in the school district building provided by the program leaders. The researcher used digital recorders to record the interviews for transcription purposes with interviewees' consent. Before they participated in the interview, all participants provided written informed consent.

Data Analysis

Concerning the data analysis, the researcher and an external analyst analyzed the transcriptions through content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002) to determine 'core consistencies and meanings' (Patton, 2002, p. 453). They coded the interview transcripts using the inductive category development approach. That is, the coders did not utilize a predefined list of codes; instead, they started the analysis after collecting and reviewing the whole data. Initially, the coders analyzed and summarized the passages of qualitative data in short phrases. At the end of this cycle, the content of the interview data was categorized. Then, they organized the short phrases under thematic patterns relating to specific research questions. Following these two cycles, the coders linked the emerging themes and codes to develop conceptual models to understand the student-centered instructional coaching model better. To ensure inter-rater reliability when coding the qualitative data, analysts chose a subset of interviews across schools and coded each other's interviews for both descriptive and thematic codes. In cases where they disagreed, they discussed and justified their coding until they reached a consensus. At the end of this process, they made an adjustment in their coding to reflect their shared understanding of codes. Finally, at the end of the data analysis process, three themes were determined: overall perceptions regarding the students-centered instructional coaching, challenges and facilitating factors for the program, and perceived impact.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the study, expert review, member checking, and thick descriptions were utilized. The researcher had experts and the program leaders in the district review and give feedback on the data collection instruments, which added to the content validity. The interviews were audiotaped, and the verbatim transcriptions were meticulously done to avoid data loss and to provide thick descriptions, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Miles and Huberman (1994). In addition, at the very beginning of the data collection process, the researcher invited all the participants in the district to take part in the study and as most of them agreed to participate, the researcher could collect different aspects and experiences of the phenomenon in different school grades (i.e., elementary, middle and high schools) (Patton, 2002). Moreover, to support the trustworthiness of the study, a member checking strategy was used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The interview transcriptions were shared with the participants, and they were asked to check for any misinterpretations and inaccuracies. None of the participants required any revisions. Additionally, the transcripts were coded by the researcher and an external coder separately. The overall intercoder reliability was calculated at the end of

the data analysis process. The total number of coding agreements was divided by the total number of agreements and disagreements together (Miles et al., 2014). The intercoder reliability was found to be 91%. To establish confirmability of this research, independent audit strategy was used. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the decisions made throughout the study, including the method, data analysis, and conclusions, were checked by a competent peer (Patton, 1990). The independent audit had PhD in Educational Sciences and had experience in teacher education. All the abovementioned procedures ensured the validity and trustworthiness of the study.

Prior to participating in the study, all participants provided written informed consent. The Ethics Committee of the UW-Madison Education and Behavioral science IRB waived the need for ethics approval and the need to obtain consent for the collection, analysis, and publication of the obtained and anonymized data for this non-interventional study.

The role of the researcher

The author of the study participated in this study as a researcher. She was a postdoctoral researcher in the Faculty of Education located in the school district. She had conducted several research studies on teacher development in different contexts, specifically on the learning of beginning teachers and compared the induction programs used in the States and Turkey. Her experience in teacher education enabled her to participate in the Faculty of Education research project investigating the SCC model used in the school district. As she had no direct or indirect connection to the district planning and implementing the coaching process, she was disconnected from the reality she studied. Thus, she did not have any values or philosophies that would affect the findings of the study. Yet, the researcher took additional measures to avoid researcher bias throughout the research. Firstly, she planned every detail while designing the study to avoid bias. Next, she practised framing the questions and conducting the interview skillfully and also had the data reviewed by a colleague to get an unbiased opinion. Throughout the whole process, she continually re-evaluated her impressions and the participants' responses until she could ensure that her pre-existing assumptions prevented the data analysis process.

Findings

The findings are organized into the following three sections: overall perceptions regarding student-centered coaching, challenges and facilitating factors in implementing student-centered coaching and perceived impacts of student-centered coaching on instructional practices of teachers.

Overall Perceptions regarding the Student-Centered Coaching Model

Many of the coaches and teachers interviewed articulated positive perceptions of the Student-Centered Coaching (SCC) model. Some of the subthemes that emerged in data

analysis are enabling non-threatening and collaborative relations with teachers, facilitating teacher reflection on practice, using student data as a measure of success and Learning Labs.

