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Self-Efficacy and Gifted Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Gifted Students with High-Functioning Autism

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Abstract

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Abstract

Gifted students with high functioning autism (gifted-HFA) are being excluded from gifted programs in one public school setting in the Southeastern United States designed for gifted and high-achieving students. Although the literature indicates teacher self-efficacy in working with this group can contribute to this problem, it was unclear whether teachers in this specific setting experienced self-efficacy challenges. The study's purpose was to understand teachers' sense of self-efficacy when teaching gifted-HFA students. The conceptual framework that drove this study was Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Using a basic qualitative method, interviews were conducted with eight gifted endorsed teachers who had experience teaching gifted-HFA students. Open coding and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data. Results indicated that teachers of gifted students experienced a lower sense of self-efficacy regarding teaching gifted-HFA students. Participants reported this resulted in part from a lack of preservice training and a need for ongoing professional development to improve their ability to meet gifted-HFA students' needs. This study's findings may be used by school administrators and gifted program directors as the basis to identify and implement training opportunities for teachers of gifted students to increase their teaching capacity and self-efficacy.

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Dedication

To Joel Morrell for his love, support, and faith as I have pursued my academic dreams throughout the years. I could not have done this without you. Thank you for believing I could do this even when I was not sure.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Teacher efficacy is the belief that teachers hold about their ability to successfully meet their students' needs. Teacher efficacy is imperative to teacher effectiveness and aligns with teachers' behaviors and student outcomes (Anglim et al., 2019; Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Love, 2016; Love et al., 2020; McCullough, 2014). Teachers of gifted students are typically expected to show optimal student outcomes, and when their ability to do so is challenged, their sense of self-efficacy can diminish (Anglim et al., 2019; Love et al., 2019; McCullough, 2014). This expectation of teacher effectiveness does not lessen when teachers of gifted students teach students with disabilities. Students who possess both giftedness and a disability are often referred to as twice-exceptional learners (2e) and can pose unique challenges for educators. Students with high-functioning autism (HFA), once known as Asperger's Syndrome, often have average to above-average intelligence to include giftedness (gifted-HFA). Teaching students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can prove particularly challenging (Catalono, 2018; Love et al., 2019. McCullough, 2014), yet teachers are still expected to meet the needs of these students.

Many students diagnosed with ASD lack appropriate social, emotional, and behavioral skills, which can negatively influence teachers' perceptions of these students (Khasakhala & Galava, 2016; McCurdy & Cole, 2014). Some students with ASD are academically high-functioning and qualify for gifted services, but their behaviors often interfere with their ability to participate in programs designed for gifted and high achieving students (Barnard et al., 2000; Missett et al., 2016; Spence et al., 2019).

Barnard-Brak et al. (2015) said 9.1% of participants with disabilities identified as gifted (those who achieved a score at the 90th percentile on the Woodcock-Johnson III achievement battery). However, only 11.1% of participants identified with a disability and giftedness participated in gifted programs (Barnard-Brak et al., 2014). Snyder et al. (2016) said approximately 3,189,000 students in America were served in gifted programs in 2016. There are currently upwards of 180,000 and 360,000 students qualified as gifted and disabled, respectively (Josephson et al., 2018; National Education Association, 2006).

Teachers of gifted students will see an increase in the number of students with ASD in their classrooms due to an increased number of students identified on the high-functioning end of the autism spectrum (Anglim et al., 2018; Love et al., 2019). Yager (2016) predicted an increase in the number of students with ASD in honors programs at colleges. These students first need preparation at the secondary school level, and middle and high school teachers must be ready to meet these students' needs to prepare them for postsecondary programs. Education leaders need to obtain a better understanding of how teachers of gifted students perceive their ability to teach gifted-HFA students. This understanding could help leaders incorporate professional development to increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy to effectively teach gifted-HFA students.

Legislators passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), which mandated free and appropriate education (FAPE) for all children diagnosed with disabilities. The law outlined the due process rights of such students and mandated that educators develop an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that places each student with a

disability in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Students with disabilities are entitled to FAPE in the LRE. This policy can be interpreted to mean that gifted-HFA students are legally entitled to an education in the LRE that provides services for both their giftedness and disability (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2011). The act did not outline guidelines for educating learners who were both gifted and disabled (Baldwin et al., 2015a; Gordon, 2017). In 1978, The Gifted and Talented Education Act was passed, establishing a national training institute, and setting up a federal office for gifted and talented individuals. Still, there were no provisions outlined regarding the education of learners who were both gifted and disabled.

This chapter includes background information related to this study. First, I stated the research problem and provided evidence that the problem was relevant and worth investigating. I then outlined the purpose of the study and reported the research questions. I identified and described the conceptual framework in which this study was grounded and described its nature. Additionally, I provided definitions of fundamental concepts and clarified any assumptions that were critical to the meaningfulness of this study. Finally, I defined the scope and delimitations of this study and identified its significance.

