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# Teachers' Perceptions of Enhancing Student Achievement Through Scripted and Teacher-Developed Curriculum

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Katherine Ann Marie Sudduth

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2020

Abstract

Teachers' Perceptions of Enhancing Student Achievement Through Scripted and

Teacher-Developed Curriculums

by

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Ed.S, Walden University, 2011

MA, Walden University, 2009

BA, University of Memphis, 2004

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Walden University

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## Abstract

District administrators in a school district in Georgia are concerned that after 5 years of implementing a mandated scripted curriculum, the high school continues to post failing scores on standardized tests. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine teachers' perceptions of and experiences with teaching the Common Core Standards with scripted curriculums provided by the school district and teaching the same standards using teacher-developed curriculums. The conceptual framework for this study was based on the theories of constructivism and differentiated instruction. Qualitative data were collected through 1 initial and 1 follow-up interview with 8 teachers (3 English, 2 mathematics, 1 science, and 2 social studies teachers) who have experience teaching with scripted curriculums and teaching using teacher-developed curriculums. Data analysis included coding to determine categories, patterns, and common themes. Key findings revealed 3 themes: (a) teachers' perceptions of student achievement regarding each curriculum type, (b) teachers' experiences implementing each curriculum type, and (c) teachers' recommendations for improving student performance, implementing each curriculum type, and improving each curriculum type. Based on these findings, it is recommended that administrators offer effective professional development for implementing each curriculum type. The results of this study may help school leaders understand how to bridge the gap between the current curriculum and the various needs of students at different ability levels with different capacities.

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## Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Standards-based instruction is a method of instruction, assessment, and grading centered on students demonstrating mastery of the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn throughout students' education (McMillan, 2013; Wenzel & Wenzel, 2014). Standards-based instruction was introduced to ensure that teachers prepare students, especially in Title I schools, to be college and/or career ready with specifications of how teachers and students will work to meet their education goals. The specified curriculum includes the concepts to be taught (Common Core Standards), the instructions on how to teach the concepts, and the order to teach the concepts from kindergarten through 12th grade for all students (Dresser, 2012; Krueger & Sutton, 2001). The curriculum, as a result, has become a prescribed set of skills guiding all instruction (Celedon-Pattichis, 2010; Tomlinson, 2014). This trend in Title I high schools to give teachers exact content is based on the expectation that if teachers adhere to a consistent form of delivery prescribed by the curriculum designer, then all students will learn equally and reach the same goal (Darder & Torres, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

The curriculum provided with standards-based instruction has some benefits such as support for beginning teachers. However, when tasked with teaching a preformatted, scripted curriculum with step-by-step directions, teachers are not able to individualize lessons for students' particular needs (Santoro, 2016). Some students have gaps in certain areas of instruction or have misunderstandings about some concepts or a lesson (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014). As a result, while the aim of a standardized approach appears to make sense, using a scripted curriculum has the opposite effect

because a prescriptive curriculum is restrictive and does not allow for differentiated instruction (Wyatt, 2014).

Teachers and students are individuals. Students from diverse backgrounds require different curriculum and may need an infusion of culturally responsive instruction to fully meet their needs and path through education (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2012; Cavilla, 2013). Differentiation is an approach to curriculum and instruction in which teachers consider student differences in designing opportunities for each student to engage with information and ideas and to develop essential skills (Dixon et al., 2014). Teachers who differentiate their instruction respond to the individual needs of their students.

Teachers need to be able to adapt their approach to teaching and adjust the curriculum to fit different learners rather than expect learners to adjust to the curriculum (Dixon et al., 2014). Students who come from diverse backgrounds (special needs, gifted, grade-level) have different learning styles and deserve to have culturally responsive curriculums so they can be successful (Ford, 2011; Griner & Stewart, 2013). Expecting teachers to offer the same curriculum and instruction to all students denies individual differences and supposes that students can learn effectively outside their zone of proximal development (ZPD; Suprayogi, Valcke, & Godwin, 2017; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2014). Teacher who recognize students' varying background knowledge, readiness, and learning styles and interests are teachers who differentiate (Dixon et al., 2014). While the scripted curriculum is offered to ensure that teachers are teaching the Common Core Standards as well as following the school district's mandated curriculum, the tight script does not

allow teachers the leeway to adjust the content or to adjust the curriculum to effectively differentiate instruction (Darder & Torres, 2004; Tomlinson, 2014).

### **Problem Statement**

District administrators are concerned that after 5 years of implementing the previously mandated scripted curriculums, Urban High School (a pseudonym for the school site in this study) in the state of Georgia is posting failing scores on standardized tests. In response to the falling scores, district administrators granted administrators at the local high school the autonomy to implement teacher-developed standards-based curriculums (see Table 1). The problem in the local school setting is that the scripted lessons might limit teachers' flexibility in addressing the multiple learning needs of their students. The scripted curriculums are aligned to the Common Core State Standards, but may not provide flexibility for working with students who have different levels of academic preparation or learning abilities. Scripted standardized curriculums can make it difficult for teachers to respond to the unique learning needs of their students because scripted curriculums tell teachers what to teach, for how long, and when to teach particular aspects of the curriculum (Labaree, 2014; Milner, 2014) rather than allowing teachers to make adjustments in instruction based on student needs.

The scripted standards-based curriculums used by teachers at Urban High School were designed to cover material students will be tested on. However, Urban High School remains ranked as one of the lowest scoring schools in the district on state and district assessments (College and Career Ready Performance Index [CCRPI], 2017). As

demonstrated by the test scores, scripted curriculums being implemented by the teachers are not achieving the desired learning results.

In Urban High School, all students are expected to achieve at the same level, at the same time, and with the same materials. For example, the students at this school are required to take end-of-course assessments in English, math, science, and social studies. These tests are taken throughout the students' high school career. Each school year, the school administrators set specific goals for passing these tests and hold all teachers responsible for meeting the goals set. The guidelines for this curriculum are laid out in a scope and sequence that detail the school year week by week. District administrators mandate that teachers to follow this roadmap as well as the timeline in it. However, after 5 years of implementing the scripted curriculums and failing scores on standardized tests, the district administrators granted the administrators at the research site the autonomy to implement teacher-developed standards-based curriculums (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Standardized Test Score Results as a Percentage of Proficient and Nonproficient Students, 2013–2017*

Test scores by year	Students not meeting proficiency (%)	Students meeting proficiency (%)
2013	17.4%	82.6%
2014 (scripted curriculum implemented)	24.2%	75.7%
2015 (scripted curriculum implemented)	29.7%	70.4%
2016 (scripted curriculum implemented)	44.6%	55.3%
2017 (scripted curriculum implemented)	45.5%	54.6%

*Note.* Adapted from Georgia Department of Education (2017) information.

## **New Performance Standards for the State**

In 2012, the state of Georgia was granted a waiver by the U.S. Department of Education to replace the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and its requirements for adequate yearly progress with new measures called the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI; 2013). CCRPI are used to assess schools and school districts on a 100-point scale. The scripted standards-based curriculums developed using the Common Core State Standards were designed with the idea of maximizing the points earned for CCPRI.

CCRPI is broken into three categories. The first category is achievement and is worth 60 possible points. Achievement consists of three indicators: (a) content mastery, which looks at student achievement on standardized tests to determine how well a school is doing with instruction; (b) post high school readiness, which looks at areas that have proven to help students be prepared for the next level of school; and (c) graduation rates, which looks at a school's 4-year and 5-year graduation rate (Georgia Department of Education, 2017). The second category is progress and is worth 25 possible points. Progress is calculated based on the percentage of the school's students demonstrating typical or high growth via student growth percentiles. Student growth percentiles describe a student's growth on state tests relative to other students' growth statewide (Georgia Department of Education, 2017). The last category is achievement gap and is worth 15 possible points. When the graduation rate or achievement gap score is attained by a school, that school is awarded points for their progress in closing the achievement gap on state tests. Instead of having to show absolute progress in student achievement, as with



No Child Left Behind, a school must show relative progress in student achievement compared to other students and schools from the school district.

In addition to the three criteria, some schools can receive up to 10 Challenge Points to add to their score (Georgia Department of Education, 2017) if a considerable number of students are members of subpopulations, such as economically disadvantaged, English language learners, or students with disabilities, and if students in these groups meet the expectations required during the school year. Because students from these subpopulations or other subgroups at Urban High School did not meet the expectations required during an academic year, the school did not receive the Challenge Points. In 2017, the school did not show adequate growth in the criteria of achievement, progress, or achievement gap (Georgia Department of Education, 2017) because students from the aforementioned subpopulations did not perform well (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Scores of Subpopulations on Standardized Tests Using the Scripted Curriculum 2017*

Subpopulations	Achievement points (students meeting performance targets)	Progress	Achievement gap	Challenge points earned
Economically disadvantaged	0	0	0	0
English language Learners	0	0	0	0
Students with disabilities	0	0	0	0
School (excluding the subpopulations)	34.1	15.8	12.5	0
Total	34.1	15.8	12.5	0

*Note.* Adapted from Georgia Department of Education (2017) information

Even though the current curriculum is designed to move students through the Common Core Standards, the strict timelines embedded within the curriculum may not allow teachers to adjust instruction for students who have not yet mastered the expected curriculum. Because teachers cannot deviate from the script to answer students' questions or to include students' interests with the material, the curriculum might not appear to be relevant to the students (Dresser, 2012). While the script serves the needs of the teachers of Urban High School to be consistent in implementing the standards and the script gives administrators a sense that required materials are being covered in every classroom, the individual needs, imagination, and rights of students are not being served in accordance with federal mandates (Harwood, 2016).

### **Structural Design of Urban High School**

Urban High School is an educational complex that consists of three small schools. Each small school has a different pathway or focus, is located on its own floor, has its own principal, and its own student body consisting of 300–325 students. The student body in this Urban High School is 92% African American, 6% Hispanic, 2% mixed races, and less than 1% White (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). Of the student population, 51% of the students are classified as high-risk students (students who are considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school), and 16% of the students receive special education services. Magnet High School, a pseudonym for one of the small schools located inside of the educational complex, houses the highest population of special education students of any of the schools in the

educational complex. Most of the teachers at Magnet High School are African American, along with one White and one Pakistani teacher.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine teachers' perceptions of and experiences with teaching the Common Core Standards with scripted curriculums provided by the school district as opposed to teaching the same standards using teacher-developed curriculums. There were eight teachers at Magnet High School who participated. Scripted curriculums are defined as teaching materials resulting in the teacher being given exact content and a prescribed method for delivering the content; teacher-developed curriculums are defined as teaching materials that implement standards and are designed by teachers (Darder & Torres, 2004; Graff, 2011; Tomlinson, 2014). Conducting this study may help educators understand how to bridge the gap between the current scripted curriculum and the various learning needs of the students. With the teacher-developed curriculums, additional time for students to show mastery of standards can be embedded.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions (RQs) for this case study were developed from the problem statement and purpose for the study. The following research questions guided the development of this study:

RQ1: How do teachers describe their experiences using scripted curriculums in instruction?

RQ2: How do teachers describe their experiences using teacher-developed curriculums in instruction?