Enabling non-threatening and collaborative relationships with teachers

The coaches reported a positive change in their coaching practice in which they were equal collaborators with teachers, rather than the coach as the expert and the teacher as the recipient of knowledge. The interviewed coaches felt that being seen as equal helped them develop a non-threatening, collaborative relationship with teachers and support them in looking at their teaching practice in-depth in the SCC model, which is designed to shift the focus away from perceived teacher deficiencies and toward student change. As one of the coaches put it, "being seen as equal helped us develop a non-threatening, collaborative relationship with teachers and support them in looking at their teaching practice in-depth." Coach 1:

> The biggest difference of this model and the thing I like most about it is that it helped us start a collaborative relationship with teachers. They are well aware that we do not aim to judge them or teach them anything, but work together as partners or colleagues, looking at their teaching together in order to make it more suitable to improve student learning. We could assure them that it is not their teaching we want to change but the students' learning. We've explained that they need to adapt their teaching because each student has a different learning style and a different learning difficulty. Seeing that we do not have any intention to evaluate them has made the coaching process non-threatening for them.

Facilitating teacher reflection on practice

The coaches shared that the model enabled them to facilitate reflection on practice with teachers by asking a series of questions aimed at teasing out factors that would help teachers develop well-thought-out instruction while meeting diverse learners' needs. The following quote illustrates this point. Coach 2:

> What are her notions of fluency and strategy and representation in mathematics? What's the difference between a strategy and a representation? What do we want developmentally, how do we want students to progress? Going from very concrete to more abstract and going from counting strategies to number relationships and modelling that, and so my work with her then was let's lay out a sequence of where most of the students are now; how we need to differentiate along the way; and what will be the sequence of strategies that we will introduce to the students and take them from focus lessons to how that will then be worked also in the context of independent practice in work stations.

Using student data as a measure of success

Results of the interview data suggested that coaches were positive about utilizing the SCC model for the professional development of teachers in the district as they observed that teachers felt more successful because of using student data as a measure of success. Both groups of respondents spoke favorably about the SCC as it emphasizes student

data to inform practice change, with student change being the ultimate driver of this model. For example, Coach 1 shared:

> I guess it's taught us to look more at data and evidence and not just my perception of the practice. So it's changed me just a bit in that if I'm meeting with teachers to discuss, I'm now looking more for sort of a third point or evidence that we can look at together as opposed to I see this, I like that, I don't like that.

Another coach, Coach 3, shared that using student data as evidence and a driver for practice change provided a structure unique to the coaching model by saying that *"I really appreciated the structure of what the student-centered coaching did was really shined a light again on the importance of the data piece."*

Similarly, interviewed teachers shared their positive perceptions of the model as using student data as a driver for practice change provided them with a clear understanding of the benefits and potential outcomes of instructional coaching on their teaching practice. Teacher 7 declared:

> Student-centered coaching has allowed us to sort of launch it in a slightly different way that makes it seem like more of a support and a resource, and we've had a number of teams and individuals that have sought that out, so it's been helpful.

Learning labs

Another aspect of the SCC that seems to contribute to the positive perceptions of the coaches and teachers is the Learning Labs, which is modelled on peer observation best practices. The coaches defined the Learning Labs as guided classroom visits that are led by classroom teachers and guided themselves. The coaches explained that they try to make sure that each Learning Lab consists of a pre-brief, a classroom visit and a post-brief. Similarly, most of the interviewed teachers voiced their appreciation of the Learning Labs by saying that "they were a great way of improving together", "they provided us an opportunity to learn from each other and a chance to observe our colleagues in action". Learning Labs were claimed to be an opportunity for teachers to observe another teacher during instruction and discuss afterwards as a group to further the learning of both the observers and the observed teachers. Coach 3 shared the potential of Learning Labs to promote a culture of collaboration, professional discourse, and the power of teacher collaboration from their perspective:

> I think it sort of further pushed our culture of just collaboration. Being transparent; being vulnerable; being a learner and wanting to continually tweak and expand practice. We work together; we learn from each other; we learn from our supports; and that's how we get better and that's why we're doing it.