Background

The idea of a student who is both gifted and disabled is not a new concept. Researchers have acknowledged the existence of students with dual exceptionalities since the 1920s. Students with dual exceptionalities have a long history, but they have gone unidentified and underserved until more recent years (Ashburner et al., 2010; Barnard-Brak et al., 2015; Brody & Mills, 1997). Educators and school systems did not officially

begin searching for dual exceptional learners until 1981 (Bracamonte, 2010; Buică-Belciu & Popovici, 2014; Fox et al., 1983). Students identified as gifted and disabled were finally legally recognized with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Foley-Nicpon et al., 2013). Still, school systems have not adequately found ways to serve these students in gifted classrooms (Barnard et al., 2000; Josephson et al., 2018). Schools continue to serve students with dual exceptionalities in more restrictive environments that are primarily designed to address these students' social, emotional, and behavioral deficits while typically ignoring gifted abilities (Alotaibi, 2019).

Teachers who lack appropriate training may lack a sense of self-efficacy, which impedes their ability to serve dual exceptional students (Anglim et al., 2018; Boujut et al., 2017; Gordon, 2017). Teachers who participate in ongoing professional development tend to improve their sense of self-efficacy (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Dymond, 2019; Rowan & Townend, 2016). There has been much research on teacher efficacy; however, there is limited research on the influences challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students have on teachers' self-efficacy. Researchers have begun to explore self-efficacy related to teaching students with ASD; however, they have acknowledged the need for further study to better understand teachers' perceptions regarding the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA learners.

Problem Statement

The number of children diagnosed with ASD has increased (Cain et al., 2019; Love et al., 2019; Yager, 2016), which has led to an increased awareness that these

students exhibit a wide range of abilities. Children with ASD demonstrate low- and high-functioning cognitive abilities, which include giftedness. However, many students diagnosed with ASD lack appropriate social, emotional, and behavioral skills, which can pose challenges in classroom settings and negatively influence teachers' perceptions (Khasakhala & Gavala, 2016; McCurdy & Cole, 2014).

The problem in this study is that despite known challenges presented by the inclusion of students with ASD in gifted classrooms, little is known regarding perceptions that teachers of gifted students have about the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and the influence these challenges have on teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Despite having a clear understanding of disparities between the number of gifted students with ASD and the actual number of students with ASD served in gifted programs, there is a shortage of research regarding teachers' perceptions of the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students. Furthermore, there is little information about how these challenges influence teachers' sense of self-efficacy in meeting these students' needs in an inclusive setting. This study involved understanding and describing perceptions that teachers of gifted students have regarding the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and how these perceived challenges influence their ability to meet these learners' unique needs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions that teachers of gifted students have regarding how challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students influenced teachers' sense of self-efficacy. First, I aimed to better understand perceptions teachers of gifted students had regarding the challenges of teaching gifted-

HFA students. I then took account of teachers' reported sense of self-efficacy as it related to teaching gifted-HFA students. Increasing school leaders' understanding of teachers' perceptions of the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students could better allow school leaders to tailor professional learning opportunities that address teachers' concerns and deficit skills and increase their understanding of serving gifted-HFA students.

I used a basic qualitative study design to gain detailed information from participants via interviews to better understand their perceptions of challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and participants' confidence in their ability to meet these learners' needs. I gained insight into the influence that perceptions of challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students had on teachers' self-efficacy through analysis of data. I explored what challenges teachers of gifted students perceived and how those perceptions influenced their sense of self-efficacy.

Teachers often feel ill-equipped to meet gifted-HFA students' needs (Anglim et al., 2018; Sanahuja-Gavalda et al., 2016). Gifted program directors have denied accepting twice-exceptional students in gifted programs (Lee & Ritchotte, 2018). Teachers may be reluctant to take on the perceived challenges of gifted-HFA students because they may feel inadequately prepared to meet these learners' unique needs. Twice-exceptional students often receive inappropriate and inadequate supports and services (Cain et al., 2019).

Research Questions

RQ1: What are perceived challenges teachers of gifted students have regarding teaching gifted-HFA students?

RQ2: How do teachers of gifted students perceive their self-efficacy regarding teaching gifted-HFA students?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT). Bandura (1989) said people's beliefs, thoughts, and feelings influence their actions. A component of Bandura's SCT is self-efficacy. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy involves how individuals perceive their capabilities to produce desired effects. The study was grounded in relevant constructs of self-efficacy, which include how teachers of gifted students perceive their ability to address the needs of gifted-HFA students, how teachers' beliefs regarding their ability to meet the needs of gifted-HFA students influenced their sense of competency to adequately instruct gifted-HFA students, and how they felt about their ability to manage perceived obstacles and barriers to effectively teaching gifted-HFA students. Teachers may be more likely to shy avoid challenges involved with teaching gifted-HFA students when they perceive that they lack the means to address these students' academic and behavioral needs. Bandura's theory can be used for insights into relationships between teachers' sense of self-efficacy and their ability to teach gifted-HFA students.