RQ3: What recommendations do teachers have for improving students' performance based on their experiences with scripted curriculums and teacher-developed curriculums?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The framework for this qualitative case study was developed from the theories of constructivism and differentiated instruction. Constructivism and differentiated instruction helped align the literature review, data collection, and data analysis to understand how curriculum is designed, how this study was designed, and how the data were analyzed. Constructivism is a theory that espouses that the interaction between the teacher and the student is cocreated, and differentiated instruction, an application of constructivist theory in a classroom, focuses on teaching to individual learning styles (Wang, Bruce, & Hughs, 2013). Constructivism theory and differentiated instruction, an application of constructivist theory, work together well, as the theory and its application can facilitate understanding of a school curriculum and classroom needs, offering insight into the use of scripted and teacher-developed curriculums.

#### **Constructivism**

Constructivism (Amineh & Asl, 2015) is a sociocultural theory that considers that knowledge is constructed through interaction shared by individuals. Sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978; Wang et al., 2013) describe learning and development as being embedded within social events and occurring as a learner interacts with other people,

objects, and events in a collaborative environment. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural approach to learning explained the ZPD, the difference between what a learner can do without help and what a learner can do with help. This theory measures the relationship between the teachers' instruction and the students' development and emphasizes the importance of teachers understanding the instructional needs of all students.

Vygotsky (1978) described ZPD as the area in which students learn. In the classroom, students move past their ZPD when working with other students and with the assistance of the teacher. Blackburn, Cornish, and Smith (2016) and Matthews and Castellano (2014) indicated that the significance of ZPD relates to students' individual development rather than their skill development in any one specific academic area. Teachers meet students at their ZPD or levels of knowledge, thus differentiating instruction to better serve the needs of different students.

### **Differentiated Instruction**

The second conceptual framework that guided this case study was differentiated instruction. Tomlinson (2014) defined a differentiated classroom as one "where teachers provide specific ways for each individual student to learn without assuming one student's way of learning is identical to anyone else's" (p. 4). Hall, Vue, Strangman, and Meyer (2003) contended that the intent of differentiated instruction is to maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where they are rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum. The responsibility of teachers is to create instructional tasks in which students collaboratively or independently engage in learning activities geared toward their level of ability (Davin, 2013; Vygotsky,

1978). Bofferding, Kemmerle, and Murata (2012) defined differentiated instruction as a teaching theory that allows teachers to tailor instruction and establish high expectations for all students based on the students' individual needs. Tomlinson's (2014) theory of differentiated instruction calls for teachers to recognize and take advantage of opportunities to enhance student learning through instruction, which is tailored to the students' needs.

Tomlinson (2000, 2014) developed a theory of differentiated instruction that consists of the effort of the teacher to respond to variance among learners in a classroom. Tomlinson's contributions include a principle-guided method to approach teaching and learning that positions instruction as only one of the key elements in a classroom system. This system consists of four interdependent parts—(a) the learning environment, (b) the curriculum, (c) assessment, and (d) instructional strategies—thus guiding teachers in addressing student differences and emphasizing the importance of the quality of each element in student success. The model indicates teachers can modify or differentiate content (what students are expected to learn) or curriculum, process (how students gain access to, explore, and express what they are expected to learn) or learning environment and instruction, and product (how students demonstrate what they have learned after extended periods of learning) or assessment as a means of attempting to study and respond appropriately to student need and variance. Tomlinson and Imbeau's (2010) framework for differentiated instruction adopts the position that each of the four elements (learning environment, curriculum, assessment, and instruction) must be shaped and cultivated to provide opportunities for students to maximize their learning capacity; this

cannot be done unless the teacher has the autonomy to offer various routes to accomplishing essential learning outcomes (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). In short, Tomlinson's (2014) theory describes the necessity for differentiating instruction to improve student achievement.

### **Nature of the Study**

This qualitative case study was conducted through individual interviews of eight teachers from Magnet High School, which is located on the second floor of the educational complex of Urban High School in the state of Georgia. Yin (2014) stated that a case study provides an understanding of a specific group or phenomenon. For this study, I used rich descriptions (see Fusch & Ness, 2015; Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015) to concentrate on observing how teachers implement scripted and teacher-developed standards-based curriculums. I also employed questions tied to the research questions guiding this study during the interviews to gain a better understanding of their experiences with and perceptions of each curriculum type as it pertains to enhancing student achievement. Qualitative case studies provide an opportunity for the researcher to gain a deep view of the research problem and may facilitate describing, understanding, and explaining a research problem or situation (Baskarada, 2014; Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case study approach was best suited for this qualitative research study because it provided an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions of and experiences with scripted curriculums and teacher-developed curriculums. This study sought to understand teachers' perceptions of and experiences with scripted and teacher-developed curriculums through individual interviews of curriculum

implementation. With the case study research design, the researcher does not need to recruit a large number of participants to increase validity (Mason, 2017; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To gather enriched information carefully, the researcher must consider the number of participants in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this case study, I recruited eight teachers who have experience implementing scripted standards-based curriculums as well as teacher-developed standards-based curriculums.

For this case study, eight participants were recruited to offer their perspectives through interviews regarding implementing scripted and teacher-developed standards-based curriculums and follow-up interviews. Palinkas et al. (2015) established that a researcher should identify and select individuals or who have knowledge about or experience with a phenomenon of interest. This purposeful selection included eight teachers (three English teachers, three mathematics teachers, two science teachers, and one social studies teacher) who have experience implementing both scripted curriculums and teacher-developed standards-based curriculums. These teachers have 5 or more years of teaching experience, have experience using scripted and teacher-developed curriculums, have been granted permission to implement teacher-developed curriculums at Magnet High School, and are currently implementing teacher-developed curriculums at Magnet High School.

For this qualitative case study, the data I collected from the interviews were organized into categories that serve to create a picture of the study through the themes and concepts that emerge (Mason, 2017). Stake (2013) elucidated that the case study design is useful in identifying themes and analyzing data. The case study approach allows



the researcher to examine and explore the shared experiences of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). With a qualitative case study design, I explored teachers' experiences with and perceptions of scripted and teacher-developed standards-based curriculums.

### **Operational Definitions**

The definitions pertinent to this study include the following:

*Differentiated instruction:* A method of approaching teaching and learning with groups of students who are in the same class but possess different capabilities (Dixon et al., 2014; Huebner, 2010).

*Differentiation:* A variety of teaching techniques and lesson variations educators use to teach a diverse group of students, with diverse learning needs in the same learning environment (Dixon et al., 2014; Huebner, 2010).

*Scripted curriculum:* A standardized approach to teaching resulting in the teacher being given exact content and a prescribed method for delivering the content; it is a prescribed set of skills leading instruction (Darder & Torres, 2004; Tomlinson, 2014).

*Standards-based:* A type of instruction, assessment, and grading based on students demonstrating mastery of the content and skills they are expected to learn (Allard, 2014).

*Teacher-developed standards-based curriculums:* *Curriculums* that implement standards and are designed and planned by the teacher (Graff, 2011).

### **Assumptions**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined an assumption as the act of taking an idea to be true without having proof. This study was based on the following assumptions: (a) the study participants received professional development pertaining to implementing scripted curriculums; (b) the participants would accurately report their perceptions of and experiences with implementing scripted curriculums; and (c) the participants would be truthful in their responses to the interview questions.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of the study was a high school that currently mandates the use of scripted curriculums in the core subject areas: English, math, science, and social studies. This study was delimited to three English teachers, three math teachers, two science teachers, and one social studies teachers for a total of 10 participants. All the participants in this study are employed at the study site and are mandated to follow the scripted curriculums designed for their respective subjects.

### **Limitations**

This study took place in one of the three small schools in the Urban High School educational complex. Because Magnet High School only has one principal, two assistant principals (who are shared amongst all three schools), and 28 teachers, the sample size is small. Having a small sample size could mean that the study might not be taken seriously by other academic researchers. Care was taken when attempting to generalize from the findings. Teachers may also be hesitant to participate in this study due to lack of time to

complete interview questions or fear of retaliation from administrators for sharing their perceptions.

### **Significance**

The implementation of the current scripted curriculum for this Title I high school may not allow teachers to adjust instruction for individual student learning needs.

Marlowe and Canestrari (2006) stated that a teacher must understand each child's unique learning differences and address these variances accordingly. Therefore, it is important for teachers to adapt instruction for each student's needs.

The current scripted curriculum was written to make positive gains in student achievement because the district administrators were not satisfied with students' performance on standardized tests. As a means of tracking student gains, assessments that replicate the structure of the end-of-course assessments are embedded within the current curriculum. These assessments focus on a large amount of information, which may fulfill federal mandates, but cover so much information that students may not be able to retain it (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2014). The district administrators' decision to embed these assessments into the current scripted curriculums dismisses the idea that students move along different paths at different rates as they seek mastery of the curriculum (Tomlinson, 2000; Vaughn, Parsons, Gallagher, & Branen, 2015; Voltz, Sims, & Nelson, 2010).

At this urban Title I high school, options on how to teach are reduced to one modality instead of considering other aspects of education such as the learning environment, instructional strategies, and differences in learning styles and abilities.

Classrooms that deny students the opportunity for critical thinking, self-reflection, and imagination are *dead zones* where good students are not challenged and students who may be struggling are also not motivated to learn (Giroux, 2010). If all the input (scripted lessons) is the same and all the output (student achievement) is the same, this can have a devastating effect on the development and implementation of rich and relevant curriculum and instruction (Rakow, 2008).

The assumption that making gains in student achievement is achieved by having a one-size-fits-all approach underlies the scripted curriculum. In too many scenarios, teachers are teaching directly to the test (Cummins, 2007; Orosco & Abdulrahim, 2017). In those cases, the test itself becomes the curriculum. Far too often, teachers bypass lessons they have because they have to teach to the test (Reiser, 2017; Wiggins, 2011). If the outcomes cannot be boiled down to simple “I can . . .” statements, then teachers seem to omit potentially meaningful learning opportunities from the school year (Dresser, 2012). This kind of decontextualized learning is meaningless for students and inhibits their motivation to learn (Vaughn et al., 2015; Voltz et al., 2010). According to a personal communication with an educator at the school in 2016, the scripted curriculums used at Magnet High School do not allow teachers to be innovative and are designed to ensure that teachers teach to the test.

I conducted this study to determine if teachers perceive implementing a teacher-developed standards-based curriculum is more conducive than a scripted curriculum in serving different student learning types and increasing student achievement. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine teachers’ perceptions of and experiences

with teaching the Common Core Standards with scripted curriculums provided by the school district as opposed to teaching the same standards using teacher-developed curriculums. The results of this study can help to understand how to bridge the gap between the current curriculum, the various learning types, and needs of students at different ability levels with different capacities.

### **Summary**

Section 1 presented the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the conceptual framework for the study, the nature of the study, the definitions, the assumptions, the scope and delimitations, the limitations, and the significance of the study. Section 2 provides a literature review on differentiated instruction stemming from a constructivist background. Section 3 defends the choice of using a qualitative case study, introduces the research questions pertaining to the study, clarifies the role of the researcher, and explains the data collection and the data analysis plans for this study. In Section 4, I discuss the setting, data collection process, the data analysis process, and the results and evidence of trustworthiness. Section 5 includes the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and a conclusion.

## Section 2: Literature Review

This section provides the framework for understanding the concept of implementing scripted curriculums as well as teacher-developed standards-based curriculums. This literature review consists of three parts. The introduction of this review includes peer-reviewed studies relating to the use of scripted curriculums and teacher-developed curriculums. A review of literature related to the conceptual framework and theoretical foundation of constructivism and differentiated instruction and the advantages and disadvantages of scripted curriculums and teacher-developed curriculums follows. To conclude this section, there is a review of literature related to methodology followed by a summary and conclusion.