Both coaches and teachers shared the idea that Learning Labs are very effective and useful as they help to create a culture of collaborative learning. It seemed to give the teachers the chance to see the great instructional practices of their colleagues teaching next door.

Challenges and Facilitating Factors in Implementing the Student-Centered Coaching Model

Respondents shared several challenges and facilitating factors about implementing the SCC model.

Challenges of implementation

At the end of the data analysis process, the subthemes that emerged as the challenges of implementation are reaching veteran teachers, regarding coaching as remediation, spending much of coaching time on other duties, having difficulty organizing Learning Labs, and having different staffing patterns and schedules at high schools.

Reaching veteran teachers

Although all the three coaches shared that they had success with SCC for new teachers to engage them and change their practice, they reported having some struggles like reaching some veteran teachers. The coaches believed that veteran teachers' reluctance to seek out coaches' help stemmed from the teachers' belief that coaching is evaluative. Coach 1 explained that:

> The worst part of the process was reaching the veteran teachers. They did not want to be a part of the process at all. They did not want to reflect on their teaching, cooperate for student learning or take part in any kind of classroom observation. I guess they believe it will evaluate their performance and be used as a proof of poor teaching or something.

Regarding coaching as remediation

One of the coaches shared that she was assigned a teacher to coach because the teacher was on an improvement plan. However, the teacher was not open to coaching. As a result, coaching resources' usefulness and investment were limited in such circumstances. Moreover, they voiced their concern that while some staff saw the benefits of creating a collaborative coaching culture, other teachers viewed it as remediation, an indicator of poor teaching performance, or evidence of teachers' deficiencies. Coach 2 felt that veteran teachers did not understand the benefits of instructional coaching and shared the following:

> So the teachers I worked with were really supportive and appreciative and thankful for the help, but they were more of your newer teachers. That's maybe why we haven't moved forward because everyone else is kind of like I don't have time. Yeah, because they do not understand the benefit of it really.

Some teachers seemed to perceive that SCC was a form of evaluation or remediation, which may have resulted from teachers being introduced to the coaching process through a variety of avenues. Three of the teachers indicated that they volunteered for coaching; the others stated that they were identified by leadership as being in need of coaching, including three new teachers and one teacher on emergency license. None of

the teachers mentioned any challenges they experienced within the program except one of the new teachers. She claimed that the district had her participate in coaching as they believed that she would benefit from coaching cycles as she lacked experience. Although she admitted benefitting from coaching a lot, she stated, "I would rather if they asked my opinion about that. Then, I would probably be more eager within the program." The coaches supported that some teachers participated in coaching as part of school initiatives, such as rolling out a new curriculum, while still others entered coaching as struggling teachers or as exemplars whose practice could be disseminated to a cadre of teachers. Overall, according to the qualitative data collected from the coaches, teachers who view SCC as a kind of evaluation or remediation are less eager to participate in coaching steps and have low intrinsic motivation for professional growth, posing a challenge to the coaches.

Spending much of coaching time on other duties

Another challenge voiced by the coaches is that their percentage of time coaching was impeded by having other duties assigned to them, such as supporting school reform efforts, new curriculum rollouts, and administrative duties. For example, Coach 1 shared his experience of having to balance coaching with other duties by stating:

> In a few of our high schools, some of us are splitting some of our responsibilities with pathways work. So we have a full school reform effort that is well underway, so our coaching allocation was reduced, which means this year, I'm only a part-time coach.

Having difficulty organizing Learning Labs

Another difficulty mentioned by the coaches is the difficulty of organizing and planning Learning Labs. While teachers and coaches viewed Learning Labs as beneficial for improving teacher practice and strengthening a culture of collaboration, coaches reported that establishing Learning Labs required a great deal of planning in advance, from requesting substitute teachers for the observing teachers to working with the observed teacher to plan for meaningful observation. As Coach 3 xplained:

> When a teacher gets input from their own co-workers outside of it being the coach, we have found that they really, really want to hear from each other. So being able to create environments with lots of prep, I mean just organizing one of those and getting class coverage and pulling the teams together, and the host is really having a purpose and laying out what they are looking for. But to have other teachers give them input then has been a very big win for us. So I think that's something that's very valuable and something that we'll keep doing…