Nature of the Study

The basic qualitative research study design allowed me to better understand teachers' perceptions of challenges involved with teaching gifted-HFA students and the influence these challenges had on teachers' sense of self-efficacy. I interviewed teachers of gifted students to collect qualitative data. Interview questions addressed teachers'

knowledge of gifted-HFA learners, any challenges they perceived when teaching gifted-HFA students, and beliefs regarding their ability to meet these students' needs.

Potential participants completed a consent form and study participant screener to determine if they were qualified candidates. The consent form was embedded in the study participant screener as a prerequisite. The criteria survey included demographic information as well as teaching experience and experience teaching students with ASD. Interview questions were primarily self-developed with a few items I adapted from existing research. I obtained permission from authors to use these questions (see Appendix B).

I used open and axial coding during three subsequent phases to analyze the data. I used open coding to label chunks of data during the first phase. I used axial coding to group open codes into categories in the next phase. Finally, I used these codes to focus on the most important categories and developed themes. I repeated this cycle until no new categories emerged. This process is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Definitions

The following terms are used for this research:

Asperger's Syndrome: Educators and other professionals have used the term Asperger's Syndrome to identify individuals on the autism spectrum who exhibit high functioning abilities. There was a shift from using the word Asperger's to using Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to identify all levels of functioning on the spectrum (Ryan & Marshall, 2018). The American Psychiatric Association removed Asperger's Syndrome

from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in May 2013 (Parsloe & Babrow, 2016).

Asynchrony/Asynchronous Development: Silverman (1997) defined asynchrony or asynchronous development as uneven development in gifted learners' cognitive, emotional, and academic development. A gifted learner may experience asynchrony, but unevenness is magnified when elevated levels of intelligence accompany severe weaknesses that are often evident in gifted-HFA learners (Silverman, 2009).

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): A developmental disorder that affects communication and behavior (National Institute of Mental Health, 2018). ASD is a medical diagnosis. Individuals identified with ASD exhibit abilities and deficits that impact their communication, social functioning, sensory input and output, and self-regulation (Ryan & Marshall, 2018).

Gifted and Talented/Gifted: According to the Georgia Department of Education (2019a), "a gifted education student is… one who demonstrates a high degree of intellectual and/or creative ability(ies), exhibits an exceptionally high degree of motivation, and/or excels in specific academic fields, and who needs special instruction and/or special ancillary services to achieve at levels commensurate with his or her ability(ies)" (para. 1).

High-Functioning Autism: High-functioning autism is not an official medical diagnosis. Educators use the term in reference to individuals on the autism spectrum who function academically or in specific areas of life without much assistance (Holland, 2018).

Inclusion: Dev and Haynes (2015) defined inclusion as "a service-delivery model whereby students with and without disabilities are taught the same content and in the same setting, with modifications and accommodations as necessary" (p. 53).

Individual Education Plan (IEP): An IEP is a document that outlines special education services for students found eligible based on criteria set forth by state regulations. Federal law and most states do not require that gifted students have IEPs developed (National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], 2019).

Masking/Masking Effect: Masking can occur in three formats: It occurs when students' disability is masked or covered by the intellectual abilities, when students' intellectual ability masks the disability, or when both students' intellectual abilities and disability obscure one another (Baldwin et al., 2015b; Bannister-Tyrrell et al., 2018; Josephson et al., 2018). Gifted traits can often obscure disabilities, and disabilities can diminish IQ scores (Silverman, 2009).

Self-Efficacy: Self-Efficacy is a key component of Bandura's SCT. Bandura (1994) described perceived self-efficacy as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce effects."

Social-Emotional Needs: Gifted and talented students often have affective needs that may include self-awareness that may impede academics, emotions, and expectations of themselves, as well as a sense of injustice and misread social cues (NAGC, 2009).

Teacher Efficacy: Hoy and Spero (2005) defined teacher efficacy as the belief that teachers hold about their ability to impact student learning and achievement.

Teachers of Gifted Students: For this study, teachers of gifted students refer to teachers who meet training requirements established by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC).

Twice Exceptional (2e): Reis et al. (2014) defined 2e students as those students who are "identified as gifted and talented and also diagnosed with one or more of the special education categories defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)" (Reis et al., 2014, p. 219). 2e learners are also referred to as dual exceptional or gifted with learning disabilities (GT/LD). The term GT/LD also applies to gifted students with ADHD or those gifted with autism (NAGC, 2019). For this study, 2e students refer to those gifted students diagnosed as high functioning students on the ASD and abbreviated as gifted-HFA.

Woodcock-Johnson III achievement battery: The Woodcock-Johnson III Achievement Test and Brief Battery "provides norm-referenced measures of academic abilities" (Wending et a., 2007, p.1). This assessment tool is often used to determine if a student is eligible for gifted services.