### **Introduction**

Educators consistently deliberate on being effective in their classrooms. While the idea behind scripted curriculums is to guarantee that any teacher will be able to teach the necessary standardized curriculum, prescribed curriculums are restrictive and do not allow for differentiated instruction (Milner, 2014). Teachers must be able to deliver culturally responsive instruction to ensure that students feel connected to the curriculum (Lenski et al., 2016; Toppel, 2012). Scripted curriculums may place constraints on educators' opportunities to engage in meaningful instruction (Parks & Bridges-Rhoads, 2012). Parks and Bridges-Rhoads (2012) also contended that relying too heavily on knowledge of automatized responses that may be laid out by a scripted curriculum can limit a teacher's ability to take advantage of unexpected moments to build content knowledge while drawing on students' thoughts and experiences. This idea of scripted

curriculum raises concerns about whether scripted curriculums are effective in increasing student achievement and whether teacher-developed curriculums can be more effective.

The purpose of scripted curriculums is to provide teachers with exact content to teach with the expectation that if teachers adhere to a consistent form of delivery prescribed by the curriculum designers, then all students will learn equally (Darder & Torres, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Olson & Roberts, 2018). Scripted curriculums may suggest that educators cannot be trusted to provide their students with rigorous instruction suitable to the needs of the students and that teachers are not capable of generating lessons and activities that promote student engagement or stimulate intellectual growth and maturation (Ahmed, 2019; Eisenbach, 2012).

In urban schools, teachers are expected to rely on predetermined scripted curriculums to shape their instructional practices rather than on their own professional judgment (Milner, 2014; Parks & Bridges-Rhoads, 2012). Scripted curriculums outline what the teacher is to teach, what the teacher is to say, how the script should be read, and what teaching strategies are to be used and when (Costello & Costello, 2016). The theory behind the implementation of scripted curriculums is to guarantee that any teacher will be able to teach the necessary standardized curriculum regardless of what skill set the teacher possesses (Au, 2011; MacGillivray, Ardell, Curwen, & Palma, 2004).

Scripted curriculums gained their popularity once 42 states, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education Activity created and implemented the Common Core State Standards. The Common Core consists of academic standards in

math and literacy (English language arts) that outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade (Common Core State Standards). In adopting the Common Core State Standards, school districts became responsible for attaining passing scores on assessments aligned to the Common Core. In turn, school districts implemented the use of scripted curriculums as a way to comply with the district, state, and federal mandates associated with the Common Core (Dresser, 2012; Griffith, 2008; Milosovic, 2007).

Fast-track teacher education programs, such as Teach for America, make scripted curriculums necessary because many of these teachers are not prepared to make rational, appropriate, and responsive curricular decisions (Vasquez Heilig & Jez, 2014). When teachers are not prepared to teach, the scripted curriculum is seen as a tool to help teachers know what to teach, when to teach, and how to teach (Au, 2011). Zhao, Wehmeyer, Basham, and Hansen (2019) upheld that developing scripted curriculum shaped the need to narrow curriculums so that teachers would focus on aspects of the curriculum that would be most likely tested in any given year. Developing scripted curriculums limits the teacher from attending to areas such as differentiated instruction, which might be needed to address an individual student's needs.

Although new teachers and some veteran teachers appreciate curriculum guidance and support, teachers value their autonomy and do not need to be told what to do or how to do it (Mili & Winch, 2019; Schultz & Ravitch, 2013). The focus on standardizing curriculum and tailoring teaching and learning to standardized tests trains students to take tests rather than engaging them in meaningful learning experiences (Carl, 2014). Asking



for more materials, guidance, and support is however different from being told to explicitly teach certain skills using a specific method (Au, 2011).

Scripted curriculums can interfere with and undermine a teacher's ability to teach and can negatively affect student development (Demko & Hedrick, 2010). Students in schools where scripted curriculums are used tend to lag behind students in schools with nonscripted curriculums (Dresser, 2012). Moustafa and Land (2002) found that scripted curriculums are less effective than teacher-developed curriculums because with teacher-developed curriculums, teachers are allowed to use their teaching experience and education to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature review was conducted using Walden University's library of electronic databases, books, and peer-reviewed journal articles to search for key terms: *differentiated instruction, differentiation, scripted curriculum, standards-based, and teacher-developed standards-based curriculums*. The 117 publications selected were read and quotes providing significant insight regarding the terms were cited. While the time frame of focus for the articles selected was from 2014-2019, there were some articles that fell outside of these dates. Earlier dated articles were cited to provide a foundational source and to establish validity for the theories and concepts used in this study. Reading the peer-reviewed journals retrieved from the Educational Resource Information Center and Education Research Complete led to the identification of additional related works.

## **Theoretical Foundation**

Theoretical rationales provide support for the ineffectiveness of scripted curriculums. However, no recent research exists on teachers' perceptions of teaching using scripted and/or teacher-developed curriculums nor is there any recent research on teachers' experiences with implementing scripted and/or teacher-developed curriculums. Constructivism theory and differentiated instruction, an application of constructivism, helped to form the theoretical base for this study.

### **Constructivism**

Constructivism (Tomlinson, 2014) in education emerged as a type of learning centered on the active learner in the teaching and learning process. The significance on individual students during instruction has drawn attention to the knowledge and skills that each individual student brings with them. The prior knowledge that students have has shown to considerably influence the ways students make meaning of instruction.

Constructivism transforms the student from a passive recipient of information to an active participant in the learning process (Wang et al., 2013). Always guided by the teacher, students construct their knowledge actively rather than just mechanically ingesting knowledge from the teacher or the textbook.

Vygotsky's theory of learning and development provided the conceptual foundation for considering that learning occurs first when students interact with people, objects, and events in a collaborative setting (Vygotsky, 1978 as cited in Wang et al., 2013). Vygotsky (1978) deepened the understanding of constructivism by introducing ZPD, which explains the difference between what learners can do without help and what

they can do with help. During the learning process, students are given assistance by a more capable peer or by an adult. With assistance, students are capable of moving through a series of steps that lead to them completing the steps on their own, thus displaying intellectual growth. Vygotsky emphasized the importance of the ZPD because it measures the intellectual potential of an individual instead of what the individual has achieved. This theory expounds on the thought that students need to be met, academically, where they are as individuals in order to learn.

Vygotsky's efforts created the foundation of social constructivism in an educational setting. This theory suggests that knowledge is first constructed in the social context (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Vygotsky's emphasis on the social context in learning has pressed educators to reconsider learning as an individual process. Students learn differently, and this challenges teachers to present information to students in diverse ways and may not allow teachers to use the same method or the same materials to teach students (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2019).

### **Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiated instruction provided a framework for responding to the learning differences in students' current and developing levels of readiness, learning profiles, and interests to optimize the match between students and learning opportunities. The focus of differentiated instruction is to ensure that all students are reaching the same academic goal, but with the tools of differentiated instruction, the process of arriving there is unique for each student (Kang, 2016; Shanton & Valenzuela, 2005; Subban, 2014). Based on the main trends of Vygotsky's theory, the interactive nature of learning, the social

aspect of learning, and scaffolding from the student's ZPD in other regulated ways, until the student can attain a self-regulated state. Differentiated instruction calls for teachers to be aware of the students' readiness level (Shyman, 2012).

## **Review of Related Research**

### **Scripted and Teacher-Developed Curriculums**

Scripted curriculums are standardized curriculums that offer teachers a prescribed method for delivering content. This type of curriculum outlines what the teacher is to say, how the script should be read, and what teaching strategies should be used (Cilliers, Fleisch, Prinsloo, & Taylor, 2019). Teaching is often viewed as a "complex activity that is not amenable to scripted materials or any one size fits all plan for the organization of instruction" (Eisenbach, 2012, p. 154). With scripted curriculums, teachers are not able to customize lessons to fit students' individual needs.

Teacher-developed curriculums are ones written by teachers and allow them to plan instruction and implement standards according to students' individual needs. Research shows that teachers who develop curriculums plan instruction according to prior classroom interactions, personal beliefs, and the observed needs of their students (Eisenbach, 2012; Gay, 2013). In doing so, teacher-developed curriculums allow teachers to build on and connect with the students' cultural literacy (Eslinger, 2014; Evans, Lester, & Broemmel, 2010).

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of Scripted Curriculums**

For many years, educational literature included the advantages and disadvantages of scripted curriculums versus teacher-developed curriculums; thus summarizing the

research to date on this issue presents a challenge (Davis et al., 2014). According to Jimenez, Lo, and Saunders (2014), scripted curriculums are important for student achievement and teacher accountability. The scripted curriculums solve the problem associated with new and inexperienced teachers who are unsure of how to begin the teaching process by providing a support structure to direct teacher behaviors (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Stefanski, 2016; Wyatt, 2014). Santoro (2016) reported that scripted curriculums provide teachers with narratives to recite which gain the learners' attention, link to prior knowledge and/or review the previous information learned and clearly state the objectives of the lesson creating constant interaction between students and teachers. Scripted curriculums offer continuity by using systematic methods for teaching content to ensure students have sufficient information to formulate correct responses to the content (Twyman & Heward, 2018). Furthermore, scripted curriculums provide consistency across classrooms and grade levels, making it easier for teachers to plan lessons and for supervisors to monitor teachers' practices (Wyatt, 2014).

On the contrary, there are many disadvantages of scripted curriculums, which cause concern (Campbell, Torr, & Cologon, 2014). For example, these programs marginalize teachers by not allowing them to make decisions about how to organize lessons and interact with students (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2013; Wyatt, 2014). Critics of scripted curriculums claim that the strict implementation of these programs has contributed to educators feeling constrained by what to teach, the amount of time allotted to individual lessons, and how students should be assessed (Plum, 2016; Tincani & Twyman, 2016). Katz (2015) stated scripted curriculums fail to acknowledge the creative

potential of educators to grapple effectively with a multiplicity of contexts found in classrooms and to shape environments according to the lived experiences and actual educational needs of their students. When teachers are required to use scripted curriculums, both students and teachers, are systematically silenced by the need for the class to cover a generic curriculum at a prescribed pace (Bauml, 2016; Timberlake, Thomas, & Barrett, 2017).

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of Teacher-Developed Curriculums**

Teachers who find ways to connect with students to the curriculum in a variety of ways ensure that they [students] stay engaged throughout the learning experience (Conrad, Moroye, & Uhrmacher, 2015; Kang, 2016). Teacher-developed curriculums acknowledge students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frame references gleaned from students' home and community (Turner & Drake, 2016). In order to meet the needs of all learners, a curriculum has to move beyond low-order skills and focus on higher level, meaning making instruction that is tailored to the students' needs (Adkins, Spesia, & Snakenborg, 2015; Bautista, Brizuela, Glennie, & Caddle, 2014; Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012). An active voice in curriculum development increases teachers' ability to adapt curriculum and adjust learning experiences, including formative assessments so each learner experiences success (Huddleston, 2014).

Huizinga, Handelzalts, Nieveen, and Voogt (2014) argued that teachers often lack the design expertise to develop an effective curriculum. Moreover, Voogt et al. (2015) contended that teachers are not adequately educated in curriculum design, which affects

if and how teachers conduct design activities. Teachers as curriculum designers hardly conduct analysis activities and tend to directly create curriculum materials; consequently, they might neglect important aspects that need to be addressed in the materials (Huizinga et al., 2015).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Teachers' professional expertise is overshadowed using scripted curriculum, which is intended to increase test scores (Milner, 2014). Scripted curriculums limit teachers' abilities to exercise professional judgment, in turn, limiting meaningful learning experiences for students. The research (Milner, 2014) substantiates that teachers prefer having the autonomy to create teacher-developed curriculums by using scripted curriculums.