Having different staffing patterns and schedules at high schools

Coach 2, who is also working at the high school level, was facing a unique set of challenges, including staffing patterns and teacher schedules. During the interview, Coach 2 expressed that some key practices were not feasible at the high school level. For example, co-teaching was not possible for most teacher-coach pairs, given the

specialized learning content knowledge at this level. Additionally, staffing patterns and teacher schedules made SCC's one-on-one meetings nearly impossible, given high school teachers demanding schedules and the greater ratio of teachers to coaches at this level. As Coach 2 noted, "At the high school level, our system makes it very difficult to get the coaching cycles going with our teachers when they have 150 students, and they are grading continually."

Facilitation factors in the implementation

Regarding facilitating factors, interviews with teachers and coaches revealed that when a specific set of conditions for student-centered coaching are present, it can effectively shape instruction and promote positive student outcomes. The specific conditions cited by the respondents are principals' understanding and appreciating the value of coaching, having protected time for coaching, some intrinsic factors and having a coach with extensive experience.

Principals' understanding and appreciating the value of coaching

Respondents generally felt that student-centered coaching was most effective when principals were aware of the benefits of coaching as demonstrated in the following quotes offered by one of the coaches. Coach 2:

> I think it's an incredibly healthy way for us to improve our teachers' practice. I think just the big picture, I believe really strongly in coaching as separated from evaluation. I think especially principals typically think evaluation is coaching. That's how they see the process. For us, I think it's just more about learning to do it well and building a culture where that's the routine.

One of the teachers, Teacher 5, also cited the principal as a facilitating factor in the implementation of the training program when she said, "My principal facilitated my professional development because he always set the tone that we are all learners, and he modelled that behavior as an individual."

Having protected time for coaching

Coaches indicated that when their role was understood and utilized properly by the principal, they could coach teachers effectively. While coaches had other duties, some principals worked to ensure that those duties did not impede on coaches' time to work with teachers. According to the interviewed coaches, having time to meet with teachers to explore teacher practice and student evidence in-depth requires consistent meetings. Indeed, consistent meetings increased coaches' ability to complete a coaching cycle with teachers. Coach 2 stated, "It's way easier for us when we have a common vision with the principal for what coaching should look like or what we all want it to look like."

Intrinsic factors

The coaches reported additional factors that supported the successful implementation of SCC. These included intrinsic factors such as teacher motivation and openness to coaching. Coaches shared that teachers who were open to coaching and desired to become better teachers tended to be more successful coaching candidates. As Coach 3 shared:

> Her goal was to be a better teacher of math basically in general terms and to support student learning. We looked at the mathematical practices within the common core. So making sense of problems and preserving and solving and modelling with math and using appropriate tools. So those were the goals for the kids, but in a way, they were also sort of her goals too because she was trying to figure out how can I show them these tools and release them to use them. What's the best way to do that? That was our work.

Having a coach with extensive experience

Teachers participating in the study all indicated that one of the most important factors in implementing the student-centered coaching program is having a coach who has extensive experience across a wide range of grade levels and subject areas. Concerning the issue, Teacher 3 said that "The coach had experience and knowledge in a broad range of subject areas and levels, which was useful to deepen our current knowledge base."

Perceived Impacts of the Student-Centered Coaching Model

When asked to provide specific examples of impacts the SCC model had, the participants overwhelmingly described changes in areas of teacher practice and student learning, improvement in teacher self-efficacy, and development of collaboration among professionals.

Positive changes in teacher practice and student learning

Teachers and coaches both reported that student-centered coaching was an effective way to change teacher practice and ultimately impact student learning. New teachers expressed that their work is intricate and requires a high level of intentionality and that maintaining an intentional focus can be difficult when teachers are overwhelmed by all that happens in a classroom in a day. Teachers reported benefits to their teaching practice from having the time to reflect with a coach on a specific aspect of their practice, improve it, and see improvement in their students. Under these circumstances, they could understand their practice in a new way and adjust it to meet students' needs. As Teacher 5 noted:

> The greatest benefits I think for me were talking through problems in my instructional practice with another educator… Even though we encourage each other by mentioning this portion of the day on this day, this part of the week, or whatever, it's not the same as talking with my colleagues

> after class. We are going to say, we're going to sit down, and the whole point is going to be to improve your practice, not let off steam, not a lesson plan for the next day, but like actually look closely at what's happening in your classroom. Just having that is probably the best benefit for me.