Assumptions

The first assumption was that teachers responded honestly and without reservation. Honest responses were critical to understanding how self-efficacy influenced inclusionary practices of teachers of gifted students. This study used a convenience sample. There was an assumption that participants were homogeneous, implying no difference in results had a random sample been selected. Finally, I interviewed participants using remote means due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There was an

assumption that all computer-based interviews did not compromise confidentiality based on guidelines I established to maintain confidentiality (i.e., password protection).

Scope and Delimitations

The study included qualitative interview data obtained from teachers of gifted students. This study involved teachers of gifted students from a large southeastern state. This research study took place in a single school setting with a limited number of potential participants. 45 teachers, administrators, and other staff members held a gifted endorsement at this location. I chose to include teachers who had gifted endorsements over other general or special education teachers because of their influence in terms of including or excluding students from the gifted program. I chose Bandura's theory of self-efficacy over other conceptual frameworks because teachers' perceptions of their ability to meet gifted-HFA students' needs may impact these students' inclusion in gifted programs. The results may not transfer to other locations because this study takes place in a single school within one school system.

Limitations

This study used a convenience sample, which has limitations because participants may not accurately reflect the population. There were 45 teachers, administrators, and other faculty who held a gifted endorsement. Potential participants were predominantly Caucasian females, thus limiting diversity. There was an increased potential for bias because participants were not randomly selected. I was also a faculty member at the research study location, which could further compound the potential for bias, as colleagues may be more likely to answer how they thought I wanted them to respond.

These limitations and the use of a qualitative design made generalizing findings to different settings harder.

I originally planned to conduct interviews face-to-face; however, with the development of the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted interviews via telephone or other remote means because social distancing requirements were still in place. There were some limitations associated with using remote means. First, the number of participants could be limited by participants' access to various technologies or lack of knowledge of how to use them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There could also be problems with audio or video equipment. Voices could break up, and participants could lose connection during both telephone and computer-based interviews. Most people no longer have landlines, and in rural areas, a cellular connection could be questionable, depending on participants' location within the county. Finally, there was a risk of confidentiality being compromised because computer-based tools were used.

Significance

According to the IDEA (2017), school systems should serve students with disabilities in the LRE. Yet, gifted-HFA students tend to remain underserved in gifted programs and placed in more restrictive environments (Dev & Haynes, 2015; Lee & Ritchotte, 2018). Barnard-Brak et al. (2014) said: "stereotypical beliefs and the lack of teacher training" are obstacles to the proper placement of these students. Studying this problem will provide guidance, allowing administrators, instructional coaches, and other education leaders to better understand how teachers' perceptions of challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students influenced their ability to teach these students effectively.

They can then identify, develop, and incorporate professional development opportunities and preservice instruction designed to bolster the efficacy of teachers of gifted students and help these teachers better serve students who are dual-qualified.

Educators who received training and ongoing support could strengthen their sense of self-efficacy, benefiting gifted-HFA students. There is a correlation between teachers' sense of self-efficacy and student performance (Bannister-Tyrrell et al., 2018). Silverman (2009) said, "with the right support services, twice-exceptional (2e) individuals become some of the most creative, productive innovators—people who change the world" (p. 129).

Researchers have addressed the need to change attitudes regarding individuals with autism. There is a need to recognize their "basic right to a full, productive life of self-realization, and not a life on the margins, outside, but rather their integration into all areas of human endeavor, as part of the right to education" (Ponomaryova et al., 2018, p. 35). The attitude of teachers of gifted students, which can be influenced by their sense of self-efficacy, is vital to the successful inclusion of gifted-HFA students. I used this study to investigate how perceptions that teachers of gifted students had about challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students influenced their sense of self-efficacy as it related to their ability to meet the needs of these students. This study's results may help administrators make informed decisions regarding types of professional development training and supports provided to teachers of gifted students.

Ponomaryova et al. (2018) said organizational support is a vital component of educators' willingness to integrate students with HFA in the academic setting. Yager

(2016) described the importance of leadership in terms of the successful inclusion of gifted-HFA students in honors programs. School leaders can use this study's insights to help determine needed supports in the gifted program setting. Teachers of gifted students may develop a more positive perception of challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and thus increase teachers' understanding of their ability to meet these students' needs by identifying and using new supports. School leaders can design training and professional development geared towards increasing knowledge and understanding that teachers of gifted students have regarding challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students. Teachers may feel reassured of their ability to identify and use appropriate supports and accommodations that would lead to the successful integration of these students in the gifted program once teachers have increased their knowledge and understanding of effectively teaching gifted-HFA students.

There is a need to have further research to better understand how teachers of gifted students can improve their effectiveness when teaching gifted-HFA students to provide positive outcomes for these students. The absence of research also indicates that further research is necessary to understand how teachers of gifted students can better prepare to meet the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA learners.