The information addressed in the literature on scripted curriculums provided the basis for this study. Ultimately, the implementation of either scripted or teacher – developed curriculum will be determined by district and/or school administrators. Section 3 describes the research method for this study. Section 4 provides the findings while Section 5 includes the discussion of findings, the conclusion, and recommendations.

### Section 3: Research Method

#### **Introduction**

Qualitative research is used to explore a problem from the perspective of the participants involved and to also establish themes that may arise during the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The appropriate research design to use for this study was a qualitative design using a case study approach. The case study approach allows researchers to explore a phenomenon in depth in a real-life context (Mason, 2017). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine teachers' perceptions of and experiences with teaching the Common Core Standards with scripted curriculums provided by the school district as opposed to teaching the same standards using teacher-developed curriculums. Through case study research, I investigated an actual case that enabled me to examine teachers' perceptions of and experiences with teaching scripted curriculums as well as teacher-developed curriculums.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

In this study, I sought to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What are teachers' perceptions of and experiences using scripted curriculums?

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions of and experiences using teacher-developed curriculums?

RQ3: What recommendations do teachers have for improving student performance based on their experiences with scripted curriculums and teacher-developed curriculums?



A case study is a qualitative empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and its real-life context within specified boundaries (Rule & John, 2015; Yin, 2014). According to Maxwell (2013), a qualitative research method is best for understanding the meanings and perspectives of the people being studied. A qualitative research method was the best choice for this research study because it allowed high school teachers to discuss their perceptions and experiences with teaching scripted curriculums and teacher-developed curriculums. A quantitative research design focuses on counting and classifying features and constructing statistical models and figures to explain what is observed (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glesne, 2016; Yilmaz, 2013). A quantitative research design would not have provided opportunities to conduct interviews or analyze narratives. A quantitative research design or a mixed-methods research design would have been ineffective because I was not testing a hypothesis, nor was I combining data and/or analysis strategies from both qualitative and quantitative research designs. Additionally, from the data collected and organized during this qualitative research analysis, patterns emerged and led to the acquirement of different questions and concepts. This could not have been obtained using a quantitative research method.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a case study is an appropriate approach when an in-depth investigation is needed to capture the complexity of a unique system. Yin (2014) also wrote that a case study is a preferred strategy when (a) what, how, or why questions are being posed, (b) the researcher has very little control of the events occurring, and (c) the focus is on a current phenomenon within a real-life setting. Merriam (2015) and Maxwell (2013) added that a case study focuses on developing an

in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases and develops an understanding, investigates the aspects, and identifies the phenomenon of the case. The qualitative case study approach also provides opportunities to make comparisons, build theories, or purpose generalizations (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012; Yin, 2014). The case study approach was best suited for this research study because it provided an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions of and experiences with scripted curriculums and teacher-developed curriculums.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I am currently a teacher in the school district at the site of the research study. I have 14 years of high school teaching experience, 7 years of which have been teaching English at the research site. Although I am not the direct supervisor of any of the participants who were asked to participate in this study, I have established a professional relationship with them as I have conducted many professional development workshops for the faculty, have cotaught with teachers during cross-curricular projects, and have modeled effective teaching strategies in several teachers' classes. Working closely with the teachers and developing relations of trust aided me in collecting the data needed to complete this research study. Although I am a teacher in the district and am familiar with the mandated scripted curriculums, I have no experience with teaching the scripted curriculums. I teach advanced placement English classes and am required by the College Board to design and develop an extremely detailed course syllabus that outlines my classes for the entire school year.

Because I am not a supervisor of any of the participants who were asked to participate in this study, influencing the participants in terms of them feeling obligated to partake in the study was not a concern. I have developed a good rapport and strong relationships with the staff of the research site, and this aided in reducing any anxiety the participants may have had about participating in this study.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection**

Magnet High School is one of the high schools located within the Urban High School educational complex in the state of Georgia. Magnet High School has a computer animation and design pathway/focus that offers elective classes for students interested in careers in digital art design, technical engineering, graphic art design, photography, and videography. However, these are not the only elective classes offered; Magnet High School offers traditional electives as well.

Magnet High School has approximately 317 students yearly in Grades 9–12. The population consists of 94% African American, 4% Hispanic, 1% mixed races, and less than 1% White. The entire school receives free lunch. The teachers are placed on grade-level teams. Each grade level consists of a four-to-six-person team of core (math, English, science, and social studies) teachers. Each team has at least one teacher for each core subject; however, the ninth-grade team has an additional math and English teacher, and the 11th- and 12th-grade teams share an additional math and social studies teacher. The core subject teachers are the teachers tasked with teaching the scripted curriculums developed by the district.

Magnet High School has one principal, two assistant principals, one counselor, and 28 teachers. Of the 28 teachers, 20 of them teach a core subject. Of the 20 core subject teachers, 18 have taught using the scripted and teacher-developed curriculums (five teachers who teach English, five teachers who teach mathematics, four teachers who teach science, and two teachers who teach social studies).

This study was conducted using eight of the 18 core subject area teachers of Magnet High School because these teachers are the only core teachers who were previously required to use the district-mandated scripted curriculums. The eight core teachers have 5 or more years of teaching experience, have experience using the scripted and teacher-developed curriculums, have been granted permission to implement teacher-developed curriculums at Magnet High School, and are currently implementing teacher-developed curriculums at Magnet High School.

To obtain the data from Magnet High School, I followed institutional review board (IRB) guidelines. I obtained permission from the site administrator to perform case study research and to solicit teachers, via formal letters, to participate in the study. I attained permission through written correspondence explaining the purpose and population of the study. Each written correspondence required signatures that I hand delivered. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary and participants could withdraw from the study at any time. To maintain confidentiality, participants' personal information was safeguarded through the use of pseudonyms. All documents are stored in a locked file drawer in my home office and will be disposed of 5 years after the completion of this study.

## **Recruitment**

A purposeful sample of eight teachers was selected from the 28 teachers in Magnet High School. Eight teachers (three English teachers, two math teachers, one science teachers, and two social studies teacher) were selected to participate in what Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) suggested is purposeful sampling because participants are conveniently located within the system and the researcher identified key informants such as people having some specific knowledge about the investigated topic.

Because I am an employee of the district and conducted the research at the school where I am employed, I am only required to complete the Local School Research Request Form which was approved by the school administrator prior to starting research. A letter of cooperation accompanied by a copy of interview questions (see Appendix A) was sent via email to the principal of Magnet High School. Only the teachers with five or more years of teaching experience and who have experience teaching the scripted curriculum and teacher-developed curriculums qualified for this study. Once the Walden IRB (Approval No. 02-22-19-0074346) granted permission for the research to be conducted, the eight participants were contacted individually via email and invited to participate in the study.

## **Data Collection**

Interviews were conducted over a 4-week period during the case study research. All participants were interviewed using the same interview questions (see Appendix A). The questions that were used in the participant interviews were questions that led to

unanticipated answers or topics. These interviews helped the researcher view the problem from different angles.

Research participants participated in two interviews, an initial interview and a follow-up interview after each curriculum type was implemented. Each interview was one-on-one, took 30 to 45 minutes, and was held in a conference room which was inaccessible to outsiders to ensure privacy. The interview questions were basic to facilitate understanding by participants. One-on-one interviews are ideal for interviewing participants who are not hesitant to speak, are articulate, and who can share ideas comfortably (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An open-ended response to a question allows the participant to create the options for responding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were made aware of interviews being taped, and they were asked to sign a waiver granting permission to be taped. Participants also has the autonomy to decide which questions to leave unanswered if there were feelings of discomfort. In addition to recording the interviews or if permission was not granted to record the interview, I took notes to ensure that I do not miss any opportunities to develop probing questions. Once interviews were completed, the audios were listened to and transcribed within five days of the initial interview. Participants were contacted if clarification was needed and were given a copy of the transcribed interviews to review. I took advantage of this insider knowledge while working to minimize bias when collecting and analyzing data.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Only teachers who had experience teaching the scripted curriculums and the teacher-developed curriculums qualified to partake in this study. Interview data and notes

taken during the interview are stored in a digital document file on a password protected computer. The computer is stored in my home.

Themes from the responses of the teachers were generated. Lodico et al. (2010) proposed data in qualitative research are analyzed through reading and review of data (notes and interview transcripts) to detect themes and patterns that emerge. Themes were developed from common answers or responses to interview questions (see Appendices A & B). The anticipated themes include the following: teacher autonomy, student achievement, and student-teacher relationships. Emergent themes, themes that were not anticipated from the literature or interview questions, were color-coded. Theme analysis moves away from reporting the facts to making an interpretation of people and activities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Trustworthiness**

To establish validity for this study, the procedures for case study analysis and member checking were followed. Member checks, the process of asking one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account and research results, were also used to relieve researcher bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participants from the study were asked to review my interpretations of their interviews and/or offer suggestions to better capture the intended perspectives of the participants (Merriam, 2015). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in order to generate themes. Personal views and biases were kept in the background.

A discussion at the end of the study indicates how the research contributes to enhancing student achievement through teacher-developed standards-based curriculums.

Understanding the meaning of an experience can be achieved by perceiving and reflecting on acts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, teachers shared their perceptions of their students' achievement using both the scripted and teacher-developed standards-based curriculum and their reflection on their experiences. A case study design offered the teachers of this study the opportunity to describe and reflect on their experiences. This research design gave the researcher the opportunity to emphasize the importance of personal perspective and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This case study was used to gain an understanding of teachers' experiences, thus gaining insights into their motivations and actions. The findings from this study will be offered to the school administrators and the members of the school leadership team. A copy of the study results will also be offered to the school district administrators, the research site administrators, as well as the research participants.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Because ethical concerns are pertinent in research studies involving the use of human subjects, specific procedures were put in place to ensure the ethical protection of the participants partaking in this study. Mertens (2014) affirmed that ethical guidelines are needed in research to guard against harmful effects of research. To this end, participants need protection from harm and guaranteed anonymity (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Sieber & Tolich, 2013). The first steps to addressing these concerns was to obtain approval from the Walden University IRB and the administrators at the research site to conduct this research. In efforts to minimize any ethical concerns relevant to this study, I gave assurance of anonymity to the participants in writing prior to the interviews. To gain



access to the participants, I used the district email system to contact the school administrators at the research site obtain their permission for voluntary participation of teachers who met the selection criteria.

Once the school administrators granted permission for the research to be conducted at the research site, I contacted participants using the school district's email system. I sent each participating teacher a letter inviting them to the study. The email addresses of both the administrators and participants are readily available through the research sites public website. The letter of invitation explained the purpose of the study as well as invited participants to participate.

Prior to interviews, participants were provided with the protocol for each procedure. The protocol informed the participants of the nature of the study as well as awarded permission for me to record the interviews. Each interview was conducted after school to ensure privacy.

Participants were informed in writing that participation in this study was strictly voluntary and that they had the autonomy to resign from the study at any time without repercussions or consequences. Participants were informed of their right to request any information gathered during the research study. They were also informed that they have the ability to request that any statement is removed during the interview. Research participants were not treated differently if they decide to resign from the study and no reward was offered to any participant in exchange for their participation.