With regard to achieving practice change, one coach described a teacher's shift in how she utilized coaching to integrate the use of assessment and student data into her practice, something this teacher previously had not done. Coach 3:

> She needed to design an assessment because that's part of the requirement of even selecting your students. So we spent a lot of time on the assessment; the assignment itself; the assessment piece that would be used; and her gathering her students and then what her moves would be making with her mid-semester check-in; you know her actual teaching. So that they'd be able to do their mid-year assessment and then the end-of-year assessment.

Besides, some respondents described emerging changes in student classroom behavior that they attributed to SCC. For example, Teacher 6 stated:

> I think what I've seen in this cycle is the evidence of students taking on the strategies we were teaching them—taking on the language that we were using with kids about math. They were starting to use that language with each other and in their explanations to us. So, those were the real observed differences I saw.

Another teacher, Teacher 2, expressed that he observed a positive change in the attitudes of his students towards lessons and the instructional activities he used in class. Although he did not use any pre and post-test to check the attitudes of his students before and after he received coaching, he reported an improvement in student participation and engagement in his lesson based on his observation.

Improvement in teacher self-efficacy

Most of the interviewed teachers also indicated that coaching contributed to their feeling of growth in their professional development. They stated they had improvements in many aspects of their teaching practice compared to their practices before being supported by their coaches. One of the teachers, Teacher 4, stated that "I feel more confident now as I believe in my ability to design learning experiences to help my students meet their learning goals." Another teacher talked about the change in her instructional skills by saying:

> I can say I've gained an important practice change in my instruction. I've started integrating the use of assessment and student data into my practice and into planning the whole teaching process, which is something I previously had not done.

Development of collaboration among professionals

Additionally, teachers explained that because of the collaborative approach their coaches used to guide them to meet their students' learning needs, they could develop a collaborative professional setting. Teacher 2 claimed that "Through cycles of goal-setting, assessment, instruction, and reflection in collaboration with an instructional

coach and gathering with other teachers to grow and develop professionally together, we could develop a collaborative professional culture." Another teacher mentioned that SCC provided them opportunities to take part in professional dialogues for improvement, which helped them gain further content knowledge and also improved her skills to impact her students' learning in a good way. Similarly, two other teachers emphasized that they had improved their content knowledge because they regularly shared ideas about the subject area with their colleagues and coaches and that they had improved their pedagogical approaches because they had the opportunity to take risks and try new strategies in their teaching. It seems that SCC has contributed to most of the participating teachers' self-efficacy, their pedagogical knowledge, and their developing and adapting of a collaborative professional culture.

Conclusion, Discussion and Suggestions

Educational research points out a link between student learning and teacher professional development. Sweeney and Harris (2017) claimed that student-centered coaching facilitates teachers to meet their students' learning needs as a professional development model. The current study investigated the impact of the student-centered instructional coaching model on the instructional practices of teachers working in a school district in the Northern USA.

The qualitative data collected from teachers and coaches revealed useful information about the SCC model, its implementation, and its impact on teachers' professional development. First, the findings of the study indicated that SCC was an effective way to change teacher practice and ultimately impact student learning. The model was found to effectively change the way coaches positively support teachers. That is, the SCC was helpful in transforming their coaching roles and practices from an expert judging and evaluating the performance of teachers to equal collaborators of teachers responsible for helping them focus on their students' learning. This dramatic change in their roles and practices resulted in coaches' having a non-threatening, collaborative relationship with teachers and supporting them in looking at their teaching practice in-depth. This finding of the study supports the previous research of Collins (2021). In a similar way, in his study, Collins reported that focusing more on student performance and data and less on teachers' instructional practices facilitated the work of instructional coaches. In addition, another researcher who found a positive influence of student-centered coaching on the practices of instructional coaches is Knight (2007). In his study, Knight (2007) found that instructional coaches work more easily with teachers when they base their actions on a partnership approach.