Summary

Teachers of gifted students typically lack an understanding of the characteristics and traits of gifted-HFA students. They have misconceptions and misgivings regarding these students and their abilities. The perceived and actual challenges of gifted-HFA students can leave teachers of gifted students feeling inadequately prepared to meet these

students' needs efficiently. There is limited research available to help district leaders develop appropriate training for teachers of gifted students to improve their practice and increase their sense of self-efficacy in terms of meeting the needs of gifted-HFA students. Using Bandura's theory of self-efficacy as a conceptual framework, this study involves understanding the perceptions of teachers of gifted students regarding the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and how that influences their sense of self-efficacy in terms of their ability to meet the unique needs of these students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is limited research regarding teachers' perceptions of the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and if these challenges influence their sense of self-efficacy. The purpose of this study was twofold: (a) gain an understanding of perceptions that teachers of gifted students have regarding the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students, and (b) better understand how these perceptions influence teachers' sense of self-efficacy. According to the U. S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014), 7% of all students without disabilities participated in gifted programs; however, only 1% of students with disabilities participate in such programs. Roughly 3% of students with ASD are also intellectually gifted (Cain et al., 2019; Charman et al., 2011; Karnes et al., 2004), yet gifted-HFA students continue to be underserved in gifted programs.

I included an exhaustive review of the literature and synthesized studies related to key concepts and research questions that govern this study to better understand this gap in gifted services for gifted-HFA students. I first described my literature research strategy. I then identified and defined the study's conceptual framework and articulated how it applied to research regarding this student population. Finally, I summarized the literature's major themes, including teacher efficacy related to 2e and gifted HFA-students and the gap in knowledge that this study addressed.

Literature Search Strategy

I searched several databases to find seminal and current literature on my research topic. These databases include EBSCOHost, ERIC, Galileo, Google Scholar, JSTOR,

Proquest Multisearch, Questia, Research Gate, SAGE Journals, Science Direct, and WorldCat. The articles I selected were related to teacher efficacy regarding 2e learners, or more specifically, gifted students on the autism spectrum. Inclusion criteria included articles published in the English language that were peer-reviewed, full text, and published between 2015 and 2020. Publication date criteria did not apply to seminal works. I used several dissertation studies in my literature review because there was a limited number of research articles found in peer-reviewed publications, and this topic is a newly emerging phenomenon. I used the following terms to search for articles regarding this literature review: *self-efficacy of teachers*, *teacher efficacy*, *teachers of gifted students*, *teachers of twice-exceptional students*, *teachers of students with dual exceptionalities*, *teachers of students with high functioning autism/Asperger's Syndrome*, *twice-exceptional*, *dual exceptional*, *gifted and disabled*, *disabled and gifted*, *gifted and autism/autistic*, and *high-functioning autism*.

I first reviewed Bandura's SCT and, more specifically, his theory of self-efficacy. I continued to research studies and articles that looked explicitly at teachers' self-efficacy, teachers of gifted children, and teachers of gifted-HFA students. I first searched for peer-reviewed and scholarly journals to find research on 2e students. I cited several earlier articles and research findings throughout this literature review because these works are considered landmarks or foundational studies. These seminal works helped establish the history of serving students who are both gifted and disabled.

Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation

Bandura (1989) said individuals' thoughts affect their actions in terms of their judgment of their capability to control events that impact their lives. Self-efficacy refers to one's belief that one can successfully perform a task at a high level. Bandura (1994) defined self-efficacy as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 71). Individuals with a high sense of self-efficacy are confident that they control their drives, abilities, behavior, and environment. Individuals' sense of self-efficacy can affect goals they set and the amount of effort they are willing to exert to achieve those goals. Individuals who have a poor understanding of self-efficacy may avoid tasks and be unwilling to commit time or energy towards a task or goal. Bandura (1977) said expectations of one's self-efficacy determine if they initiate behaviors or expend efforts, and if so, for how long when faced with obstacles or aversive experiences.

Teacher self-efficacy is the belief that a teacher holds about themselves and their ability to help their students be successful. Teacher self-efficacy also refers to the level of confidence they have in meeting their students' needs and promoting growth effectively. This term indicates the level of confidence that teachers have in their ability to effectively meet the needs of their students, as evident in terms of their student achievement (Henson, 2001; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Kim & Seo, 2018). Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to have students who learn (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Kim & Seo, 2018; Love et al., 2019; Protheroe, 2008; Zee & Koomen 2016).

Armor et al. (1976) found a relationship between teachers' sense of self-efficacy and achievement growth via student standardized reading scores. Berman et al. (1977) said a strong sense of efficacy is positively related to goal achievement, teacher change, and improved student performance. Bray-Clark and Bates (2003) said teacher efficacy was essential to teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. Zee and Koomen (2016) said there were links between teachers' sense of self-efficacy and students' academic performance, and teachers' behaviors and practices in the classroom. Teachers with a definite sense of self-efficacy experience a stronger sense of personal accomplishment, job satisfaction, and commitment to their job (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Klassen & Tze, 2014; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Teachers with a negative sense of self-efficacy are more likely to experience a sense of burnout (Cappe et al., 2017; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Teachers who believe they can effectively teach and influence their students' performance appear to positively impact student outcomes (Kim & Seo, 2018) and are more supportive of inclusive practices (Segall & Campbell, 2014). Zee and Koomen (2016) said teachers with an elevated sense of self-efficacy created productive classroom environments through planning engaging and meaningful lessons. Additionally, these same teachers established clear and precise classroom procedures and routines (Zee & Koomen, 2016). There was an implication that students learn better from teachers who possess a strong sense of self-efficacy.