Participants were informed of the data collection methods. There were no rewards offered for participation in the study. I did not communicate any of the participant

information to anyone nor did I share any of the participants' identities. For the purpose of confidentiality, I used pseudonyms.

Once the data were collected, I used member checking, inviting the research study participants to check, comment, or approve the researcher's data or interpretations of the data, to verify and validate the findings (Iivari, 2018). Research participants were given three options for meeting times to review the data collected from the interviews. The meeting was held in a secluded conference room to ensure that the privacy of the participants was maintained. All data collected is available to only me and is housed on my personal computer which is protected by my personal password and is housed in a locked file cabinet. The data are located in a password-protected file, and the computer is stored at my residence. As required by Walden University, the data will be stored for 5 years after the publication of this doctoral study. Once 5 years have passed, all documents will be shredded, and all files will be deleted from my computer.

### **Summary**

In Section 3, I discussed the qualitative case design that allowed for the collection of information pertinent to the success of this study. Data were collected in the form of individual interviews. Participant interviews explored teachers' perceptions and experiences with scripted and teacher-developed curriculums. The results of the data collection and analysis in relation to the research questions are discussed in Section 4.

## Section 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine teachers' perceptions of and experiences with teaching the Common Core Standards with scripted curriculums provided by the school district as opposed to teaching the same standards using teacher-developed curriculums. In this study, I sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do teachers describe their experiences using scripted curriculums in instruction?

RQ2: How do teachers describe their experiences using teacher-developed curriculums in instruction?

RQ3: What recommendations do teachers have for improving student performance based on their experiences with scripted curriculums and teacher-developed curriculums?

This section provides an explanation of the setting, the data collection process, the data analysis, the results, and the evidences of trustworthiness. It ends with a summary of the answers to the research questions and a transition to Section 5.

### **Setting**

At the time of the study, the research site was preparing for state testing that would take place during the following month. Preparation for state testing included resetting all the computers in the first-floor computer labs as well as resetting the Chromebooks (laptop computers). Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the teachers, the school, and the school district. Eight teachers with teaching experience ranging from 6 to 25 years of teaching English, math, science and social studies and with

2 to 19 years of experience teaching teacher-developed curriculums and four to seven years of experience teaching scripted curriculums participated in this study. Table 3 shows the participants' demographics.

Table 3

*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Education	Experience (years)	Subject taught	Years teaching teacher-developed curriculum	Years teaching scripted curriculum
Rico	Bachelor's degree in math Master's degree in math education	11	Math (Algebra 1 and Algebra 2)	5	6
Sandra	Bachelor's degree in English Doctorate in leadership	18	World literature and AP language	12	6
Elise	Bachelor's degree in history	6	U.S. history	2	4
Ellen	Bachelor's degree in English Master's degree in education	13	American literature	6	7
Jasmine	Bachelor's degree in Math	10	Geometry	5	5
Nadia	Bachelor's degree in biology Master's degree in biology	12	Biology	7	5
Dylan	Bachelor's degree in history Master's degree in history	17	U.S. history	10	7
Annabelle	Bachelor's degree in English Master's degree in English	25	British English	19	6

### **Data Collection**

After approval was received from Walden University's IRB (Approval #02-22-19-0074346) and the research site administrators, a letter explaining my research study was emailed to potential participants. Only the teachers with 5 or more years of teaching experience and who had experience teaching the scripted curriculum and teacher-developed curriculums qualified for this study. Once participants agreed to participate, initial interviews were scheduled. The data collection for this study followed a qualitative research design using a case study approach. The interviews were transcribed and shared with the research participants to ensure accuracy of the statements. Data collected documented teachers' perceptions of enhancing student achievement through teacher-developed standards-based curriculums.

The data were collected through initial interviews and follow-up interviews with participants who met the research study criteria. I invited 18 teachers to participate in the study. Each participant was sent a letter via email that explained the purpose of the study and the participant criteria as well as invited them to participate in the study (see Appendix C). Of the 18 teachers invited, eight agreed to participate in the study.

Both the initial interviews and the follow-up interviews were conducted in a secluded conference room or over the telephone and lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed using the online transcription program Trint. I also took notes during the interviews. My notes consisted of significant points provided by the participants, which aided me in asking probing questions to gain a better understanding of the participant's perceptions and added insight to the study (see

Appendices A and B ). Once the interviews were completed and transcribed, I collaborated with each participant to ensure that my interpretations of their answers to the interview questions were precise.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Individual Interviews**

Only the teachers with 5 or more years of teaching experience and who have experience teaching the scripted curriculums and teacher-developed curriculums qualified for this study. The interview questions were created from the following research questions:

RQ1: How do teachers describe their experiences using scripted curriculums in instruction?

RQ2: How do teachers describe their experiences using teacher-developed curriculums in instruction?

RQ3: What recommendations do teachers have for improving student performance based on their experiences with teaching scripted curriculums and teacher-developed curriculums?

After I received approval from the administrators at the research site and Walden University's IRB, the research participants were asked to participate in an initial interview and a follow up-interview. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. I explained that all interviews would be audio recorded for accuracy. I also explained that pseudonyms would be used to protect their identity. Once the interviews were completed, I listened to the audio recordings as I read along with the transcriptions to ensure

accuracy. In addition to this, I took thorough field notes. These notes aided me in asking probing questions to gain a better understanding of the research participants' perceptions of and experiences with scripted and teacher-developed curriculums. Once the interviews were completed, I read and reread the information from the interviews. As a part of the thematic analysis conducted, I used open coding to develop categories. Those responses with similar characteristics were used to develop themes. From the themes, subthemes were established. Table 4 shows the themes.

Table 4

*Themes and Subthemes From Data Analysis*

Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1: Perceptions	Student achievement with implementation of the scripted curriculum Student achievement with implementation of the teacher-developed curriculum Advantages and disadvantages of scripted curriculums Advantages and disadvantages of teacher-developed curriculums
Theme 2: Experiences	Positive experience using scripted curriculums Negative experiences using scripted curriculums Positive experience using teacher-developed curriculums Negative experience using teacher-developed curriculums
Theme 3: Recommendations	Recommendations for improving student performance Recommendations for implementing scripted curriculums Recommendations for implementing teacher-developed curriculums Recommendations for improving each curriculum type

## Results

### Theme 1: Perceptions

The participants' perceptions exposed four subthemes: student achievement with the implementation of the scripted curriculum, student achievement with the implementation of the teacher-developed curriculum, advantages and disadvantages of scripted curriculums, and advantages and disadvantages with teacher-developed curriculums. During the interviews, the participants discussed their opinions concerning student achievement, teacher autonomy, and the advantages and disadvantages when using both the scripted and teacher-developed curriculums. Some the participants' shared similar perceptions and some participants' perceptions were different.

**Subtheme 1: Student achievement with implementation of the scripted curriculum.** The discussion for this subtheme will be presented by the participants.

Rico, who has taught using the scripted curriculum for 5 of his 11 years of teaching, discussed how his students responded and achieved with the scripted curriculum because of their respect for him as a teacher. Rico stated,

Prior to the scripted curriculum, I had a relationship that I [had] built with my students. They responded out of respect, but at the same time, me being a student of my own self and digging in deeper, I feel like they didn't reach their full potential. I didn't reach my full potential because it seemed so unnatural, and it seemed scripted. We scratched the surface, and when we scratched the surface, they got what they needed from the surface, but I like to dig a little deeper. I like to dive a little further down into the curriculum and force a different level of



questions because I always say that I know what students know by the questions that they ask.

Nadia, a participant with 12 years of teaching experience, had a different experience when it came to her students' achievement with the scripted curriculum. She added,

At first, my students responded as they normally would to a lesson I taught. Once they caught on to how the lessons were being taught, they got a little rebellious. They wanted to know why they had to do things the exact same way every day, and how come there weren't any more projects. They like doing projects, and the script didn't allow it. Some of my students achieved with this curriculum, but they will always achieve because they work hard. Others needed more time to complete the tasks and to learn concepts.

Ellen, a participant with 13 years of teaching experience, stated that student achievement was "average." Her response explained,

It [student achievement] was average. [There] wasn't anything spectacular, but they got the information that they were supposed to know and nothing beyond that. Nothing outside of the language of the standard and the skills they would need to master the standard. Nothing to make them distinguished learners.

Sandra, an 18-year teaching veteran, shared her experience with student achievement using the scripted curriculum. She stated,

In my opinion, my students did not perform at the level at which I wanted them to perform simply because the engagement wasn't there. As I said before with

scripted curriculums, they really don't take into account what students like to learn and how they like to learn the modalities. It [the scripted curriculum] doesn't vary according to their [students'] learning styles and their interests. And so because students had a dire lack of engagement, because they had to learn the same thing at the same time, I really felt as though they really weren't motivated to perform at the level at which they could have performed had there been greater variety in the teaching and learning process.

Elise, a participant with 6 years teaching experience, shared her experience with scripted curriculum use. She stated, "Student achievement is improving. The scripted curriculum offers structure and a routine. They know what is expected of them and once they get the hang of things, they do well."

Annabelle, a participant with 25 years of teaching experience, feels as though the scripted curriculum stifles student achievement. Annabelle explained her experience by stating,

My students did not respond as they were expected to respond. Everyone thought the scripted curriculum was going to be what saved the students, but how can you expect them to embrace something that does not cater to their needs?

She continued by stating, "Student achievement is not going to reach new heights if the teachers cannot teach."

Dylan, a participant with 17 years of teaching experience, and Jasmine, a participant with 10 years of teaching experience, assumed a different role with the scripted curriculum to help ensure student achievement. Dylan stated, "Student

achievement was at a standstill in my class. I've been teaching for 17 years, and I am stuck, and out of ideas. Implementing the scripted curriculum helped my students achieve." Jasmine added, "The scripted curriculum really helped my students grow. They were more engaged in the lessons and responded well to what I taught."

**Subtheme 2: Student achievement with implementation of the teacher-developed curriculum.** Participants also shared their perceptions of student achievement when implementing a teacher-developed standards-based curriculums. Rico's perception of student achievement focused on the student's ability to have an input of what and how they learn. He detailed,

They blew my mind. They blew my mind because I think a lot of times when we are dealing with students, we think that because we know the content, they don't know much themselves. And when you go back and allow students to have input and allow students to use whatever their unique knowledge is, their unique skill set is, or their interest are into the curriculum, then you'll realize and you'll know that they have a lot of value to add not only into the classroom but into society. It builds their confidence when they leave out of the classroom because they know they feel valued, and their opinion matters.

Sandra, Elise, and Annabelle had similar perceptions when implementing the teacher-developed curriculums. They focused on their ability to have complete autonomy of how and what was taught. Sandra stated,

I saw a significant difference in their growth because once again, I did not express to my students that there was a set way in which they had to go about mastering

all of the standards that they were expected to master. I gave them choice. I gave them, for example, the opportunity, when attempting to demonstrate mastery of standard RL3 which is analysis of the development of characters, to engage in art. They could show the development of characters through drawing a picture. Also they could show the development of characters, for example, through engaging in some sort of dramatic act. So, I opened the door to the various possibilities for mastering the standards, and I saw that the students because of their engagement level it was very high, that they actually perform at higher and higher levels of mastery.

Elise added, “My students responded well. With the teacher-developed curriculum, I am able to stop and review if I need to. We have the time to make sure they understand what they are doing.” Annabelle stated,

There was a substantial amount of growth in my student achievement. Because there wasn't a prescribed set of tasks I was to teach, I had the autonomy to do what needed to be done to ensure that my students were successful.