Qualitative data also revealed that two important features of the model contributed to its effectiveness. These are the using change as the ultimate driver of the model and using student data to inform practice change. Moreover, through effective questioning of coaches, the model facilitated teachers' reflection on practice and their developing well-planned instruction that would make an improvement in student learning. This

finding of the study complies with the findings of Collins' (2021) study. In his study, Collins (2021) mentioned the partnership with an instructional coach and the focus on student success as the two main factors within the coaching process that greatly impact teacher self-efficacy.

Another point that makes the model very effective was found to be the Learning Labs. Being given the opportunity to observe another teacher during instruction and discuss afterwards as a group to further their learning seemed to facilitate teachers' professional development to a great extent. Thus, it can be concluded that giving both the observed teacher and the observer the opportunity to collaborate and reflect upon the observed lesson, instead of the observer' just watching the teacher without any analysis or discussion can better serve the coaching process. A similar finding was reported by Grimm, Kaufman and Doty (2014). They suggested that giving observed and observing teachers the chance to discuss the observed lesson is the best way to complete teacher observations for coaching purposes.

The qualitative data also indicated crucial findings for the challenges experienced in implementing the model. Regarding these issues hindering the implementation of the SCC model, it was found that reaching some veteran teachers who perceive the SCC as a form of evaluation or remediation can be demanding. This can be because these teachers are familiar with previous supervision techniques that leaders used to evaluate teachers. However, coaching as a means for professional development arose in the late 1980s as a response to such evaluative techniques (Nelson & Sassi, 2000). Thus, different from previous approaches, this recent approach to training encourages teachers to reflect on their teaching strategies and practices rather than observing their practices and evaluating how much they apply district-imposed strategies (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). Therefore, it is recommended that the districts adequately inform veteran teachers about the SCC model and its non-evaluative and judgmental nature. However, their reluctance may also result from some other factors like being confident in their professional skills, having a negative past experience regarding professional training or not being convinced of the benefits of coaching.

Another challenge that emerged at the end of the data analysis process is impeding coaching time by assigning coaches some other administrative or coordination duties. When coaches are given some other responsibilities, they certainly will not be able to serve effectively as instructional coaches since these responsibilities take up most of their time. As a result, this may impair the effectiveness of the coaching model. This finding of the study aligns with the previous research findings. Hebgen (2017) mentioned the limited amount of time dedicated to coaching to engage in coaching cycles as a challenge of the process. He stated that coaches who are also held responsible for assessment coordination and facilitation, meetings, and the coordination of resources do not have enough time for coaching cycles, and this affects their main service as coaches (Hebgen, 2017).

In addition, it was found that integrating the SCC model in the schedule of a school may not be straightforward. Especially the coaches working at the high school level reported

that they faced a unique set of challenges in the implementation of the model because of the staffing patterns and teacher schedules in high schools. As the number of teachers from different subject areas is higher in high schools, it may be more difficult to pair teachers with coaches with the same content knowledge. Also, as the number of students they teach in several different classes may be more, having one-to-one coaching cycles is probably more difficult. A similar challenge in implementing student-centered instructional coaching was mentioned by Hebgen (2017). In his study, Hebgen (2017) mentioned that it is a difficult task to include instructional coaching into a school day and navigating other responsibilities might cause problems in implementing the model. This finding of the current study may suggest that context makes a difference in implementation; thus, prior to implementing the SCC model, the context variables need to be evaluated and context-specific plans should be formulated.

The study also made some conclusions about the facilitating factors for the SCC model. Based on the data analysis, it was suggested that for a better implementation of the model, it is important that principals understand and appreciate the value of coaching, and coaches work directly with principals to align coaching goals with school improvement goals. Another crucial factor for a smooth implementation of the model emerged to be that principals protect coaching time and provide resources for teachers to work with coaches through a coaching cycle. This finding of the study supports the previous findings of Killion's (2013) study. The findings of his study emphasized that successful coaching begins with school leaders who develop capacity and advocate and create support systems for professional learning.

Besides the external factors such as a principle facilitating the coaching cycles, intrinsic factors were identified to contribute to the effectiveness of the coaching process. To illustrate, teacher motivation and openness to coaching were among the factors supporting the success of the SCC. This finding of the study makes sense as previous research also claimed that adults are driven more by internal motivation and the desire to achieve (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011).