Kim and Seo (2018) said selected instrumentation and context potentially influences teachers' outcomes regarding their sense of self-efficacy. Love et al. (2019) said teachers' understanding of self-efficacy could also be affected by diverse contexts

and learners they may encounter. A teacher may feel a strong sense of self-efficacy in one learning environment yet feel incapable in another. They may feel a high sense of self-efficacy when teaching students with giftedness; however, they might also feel ill-equipped to teach students with disabilities.

Oral (2017) said teachers reported a lower sense of self-efficacy when instructing gifted students. Typically, teachers with more experience have elevated feelings of self-efficacy; however, Oral said new teachers felt higher levels of self-efficacy when using new practices. Dev and Haynes (2015) said not only could the current classroom context influence teachers' sense of self-efficacy in teaching students with disabilities, but previous experiences could also have a role. A teacher of gifted students may have a lower sense of self-efficacy if they have no prior experiences teaching students with disabilities, particularly gifted-HFA students.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

History of 2e

Hollingworth (1923) used the term gifted to refer to individuals with superior intellect; however, she also acknowledged some highly gifted learners who simultaneously exhibited learning difficulties in one or more areas. It was not until 1944 when a form of autism, referred to as Asperger's, first emerged in research. Asperger (1944) identified a new personality disorder with a similar combination of high intelligence and learning difficulties. He noted behaviors such as "pedantic speech content, impairment of two-way interactions, excellent logical, abstract thinking, isolated areas of interest, repetitive and stereotyped play, and ignorance of environmental

demands" (Baldwin et al., 2015a, p. 207). Early researchers began making a connection between high intellect and certain behavioral traits.

Though the law (e.g., EAHCA) had not yet acknowledged these learners, researchers continued to investigate the phenomenon of students who were simultaneously gifted and disabled. Meisgeier et al. (1978) said students with learning disabilities also possessed superior abilities. These students needed to have not only their academic needs met but also emotional requirements. Meisgeier et al. (1978) said the severity of these students' emotional issues coincided with the asynchrony of their strengths and weaknesses. Still, there were no legal requirements to meet the educational needs of such learners at that time.

In 1944, researchers began to acknowledge characteristics in gifted or highly intelligent individuals that later would be known as HFA. Eventually, the prevalence of such individuals was documented, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) tracked an increase in the number of children diagnosed with autism. With the number of students diagnosed rising each year, researchers continue to explore the characteristics of the 2e learner. Demands for programs designed to meet gifted-HFA students' needs increased as the number of students diagnosed on the autism spectrum increased. Public school systems continue to see a rise in the demand for programs designed to meet the unique needs of gifted-HFA students (Baldwin et al., 2015a; Love et al., 2019). However, while federal projects and state grants created opportunities for program development for gifted students (Baldwin et al., 2015a), 2e learners were still

overlooked and underrepresented in these programs (Bianco & Leech, 2010; Lee & Ritchotte, 2018; Missett et al., 2016; Mohammed, 2018; Townend & Pendegrast, 2015).

Organizations such as the Association for the Education of Gifted Underachieving Students and the special populations division of the NAGC increased awareness of the need to address the deficits of 2e students through special education programming and develop these students' gifts and talents through gifted education. Brody and Mills (1997) said these learners are not being identified and are grossly underserved. The challenge of identifying and serving 2e learners persists.

In the 2000s, the term 2e was developed to describe highly intelligent learners with learning disabilities. Lawmakers reauthorized the IDEA in 2004, and for the first time, the law acknowledged that students with disabilities could also be gifted. The reauthorization of the IDEA also eliminated the discrepancy model that had previously outlined how to identify students with learning disabilities. The discrepancy model compared a student's intellectual abilities to their performance. If there was a discrepancy, the student could be found eligible for special education services.

Furthermore, the law promoted the use of a "comprehensive team-based, problem-solving approach with multiple data sources" (Baldwin et al., 2015a, p. 209) to identify students with learning disabilities. These updates led to changes in policy guidelines, and the federal government supported the use of Jacob Javits grants for underserved populations of gifted learners. Subsequently, many states initiated new guidelines for identifying and serving 2e learners.