Nadia explained how her students achieved in the classroom as well as on standardized tests. Nadia stated,

My students responded pretty well. They were actually involved and enjoyed the variety of tasks. One of my students told me that they were glad I was teaching again because they did not like the way I was teaching before. Because I was able spend more time teaching them certain skills, my students did extremely well on standardized tests as well.

Ellen and Jasmine expressed similar perceptions of student achievement when implementing the teacher-developed curriculum. They both mentioned that student achievement was about the same as it was with the scripted curriculum. Ellen stated,

I think they [students] responded the same [as they did with the script] because there was just something that a teacher was given them. But, they changed a little more because this [curriculum] seemed like it has more and more in it that addressed where students might come up short.

Jasmine added, “Student achievement was about the same. There wasn’t much that I did differently. I modeled the teacher-developed curriculum after the scripted one [curriculum] I had been teaching.”

Dylan also articulated that she felt as though there wasn’t a distinct difference in student achievement when using the teacher-developed curriculum. She stated, “There wasn’t really a difference in my students’ achievement. I had the opportunity to review, but it wasn’t as effective as I hoped it would be.”

### **Subtheme 3: Advantages and disadvantages of a scripted curriculum.**

Classroom management is an important part of the teaching and learning process. The participants’ perceptions revealed that scripted curriculums promote a classroom routine as well as provide structure because the lessons are scripted. Rico emphasized that an advantage with implementing a scripted curriculum is structure.

You know you don’t spend too much time on certain things or on certain areas of your lesson. You don’t deviate too far because of the script you know I should be

doing this in five minutes, and I should be doing this in 10 minutes. It [the scripted curriculum] leaves a lot less room for running over your time.

Elise stated, “The advantage is the structure it offers. The structure helps me with my classroom management because there isn’t much down time. The lessons are written to last the entire class period if the steps are followed properly.” Dylan added, “A routine is established for you. There is no guesswork that has to be done.” Jasmine added, “The strict timelines in the scripted curriculum help to establish a routine that the students get used to following.” Sandra highlighted that the advantages are that “Everybody knows what to teach. Most times, if not all of the time, scripted curriculums are connected to some sort of standards. Those standards are used to drive teaching and learning.” Ellen asserted, “You [the teacher] know, in the least, you have what you’re supposed to know.”

The participants agreed that scripted curriculums were beneficial for novice teachers as well as for teachers who need additional support. Annabelle added, “The scripted curriculum is very appropriate for teachers who struggle with getting things started in their classrooms.” Nadia stated, “I just believe it’ll be good for novice teachers and teachers who require more support with their time management and structure.”

While the participants’ perceptions revealed that there are advantages to implementing a scripted curriculum, they also revealed that this curriculum type limited teachers. Elise stated, “The disadvantage is not being able to spend extra time where needed. The timelines are very strict and leave little to no room to review.” Ellen stated,

They have provided you with the standards that they expect you to know, but nothing outside [of that] like maybe remediation or how to bridge the kids who are already on level to go higher than what they gave you.

Nadia stated, “I feel like I’m not able to teach. The people who wrote the curriculum don’t know my kids. They don’t know their skill levels, and they didn’t ask me.” Sandra stated,

I just believe that the scripted curriculums do not take into account what students like to learn and how they like to learn. There are several ways to master standards, and I don’t think that students should be subjected to mastering standards in the same way at the same time.

The research participants also divulged that teacher autonomy is scarce when implementing a scripted curriculum. Sandra stated, “There’s no variety. There is no innovation. There is no allowance for creativity.” Dylan, who is an advocate for scripted curriculums added, “With the strict guidelines, there is no room for your own ideas.” Rico stated,

It [the scripted curriculum] takes away from the innovation of the teachers.

Teachers are the respected experts in their content, and they know their students better than anyone else knows their students just as well as they know their curriculum better than anyone else knows their curriculum.

**Subtheme 4: Advantages and disadvantages of a teacher-developed curriculum.** All students are capable of reaching academic success; however, the process of arriving there is unique for each student. The research participants revealed that the

teacher-developed curriculums allow teachers to determine what students should learn with respect to the rigorous demands of the standards. Ellen stated, “It’s [the teacher-developed curriculum] a bit more in tune with what’s happening currently in the classroom.” Sandra stated,

I believe that teacher-developed curriculums allow students to actually perform at higher and higher levels of mastery because teachers know what their students like to learn, how their students like to learn and teacher-developed curriculums allow for more innovation.

Rico stated, “You’re able to take the things you know that the students can connect to and redeliver them in your lesson and be innovative with your standards and align your standards with the listen you are trying to drive.” Elise stated, “One advantage is having the time to review. This curriculum is less restrictive. It’s more flexible because it allows change.” Nadia stated,

The advantages are being able to tailor lessons toward my individual students, being able to spend more time to make sure that my students understand the concepts that are being taught and having the autonomy to change things that need to be changed.

Annabelle and Sandra commented on being able to differentiate when implementing the teacher-developed curriculum. Annabelle stated, “Teacher-developed curriculums allow for greater differentiation in the teaching and learning process.” Sandra ascertained, “I had the autonomy to differentiate instruction in the way that I wanted to. I had the autonomy to use whatever resources that I felt would help students to achieve



mastery.” Dylan stated, “The one advantage of teacher-developed curriculums is that the teacher can personalize the curriculum to fit students’ needs.” Jasmine stated, “With the teacher-developed curriculum, I am able to teach the lesson multiple ways.”

The participants’ perceptions also revealed the disadvantages with implementing a teacher-developed curriculum. While having the autonomy to control what is taught in their classes is ideal, the participants highlighted the excessive amount of time that has to be devoted to the construction of a teacher-developed curriculum as well the possibility of overlooking standards.

Ellen stated, “A disadvantage is although it is from a teacher that may have been in the classroom feel based on what they experience so no classroom is the same.”

Sandra stated,

At times, there was a lack of consistency amongst individuals in my department.

Because while I was taking a specific route to teaching specific standards, there were other teachers who were taking a totally different route, and I believe that as a department that lack of consistency hurt us in some way or another.

In summary, the participants’ perceptions with respect to implementing scripted curriculums as well as teacher-developed curriculums revealed different aspects. Student achievement was attained with the implementation of each curriculum. However, participants’ perceptions varied on how well students achieved.

## **Theme 2: Experiences With Each Curriculum Design**

The participants in the qualitative case study expressed their experiences with implementing scripted curriculums as well as teacher-developed curriculums as positive

or negative. The initial interview questions focused on the teachers' experiences with implementing each curriculum type thus allowing them to share any positive as well as negative experiences they may have encountered.

**Subtheme 1: Positive experiences implementing scripted curriculums.** Of the eight research participants, four of them expressed having positive experiences with implementing the scripted curriculum. One participant voiced that the scripted curriculum offered a sense of relief. Dylan shared, "I was beginning to feel overwhelmed. Teaching the scripted curriculum gave me the opportunity to focus on other responsibilities." Nadia, who openly admitted that she did not want to use the scripted curriculum when it was first introduced, shared, "Once I was given the [scripted curriculum] material and I used it, it wasn't bad. Personally, I think that the scripted curriculum can be very useful in certain circumstances." Elise stated, "My experiences have been pretty good so far. I've taught using a scripted curriculum for the majority of my teaching career. I'm comfortable with it, and I like the sense of security it offers." When asked to elaborate on the how the scripted curriculum offers security, Elise stated, "They [scripted curriculum] keep me on track. I know what I am supposed to teach and where I am supposed to be in the curriculum. I like knowing what is in store, what should happen next, and what I should expect. I like to be prepared." Jasmine responded, "My experience has been very good. The scripted curriculum works great for me."

**Subtheme 2: Negative experiences implementing scripted curriculums.** Of the 8 research participants, 4 of them expressed having negative experiences with implementing a scripted curriculum. The research participants who expressed negative

experiences when implementing the scripted curriculum noted how this type of curriculum was restrictive. Sandra stated,

“Well, I actually have years of experience with implementing scripted curriculums. My view is one that encompasses more innovation, more creativity because when implementing the scripted curriculums, I see just how restrictive they really are. I see how kids don’t have the ability to really learn in the various ways in which they like to learn because the scripted curriculum dictates what they learn, when they learn, and how they learn. Even for the teachers, it dictates what they teach, how they teach, and when they teach. This personal experience of mine has really made me feel even strongly about how restrictive scripted curriculums can be.”

Rico commented,

My experiences, personally, is that with scripted curriculum didn’t feel natural. I respected the structure of everything saying no you have this amount of time doing this, but when it comes to actually me tapping into my innovative side and differentiating for the students to make sure that they receive the most and gain the most out of the lesson that I was trying to drive home for them, I felt that scripted curriculum didn’t work well with me.

Ellen’s and Annabelle’s experiences focused on what they perceived to be the missing components of the scripted curriculum. Ellen specified having to “expect to fill in spaces where the scripted curriculum doesn’t fully assist the students.” Annabelle

stated, “I feel like there are a lot of misconceptions that the scripted curriculum doesn’t address.”

**Subtheme 3: Positive experiences implementing teacher-developed curriculums.** When reflecting on the teacher-developed curriculums, 8 (each participant) of the research participants expressed having positive experiences. They found that implementing a teacher-developed curriculum allowed them to customize instruction based on the learning styles of their students. While Nadia admitted that creating a teacher-developed curriculum is time consuming, she says her experiences has been good. She explained, “I was able to tailor the lessons to meet the needs of my students. I get to be creative and in control of what and how I teach.” Annabelle stated, “I prefer using the teacher-developed curriculum because it allows me to tailor my students’ learning experiences.” Sandra stated,

Well my experience with implementing a teacher-developed curriculum came years ago when I was expected simply to ensure that I was providing my students with ongoing opportunities to master the standards, but I wasn’t specifically told what curricular content I had to use to provide students with those opportunities. I saw a significant difference in students’ achievement because I had the freedom and the flexibility to use the texts that I like. I had the freedom and the flexibility to use various resources that I like to appeal to a heterogeneous pool of learners and to appeal to their interests and their various modalities. That particular experience shaped my personal view of teaching because I see that when teachers are given the autonomy to use curricular content of their choice [and] curricular

content that they know will behoove their students and their growth, I feel that it makes a significant difference in the learning process.

Elise mentioned the favorable experiences she has when planning with other teachers to create a teacher-developed curriculum. Elise shared,

I planned with the veteran teachers to ensure that I was creating lessons that matched the standards because I was unsure. I doubted myself in the process so planning with them really helped me understand what I needed to be doing to make sure that my students learned.

Ellen described her experience in a positive manner as well. She explained that there were common misconceptions that the teacher-developed curriculum addressed due to it being written by teachers. She stated, “I don’t have to address as many misconceptions. A lot of the holes are filled because it’s [the curriculum] from teachers who are in the classrooms.”

Jasmine and Dylan articulated having positive experiences with implementing the teacher-developed curriculum. While they both admitted that they experienced difficulty with creating the teacher-developed curriculum, they had no problem implementing the curriculum. Jasmine stated, “My experience was pretty good. I modeled the curriculum I developed after the scripted curriculum I taught, but I got to add things that were missing from the scripted curriculum.” Dylan said, “My experience was great. Since I created the curriculum, I was able to change things when they needed to be changed.”