Concerning the perceived impact of the SCC model, qualitative data reflected that the participants perceived student-centered coaching as an effective model for improving both teacher practice and, ultimately student learning. It is possible to claim that teachers have the chance to reflect on a specific aspect of their practice with the guidance of a coach, and this helps them understand their practice in a new way and adjust it to meet students' needs. Through the coaching cycles they engage in, teachers could focus on student learning targets and make any adjustments when needed to improve their performance based on student data, just as planned by Sweeney (2011).

The findings of the study also suggested that SCC contributed to the self-efficacy of the participating teachers' by changing their own perceptions and beliefs of being able to improve student learning outcomes. Through their partnership with an instructional coach and the collaborative professional culture created within the coaching process, the teachers could improve their content and pedagogical knowledge, which led to improved self-efficacy. This finding of the study supports previous research claiming that

participating in a student-centered coaching cycle impacts teacher self-efficacy (Collins, 2021).

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher made some recommendations to help address potential challenges in implementing the SCC in the future because when the necessary conditions for effective implementation are met, coaching is likely to result in enhancements in teacher practice. To start with, principals have an important role in the success of the model. When principals promote a culture of collaboration around addressing inconsistencies in student learning, veteran teachers are more likely to view coaching as a benefit to their practice. Also, principals who have a clear vision for coaching protect time for coaching, and when coaching time is protected, teachers may not suffer from inconsistent meetings with their coach or incomplete coaching cycles. Further, principals who have a vision for coaching will frequently meet with coaches to align the focus of coaching and other professional development to school improvement plans. Also, coaching needs to be linked to larger instructional goals and school improvement.

This requires a consistent districtwide strategy for instructional coaching and supports for leadership in implementing coaching within buildings. This strategy could include, for example, emphasizing to principals that meeting regularly with coaches is beneficial in that principals are more aware of the problems of practice and how coaching can align with school improvement goals.

Another finding of the study also suggested that there is a need for modifying the SCC model so that it can be adopted more effectively in different school settings. For example, in the high school context, the SCC model was not a great fit. The one-on-one coaching model was found to be unrealistic for high school teachers and coaches, given the high ratio of teachers to coaches. Therefore, it is suggested that context determines the success of the implementation, and contextual variables should be considered, and context-specific plans should be developed.

The current study's findings have implications for practices of professional development of teachers both in national and international contexts. As it was found that the coaching support effectively improved participating teachers' instructional practices, people responsible for training teachers may consider using student-centered coaching as a model to support teachers in their endeavor to meet the needs of their students. In the national context, it is worth using the model, which focuses on student learning and student growth. SCC has the potential to transform the current teacher induction model in Turkey. Using the approaches to student-centered coaching may be possible not only to support the professional development of new teachers but also to make a difference in students' learning. Other features of the model include using student needs as a lens for improvement not only for students but also for new teachers, providing a non-threatening professional development environment, enabling collaborative teacher-coach relationships, using activities that encourage teachers to reflect on their practice and their learners' needs, having new teachers observe other teachers during instruction and discuss their observations afterwards to further their learning; a non-threatening

professional development environment; a non-threatening professional development environment; a collaborative teacher-coach relationship; a collaborative teacher-coach relationship. In addition, for effective professional development of teachers, principal support was identified to be a critical factor. Thus, it is important that principals be adequately informed about the significance of coaching, provide protected time and resources for coaching cycles, and cooperate with coaches to align the school improvement goals with coaching goals.

Although the study revealed critical findings of the SCC model, it also has some limitations. The current study was based on the perceptions of teachers and the coaches regarding the effectiveness of the model on the instructional practice of teachers and the implementation process of the model. The interviews were only conducted at the end of the implementation, so it is not possible to conclude whether there was a change in their perception before and after the implementation of the model. It would be useful to conduct pre and post interviews to compare the participants' notions of the SCC model before and after the implementation. Additionally, although some respondents described changes in student classroom behavior, this research cannot suggest that SCC influences student achievement outcomes and student success are not measured in this study. It would be interesting to investigate further the relationship between SCC and student achievement in future research.

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