There is still limited research regarding 2e learners, particularly when looking at specific disability groups such as gifted-HFA. Few empirical research studies specifically investigated students with high-functioning autism. Researchers have identified the need for continued research to better understand the characteristics of 2e students and how educators can best meet the needs of these unique learners. When examining the broader problem concerning gifted-HFA learners, much of the research was limited or outdated. The limited number of new studies further illustrates the need for researchers to continue to explore problems regarding gifted-HFA learners.

Challenges of Teaching Gifted-HFA Students

The idea of both giftedness and disability coexisting in one individual can be a challenging concept to grasp. Researchers have sought to understand how an individual can be simultaneously gifted and disabled. Silverman (2009) studied these seemingly opposing abilities and noted that just like any other student, gifted students have a wide range of abilities, including a range of strengths and weaknesses that serves as a function of their asynchrony. Davidovitch et al. (2017) investigated teachers' beliefs about the contributions that students with high functioning autism can contribute to a gifted program. Teachers acknowledge that gifted-HFA students experienced challenges in the classroom. Still, these students can also enrich the setting's social and educational climate (Davidovitch et al., 2017), particularly if teachers developed a support system that considered the gifted-HFA student's unique needs and challenges (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2011).

Researchers indicated that teachers find teaching students with disabilities, particularly students with ASD, more challenging (Catalono, 2018). Students on the autism spectrum share three common traits: lack of social skills, communication deficits and repetitive behaviors, and limited or specific interests (Ashburner et al., 2010; de Jager, 2018; Holcombe & Plunkett, 2016; Hopwood, 2019; Majoko, 2016; Ricon et al., 2017; Stokes et al., 2017). Often these students also have social, emotional, and behavioral skills deficits that increase difficulties in school. Researchers have identified several additional challenges that impact teaching gifted-HFA students in a general education setting (Ashburner et al., 2010; Catalono, 2018; de Jager, 2018; Hopwood, 2019; Linton et al., 2015; Majoko, 2016; Ricon et al., 2017; Stokes et al., 2017, Wright, 2016; Yager, 2016). These common traits and deficits can prove challenging in a classroom setting and can be compounded by the teachers' lack of understanding of the characteristics and deficiencies associated with gifted-HFA learners (Dymond, 2019).

The challenges that each gifted-HFA student experiences differ significantly and can profoundly impact their classroom behavior and academic performance. Majoko (2016) interviewed classroom teachers to determine the barriers and enablers that teachers identified as obstacles and facilitators to the inclusion of students with ASD. Teachers specifically identified social rejection, communication impairments, and behavioral challenges of students with ASD in an inclusion setting (Majoko, 2016). Additionally, teachers observed several other behaviors that they felt negatively affected students with ASD success in the general education classroom setting (Majoko, 2016). Teachers noted that students with ASD tend to engage in social isolation, fantasy worlds,

and lonely play, which hindered these students' integration in the inclusion classroom (Majoko, 2016).

Triadic Impairments

Burger-Veltmeijer and Minnaert (2011) identified a triad of impairments experienced by students with ASD: social interaction, communication, and imagination. The triad of impairments coincides with the three common traits previously identified: lack of social skills, communication deficits and repetitive behaviors, and limited or specific interests; however, Burger-Veltmeijer and Minnaert (2011) believed that the triad of impairments was the foundation for the rigid, repetitive pattern of activities that were often associated with students on the autism spectrum. Furthermore, these behaviors presented disruptions in the everyday classroom routines and practices (Gunn & Delafield-Butt, 2016). Disruptions can lead to a loss of continuity in the delivery of classroom material. Often, teachers are uncertain of how to address restricted and repetitive interests. Teachers must understand when and how to incorporate them into their lessons. Researchers have found that some teachers opt to take punitive measures for these interests, while other teachers chose to include them when possible or permit these interests as a reward (Gunn & Delafield-Butt, 2016).

Challenges in Social Interaction

Strong-Kinnaman and Bellack (2012) defined social skills as "behaviors that individuals use to interact effectively with other people" (p. 251). Gifted-HFA students often experience social isolation (Reis et al., 2014) that can be self-imposed (Majoko, 2016) and may be due to the asynchrony associated with the student's chronological age

and mental age (Hopwood, 2019). Gifted-HFA students often demonstrated a lack of behavioral and emotional maturity (Foley-Nicpon, 2013). These students demonstrate difficulty developing age-appropriate peer relationships (Foley-Nicpon, 2013; Yager, 2016), may exhibit emotion regulation deficits (Ashburner et al., 2011), and demonstrate difficulty with the reciprocal communication exchanges that occur in an academic setting (Burger-Veltmeijer & Minnaert, 2011; de Jager, 2018). Peers often exclude Gifted-HFA students because children with ASD often fail to make social adjustments and adapt to the changing social settings in a school environment (Majoko, 2016).

Poor peer relations can add a dynamic to the classroom environment that some teachers of gifted students may not feel prepared to navigate. Gifted-HFA students may need to be explicitly taught the unspoken social rules and norms to successfully navigate the social world around them (Foley-Nicpon, 2013). Parents have expressed concerns regarding teachers' inability to "reach and teach" students with ASD and address social and communication deficits (Barnard et al., 2000, p. 8). Teachers of gifted students need to be trained to incorporate and facilitate social skills lessons into the curriculums to help gifted-HFA students develop the skills to interact with their peers successfully.