Rico shared his experience as being one from which he learned as his students learned. He stated,

“My experience has been [that] I’ve learned. Because when you’re becoming innovative, you’re thinking outside of the box. Everybody has an open mindset, and just as much as I’m teaching students, I’m also learning myself. Students are very brilliant and have some amazing ideas. [So] as we go and we’re learning and they’re coming up with different aspects and putting their own personal touch based off of their personal skill sets and their personal interests, I think it drives for a creative classroom [where] not just teacher-centered [or] student-centered, but it is a collaborative classroom for the teachers and students.”

**Subtheme 4: Negative experiences implementing teacher-developed**

**curriculums.** None of the participants expressed having a negative experience with implementing the teacher-developed curriculum. Jasmine and Dylan expressed difficulty when developing the curriculum, but reiterated that their experience with implementing the teacher-developed curriculum was positive.

**Theme 3: Recommendations**

Both the initial and follow up interviews with the research participants revealed recommendations for improving students’ performances, implementing each curriculum type and recommendations for improving each curriculum. During each interview session, the research participants offered suggestions for improving students’ performances, suggestions for implementing each of the curriculum types as well as suggestions for improving each curriculum.

**Recommendations for improving student performance.** The research participants’ recommendations for improving student performance varied. Rico stated,

“[Teachers] make sure that you allow time for Q & A and offer consistent input, but I have found more success when you constantly do debriefing at the end of each area.”

Jasmine proposed “having one-on-one conversations with students” to gauge with what standards they may need additional support. Nadia stated, “I recommend using the scripted curriculum for teachers that may need a little more time and structure. Often the foundation of effective teaching will ultimately improve students.”

Elise, Dylan and Ellen offered recommendations which focused on allotting time to re-teach. Elise recommend that “each type of curriculum be written with the students in mind.” She further stated, “I know that this is what the district has in mind when they develop the scripted curriculums, but they miss the mark when they do not include time for re-teaching.” Dylan stated, “Ultimately, being able to re-teach gives students more opportunities to be successful. The scripted curriculum does not give me this option.”

Ellen articulated, “I would say to assist the students more even if the curriculum you have does not allow for that. You [teachers] have to make room to do that.”

Sandra’s and Annabelle’s recommendations stressed the need for the analysis of data. Sandra said that, “in order to ensure that students are performing at higher and higher levels of mastery, I believe that the analysis of data is really key.” She further explained her recommendation by stating,

So I would just say ensuring that the analysis of data remains at the forefront of the implementation process so that ongoing adjustments can be made. Data is what tells the story. Data is what will inform both teachers and students alike how those ongoing adjustments and spontaneous adjustments need to be made to

ensure that the curriculum is doing all that it is supposed to do with respect to helping the kids to achieve mastery.

Annabelle proposed using assessment data to “indicate students’ levels of mastery.” She stated, “You [teachers] will know exactly what your students need if you are assessing them on what is being taught.”

**Recommendations for implementing a scripted curriculum.** Participants’ recommendations for implementing a scripted curriculum placed emphasis on what the participants believed the curriculum lacked. Rico’s recommendation focused on the need to keep students engaged in the lessons by allowing things to flow as naturally as possible. He stated, “Within the scripted curriculum, you have to allow opportunities for natural progression, natural flow because now you’re running the risk of disengagement.”

Nadia and Elise shared similar views for recommendations for implementing the scripted curriculum. Nadia stated, “To me, it [scripted curriculum] just needs to be written to include time to reteach if needed.” She further added, “I recommend that re-teaching and reviewing time be added so that all of the students have an opportunity to be successful.” Elise said, “I think that the scripted curriculum should offer time to reteach and review. My students show understanding when they are given time to do and redo things in the moment.” Dylan and Jasmine also mentioned needing time to review. Dylan noted that the having “time in the script for review” is something that will benefit teachers and students. Jasmine, who is an advocate for the scripted curriculum, stated, “The scripted curriculum should have time built in to review the students.”



Ellen mentioned how the scripted curriculum uses the language of the standards but does not take in account that students may not know what the words mean. She recommended that, “[teachers] make sure that they [students] understand the language of the standards” before the activities from the lesson are attempted. She indicated that by doing so, teachers are ensuring that their students have standard mastery.

Sandra expressed how assessment data should be used to inform classroom instruction. She stated,

I would just say that the scripted curriculum doesn’t really take into account how data should actually be used to inform every aspect of each lesson. There needs to be more adjustment with respect to analysis of data because scripted curriculums will be ineffective if there isn’t an ongoing and consistent method of really assessing whether or not students have the ability to master the standards without that assessment.

Annabelle’s recommendations focused on differentiated instruction. She recommended that the scripted curriculum “be written with all learners in mind.” She further explained that the scripted curriculum “only tells teachers how to do things one way” and that the scripted curriculum “may be more effective if it was written to cater to more than one type of learner.”

### **Recommendations for implementing a teacher-developed curriculum.**

Participants’ recommendations for implementing a teacher-developed curriculum presented various ideas for enhancement. Rico, Nadia, and Dylan all expressed that

teachers need to be aware of time when implementing the teacher-developed curriculum.

Rico stated,

“Just to make sure that you [teachers] are on a time schedule because sometimes with the teacher-developed lessons, you [teachers] can get so involved in the passion or get involved in the moment that you [teachers] and the students are engaging in that you can kind of lose the time.”

Nadia said, “I would recommend teachers be cognizant of the time they spend on one skill or concept.” Dylan stated, “Teachers have to make sure that they aren’t spending too much time on one standard.”

Ellen and Elise shared similar views when making recommendations for implementing a teacher-developed curriculum. Ellen proposed paying attention to what the students need. She stated, “The teacher [developed] curriculums do address a lot of what they [teachers] feel students may not know, which is good, but if you [teachers] are not really assessing the kids, then they are still going to miss the overall point.” Elise stated, “I think that they should design the lessons to reflect what the data shows is needed. I think that it would help students because the lessons will be truly tailored to target the deficient standards.”

Sandra’s recommendation for implementing the teacher-developed curriculum focused on teacher autonomy. She shared,

After implementing lessons from the teacher-developed curriculum, I would say that there just should be stronger emphasis on keeping the standards at the forefront because sometimes autonomy can lead you astray. Along with that

autonomy, comes great responsibility with respect to just keeping the standards up at the forefront to ensure that all aspects of the lesson are clearly aligned to the standards.

Annabelle and Jasmine suggested having teachers work collaboratively to ensure that the teacher-developed curriculums are written with the correct components.

Annabelle proposed pairing “the less experienced teachers with more veteran teachers.”

She explained that this would help “new teachers become more comfortable with the

teacher-developed curriculums.” Jasmine said, “Working with a more experienced

teacher allowed me to get feedback on my lessons before I taught them.” Jasmine

expressed that being able to “practice her lessons” made her more comfortable when it

was time to deliver the lessons to her students.

**Recommendations for improving each curriculum type.** During each interview, participants were asked if there was anything they would like to add regarding the scripted as well as the teacher-developed curriculums. 2 of the 8 research participants offered additional recommendations which highlighted improving the structure and/or format of each curriculum type. Rico offered suggestions that centered on project-based learning and making the lessons relevant to the students. Rico shared,

“Project-based learning, I think, is the way of the future. I think that [project-based learning] should be the focus. It challenges students to be critical thinkers as well as analytical thinkers within their own PBL projects within whatever content it is and seeing how the content aligns with what their current reality is every day.”

He also stated,

No matter what content it is, no matter whether it's [a] scripted or teacher-developed [curriculum], there needs to be a way to find relevance to the students. Because if a student doesn't find it relevant or engaging, then you will lose them regardless of how good the lesson is or how good the student is.

Sandra shared her views of teachers having the autonomy to be innovative and creative and reiterated "keeping the standards in the forefront." She said,

They [teachers] know their students better than anyone at the district level. [They know their students] better than any administrator ever could. I believe that having that autonomy to really be innovative, to really be creative, and to take into account students' various learning styles [and] the modalities in which they like to learn and then taking all of that information and using it to build curricular content while still keeping the standards at the forefront to ensure alignment is what will greatly improve teaching and learning everywhere.

In summary, the research participants' recommendations focused on improving student performance and enhancing scripted and teacher-developed curriculums. For the scripted curriculum, participants recommended employing a natural progression of the lessons, incorporating time to re-teach and review, ensuring that students understand the language of the standards, ensuring that assessment data is being used to inform instruction, and incorporating differentiated instruction. For the teacher-developed curriculum, participants recommended that teachers be aware of the amount of time they spend on particular standards, ensuring that teachers pay attention to students' needs,

ensuring that students are assessed, ensuring that lessons are written as a result of the assessment data, ensuring that the standards are kept in the forefront and ensuring collaborative planning.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

This research study followed the procedures for a qualitative case study. The participants for this study had to meet specific criteria to participate. Once the participants were identified, they were contacted and asked to participate via email. When they agreed to participate in the study, the interviews were scheduled. As a part of the analysis process and to establish validity for this study, member checking and rich descriptions of data were used. Each participant was given a copy of the findings to review for accuracy. If my interpretations of the findings were invalid, I would modify my interpretations to align with the research participants' intentions. Additionally, direct quotes from the participants were used to support the themes and subthemes and to add to the credibility of the findings.

### **Summary**

In Section 4, I discussed the setting, data collection process, the data analysis process, the results and evidence of trustworthiness. Furthermore, the initial and follow-up interviews with participants concerning their perceptions of enhancing student achievement through teacher-developed standards-based curriculums were discussed. From these interviews, three themes and a total of 11 subthemes derived. Section 5 includes the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications and conclusion.

## Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this qualitative case study, I examined teachers' perceptions of and experiences with teaching the Common Core Standards with scripted curriculums provided by the school district as opposed to teaching the same standards using teacher-developed curriculums. Magnet High School implemented the use of scripted curriculums in August 2014, and after 5 years of implementing the scripted curriculums, Magnet High School continued to post failing scores on standardized tests. In response to the falling scores, district administrators granted the administrators at Magnet High School the autonomy to implement teacher-developed standards-based curriculums. Sixteen interviews (eight initial interviews and eight follow-up interviews) were conducted with eight research participants to determine the teachers' perceptions of and experiences with teaching the Common Core Standards with scripted curriculums provided by the school district and teaching the same standards using teacher-developed curriculums.

This qualitative case study was structured around three research questions that focused on teachers' perceptions of and experiences with implementing scripted curriculums provided by the school district as opposed to teaching the same standards using teacher-developed curriculums. The third research question centered on the recommendations the participants had for improving student performance based on their experiences with both curriculum types. To clearly examine this phenomenon, two themes from the interviews were explored: teacher perceptions and experiences implementing both curriculum types. Additional subthemes emerged from each theme.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The following interpretations of the findings are focused on participants' perceptions of and experiences with both scripted and teacher-developed curriculum types. The participants had positive and negative perceptions of and experiences with scripted and teacher-developed curriculums. The research participants ascertained that student achievement was attained with the implementation of each curriculum. They also recognized that the scripted curriculum offered daily classroom routines that promoted classroom management and that the teacher-developed curriculum offered more teacher autonomy.

Although the research participants' perceptions of and experiences with each curriculum type offered positive aspects, other concerns emerged from the interviews. These concerns were categorized under the following subthemes: (a) student achievement with implementation of scripted curriculum, (b) advantages and disadvantages of a scripted curriculum, (c) advantages and disadvantages of a teacher-developed curriculum, (d) positive experiences implementing scripted curriculums, (e) negative experiences implementing scripted curriculums, (f) positive experiences implementing teacher-developed curriculums, and (g) negative experiences implementing teacher-developed curriculums.

#### **Student Achievement With Implementation of the Scripted Curriculum**

According to Jimenez et al. (2014), scripted curriculums are important for student achievement. Scripted lessons are viewed as an effective instructional strategy are important for student achievement (Hummel, Venn, & Gunter, 2004; Jimenez et al.,

2014). Scripted curriculums contain explicit instructional lessons that use systematic methods of teaching content to ensure students have sufficient information to formulate correct responses about the content (Gunter & Reed, 1997; Jimenez et al., 2014; Twyman & Heward, 2018). The primary goal of a scripted curriculum is to ensure that the teacher delivers pertinent information on the content to the students to increase student achievement (Olson & Roberts, 2018). As reflected in the interviews, three of the research participants spoke to the idea that once the students embraced the routines surrounding the scripted curriculum, they performed well and grew academically.

### **Student Achievement With Implementation of the Teacher-Developed Curriculum**

The diverse cultural composition of classrooms makes it questionable that a single curriculum will meet the needs of all students (Ede, 2006; Lenski et al., 2016). Curriculums must be flexible so that teachers are able to construct lessons that will be of high interest to their unique groups of students and actively engage them in creating knowledge (Ede, 2006; Lenski et al., 2016). As revealed in the interviews, the typical classroom consists of students with a wide range of learning needs. Classroom teachers are in the best position to identify students' individual strengths and needs and to adjust a curriculum to address them. Participants shared that student achievement was higher because the students had the ability to have input into what and how they learned and teachers had the autonomy to choose how and what they taught when using the teacher-developed curriculums. Students learn when curriculum is relevant to their lives, when it is of personal interest to them, and when they are actively engaged in the pursuit of



knowledge (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2019). Reading aloud scripted lessons that have been created for a generic group is unlikely to accomplish this goal (Mili & Winch, 2019).

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of a Scripted Curriculum**

The immediate benefit of scripted curriculums is that they assist new and inexperienced teachers who are unsure of how to begin the teaching process (MacGillivray et al., 2004; Wyatt, 2014). Scripted curriculums are designed to provide support structures to direct teacher behavior and in this way are beneficial (Duncan-Owens, 2009; Wyatt, 2014). Another benefit is that scripted curriculums provide consistency across classrooms and grade levels, making it easier for teachers to plan their lessons and for supervisors to monitor teachers' practices (Wyatt, 2014). As the research participants indicated, scripted curriculums are beneficial for novice teachers as well as for teachers who need additional support. Scripted curriculums offer structure that may be nonexistent in a new teacher's class. The participants revealed that scripted curriculums promote a classroom routine as well as provide structure for the students. They further explained that the strict timelines in the scripted curriculums help to establish a routine that students become used to following.

Strict implementation has contributed to educators feeling constrained by what to teach, the amount of time allocated to individual lessons, and how students should be assessed (Cilliers et al., 2019; Dresser, 2012;). Consequently, teachers modify their instruction by devoting an inordinate amount of time to test-taking preparation and teaching only content that will be covered on the test (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Stefanski, 2016; Wyatt, 2014). Critics of scripted programs suggest that scripted lessons

condense students' knowledge, cultures, and communities to an invisible state (Kang, 2016; Schultz & Ravitch, 2013; Shanton & Valenzuela, 2005) and fail to build on the skill set that different learners bring to school. While the findings of my study revealed that there are advantages to implementing a scripted curriculum, the findings also revealed that this curriculum type limited teachers. Scripted curriculums hinder the teacher's ability to tailor lessons to each of the different learning types in their classroom.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of a Teacher-Developed Curriculum**

Adkins et al. (2015) and Darling-Hammond et al. (2012) argued that performance assessments, developed by teachers and consisting of purportedly authentic teaching tasks, are a critical component of teacher education taking control of accountability, defining the field for itself, and becoming a profession akin to medicine and law. The research participants shared that the teacher-developed curriculums allow teachers to determine what students should learn with respect to the rigorous demands of the standards in essence personalizing the curriculum to fit the students' needs. Darling-Hammond and Hyler (2013) argued that the extent to which an occupation is micro-managed by rules from without is directly related to the extent to which it fails to maintain high, common standards of competence and professional practice. The research participants expressed that having the autonomy to control what is taught is the ideal situation.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Due to participant comfortability, the first group of participants that I recruited for the study did not want their interviews recorded. The first group of research participants

agreed to be interviewed, but was not comfortable with having their interviews recorded. At the time of the study, the culture and climate of the school centered on fear and retaliation against those who spoke out against the conditions. The first group of participants feared retaliation. While I assured them that the interviews would be kept confidential, they were not comfortable being recorded. Not being able to record presented a limitation because it took away my ability to listen to the interviews for accuracy. Because the first group of research participants would not allow their interviews to be recorded, a second set of emails inviting potential research participants to participate in this research study was sent. Of the 10 additional potential research participants, eight agreed to be audio recorded during their interviews. The data in this study were based on these eight participants. This additional recruitment created a setback concerning the timeline as the end of the school year was swiftly approaching.

Another limitation to occur were the telephone interview. Three interviews were conducted via telephone. Due to poor audio recording over the phone, two of the telephone interviews had to be rerecorded. This provided yet another limitation concerning time. Because the research participants who needed to be re-recorded were on vacation, I had to await their returns home before the interviews could be conducted again.

While this study achieved its purpose to determine teachers' perceptions of and experiences with teaching the Common Core Standards with scripted curriculums provided by the school district as opposed to teaching the same standards using teacher-developed curriculums, potential limitations surrounding the use of the study findings

may be limited. The qualitative data collected during this research study was limited to eight teachers who have five or more years of teaching experience, have experience using the scripted as well as teacher-developed curriculums. Additionally, the data collected through the interviews is controlled by the research participants. Because of this, the data I collected may not provide a transferable representation to all high schools using scripted and/or teacher-developed curriculums.

### **Recommendations for Action**

A recommendation for implementation is to provide teachers with effective professional development for implementing each curriculum type. The lack of experience teachers have with implementing each curriculum type has led to them ineffectively implementing each curriculum type. The research participants' recommendations focused on improving student performance as well as enhancing teachers' capacity to implement scripted and teacher-developed curriculums. Providing effective professional development can help to alleviate the uncertainties of implementing the scripted and teacher-developed curriculums.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This case study focused on teachers' perceptions of and experiences with teaching the Common Core Standards with scripted curriculums provided by the school district as opposed to teaching the same standards using teacher-developed curriculums. This study looked at the perceptions and experiences of core teachers who have five or more years of teaching experience, have experience using the scripted as well as teacher-developed curriculums, have been granted permission to implement teacher-developed curriculums

at Magnet High School, and are currently implementing teacher-developed curriculums at Magnet High School. One potential extension of this study could include students who have experienced both curriculums. Their perceptions of the learning process as it pertains to each curriculum could help teachers as well as administrators make decisions about which curriculum type to offer.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Sociologists define social change as changes in human interactions and relationships that transform cultural and social institutions (Glesne, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Despite any discomfort they may have experienced, the participants in this research study agreed to participate because of their passion for education and their willingness to positively impact students and student achievement. The research participants' perceptions of and experiences with scripted as well as teacher-developed curriculums may provide other teachers with a better understanding of the implementation of each curriculum type. Understanding how to effectively implement these curriculum types can lead to the improvement of professional development training for teachers. Conducting this study contributes to social change by aiding school leaders in understanding how to bridge the gap between the current curriculum and the various needs of students at different ability levels with different capacities.

### **Conclusion**

The interviews from this study revealed high school teachers' perceptions of and experiences with scripted and teacher-developed curriculums. The participants shared the advantages and disadvantages of both the scripted and teacher-developed curriculums

that impacted student achievement and teacher autonomy. Though there were several positives mentioned for implementing a scripted curriculum, the participants ultimately agreed that implementing a teacher-developed curriculum was more conducive to teaching and learning process. Although the use of a scripted curriculum is preferred at Magnet High School, the perceptions of the participants in this research study provided an understanding of the phenomenon of allowing the teacher-developed curriculums to be implemented. Because the research participants have taught using both the scripted as well as the teacher-developed curriculums, they were able to offer insightful advice to schools considering this type of change in curriculum.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions for Teachers

### *Interview procedures:*

When meeting with the participants, I will explain the purpose of the interview and identify where I am in the research process. I will inform the participant that the interview is being recorded for accuracy using a digital recording program on my personal computer that is equipped with transcribing technology. I will inform the participants that they will receive a copy of the transcribed interview via the email address they provided. Once these procedures have been explained, I will ask the participant if they have any questions regarding the interview.

The research questions for this case study were developed from the problem statement and purpose for the study. The research questions will guide the development of this study by seeking to answer the following questions:

Research Question 1. How do teachers describe their experiences using scripted curriculums in instruction?

Research Question 2. How do teachers describe their experiences using teacher developed curriculums in instruction?

Research Question 3. What recommendations do teachers have for improving students' performance, based on these two experiences?

### *Interview Questions:*

1. What are your perceptions of scripted curriculums? (Research Question #1)
2. What is your experience with implementing scripted curriculums? Has this curriculum shaped your personal view of teaching? (Research Question #1)



3. In your opinion, how did your students respond to and/or achieve when you used the scripted curriculum? (Research Question #2)
4. What advantages and disadvantages do you think are gained from implementing a scripted curriculum in your class? (Research Question #1)
5. What are your perceptions of teacher developed standards-based curriculums? (Research Question #2)
6. What is your experience with implementing teacher developed standards-based curriculums? Has this curriculum shaped your personal view of teaching? (Research Question #2)
7. In your opinion, how did your students respond to and/or achieve under the teacher-developed curriculum? (Research Question #2)
8. What advantages and disadvantages do you think are gained from implementing a teacher developed standards-based curriculum in your class? (Research Question #2)
9. Based on your experiences with teaching a scripted curriculum as well as a teacher developed standards-based curriculum, what recommendations do you have for improving students' performance? Please describe examples that support your rationale for your recommendations. (Research Question #3)
10. What have I not asked about curriculum and instruction that you would like to add?

## Appendix B: Post Lesson Implementation Interview Questions for Teachers

### *Interview procedures:*

Once the participants have implemented the lessons, I will meet with each participant and explain the purpose of the follow-up interview and identify where I am in the research process. I will inform the participant that the interview is being recorded for accuracy using a digital recording program on my personal computer that is equipped with transcribing technology. I will inform the participants that they will receive a copy of the transcribed interview via the email address they provided. Once these procedures have been explained, I will ask the participant if they have any questions regarding the interview.

The research questions for this case study were developed from the problem statement and purpose for the study. The research questions will guide the development of this study by seeking to answer the following questions:

Research Question 1. How do teachers describe their experiences using scripted curriculums in instruction?

Research Question 2. How do teachers describe their experiences using teacher developed curriculums in instruction?

Research Question 3. What recommendations do teachers have for improving students' performance, based on these two experiences?

### *Interview Questions:*

1. What did you think about the lessons? (Research Questions 1&2)

2. After implementing the lessons from the scripted curriculum, what recommendations do you have for improving student performance? (Research Question #3)
3. After implementing the lessons from the teacher developed curriculum, what recommendations do you have for improving student performance? (Research Question #3)
4. Is there anything you would like to contribute concerning your experiences with implementing each curriculum that I have not asked you?