Though research indicates that students with HFA benefit from social skills interventions, Gordon (2017) reported that teachers were least likely to implement effective strategies to develop the social skills of gifted-HFA learners. Yet, gifted-HFA students need opportunities to socialize and interact with peers of the same ability level (Amend et al., 2009). Researchers have acknowledged that social skills can improve

when gifted-HFA students are placed in an academically challenging environment with appropriate interventions to develop social skills deficits (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2011).

Challenges in Communication

The terms social skills/interactions and communication skills are often used interchangeably, but these concepts are not the same. Social skills allow individuals to interact with one another in social exchanges and develop meaningful relationships (Strong-Kinnaman & Bellack (2012). Social skills help individuals communicate. Communication skills are the abilities that one uses when giving and receiving different kinds of information (Schramm, 1954). Communication involves listening, speaking, observing, and empathizing. The ability to communicate effectively allows us to build and maintain relationships (Lavner & Bradbury, 2012). Students with ASD can have communication skills that range from nonverbal to highly verbal (Catalone, 2019; Kjelgaard & Tager-Flusberg, 2001; Tager-Flusberg, 2006). Students with HFA tend to have age-appropriate language skills. Yet, they often struggle in conversational exchanges and demonstrate difficulties following the social rules of conversation (i.e., turn-taking, oversharing, etc.) (Arciuli & Brock, 2014).

The challenges in communication that gifted-HFA students experience can negatively impact how gifted-HFA students socially interact with their peers (Catalone, 2018). Gifted-HFA students can demonstrate difficulties verbally expressing themselves. They may use inappropriate words or respond at inappropriate times (Ponomaryova et al., 2018), which hinders their ability to communicate effectively with adults and peers. Rendle-Short (2014) emphasized the long-term benefits that friendships offer in terms of

school adjustment, self-esteem, and a student's sense of well-being. Effective communication skills and pragmatics are necessary tools to establishing these long-term friendships.

Challenges in Imagination

Researchers have noted that gifted-HFA students often experience challenges in imagination (Berenguer et al., 2018: Burger-Veltmeijer & Minnaert, 2011; Dymond, 2019; Ten Eycke & Müller, 2018). The imaginative play behaviors of gifted-HFA children look different from that of their same-age peers (Dymond, 2019). Gifted-HFA students demonstrate difficulty participating in imaginative play with their peers (Berenguer et al., 2018; Ten Eycke & Müller, 2018) and often prefer to engage in imaginative, fantasy worlds to compensate for the lack of peer friendships they experience (Dymond, 2019).

Another aspect of the challenges of imagination that gifted-HFA students face was marked by their inability to imagine others' intentions or feelings (Beadle-Brown et al., 2018). This deficit can lead to miscommunications and can cause the gifted-HFA student to misread social interactions causing disruptions in the learning environment. Not only can teachers of gifted-HFA students find these disruptions challenging, but teachers may also find it challenging to implement interventions or strategies to minimize these miscommunications. Research showed that play and improvisation through drama-based methods could help improve imaginative skills and social and communication skills (Beadle-Brown et al., 2018; Doernberg et al., 2020; Ten Eycke & Müller, 2018).

Asynchrony

Teaching any gifted student with a disability can be challenging. Gifted individuals can possess noticeable discrepancies between their abilities and their weaknesses, which was a fundamental function of their asynchrony (Silverman, 2009; Wright, 2016). This unevenness in skill development was a key characteristic of many children with autism (Davidovitch et al., 2017). Gifted-HFA students often have high academic ability while possessing weak emotional, behavioral, and social skills. The asynchrony was heightened when the gap between high intelligence and poor emotional, behavioral, and social skills was wider. Often the weaknesses associated with autism can depress IQ scores (Silverman, 2009). Because IQ scores are often heavily relied upon to determine giftedness, depressed IQ scores could result in gifted-HFA students being overlooked and therefore inappropriately served.

The difficulty of teaching gifted-HFA students was further compounded because the autism characteristics and traits overshadow the giftedness, or the giftedness masks the characteristics and traits of autism (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2011). Researchers dubbed this phenomenon as the "masking effect" (Baldwin et al., 2015a; Bannister-Tyrrell et al., 2018; Buică-Belciu & Popovici, 2014). In either scenario, the gifted-HFA student lacks supports in one or more areas, negatively impacting the student's ability to progress in a gifted program. Educators who work with gifted-HFA students must be aware of these students' abilities and disabilities and how the gifted-HFA students' strengths and weaknesses impact the teachers' self-concept (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2015). Researchers also believe that the masking effect makes it more challenging for educators to

appropriately identify 2e learners (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2011), and therefore, many gifted-HFA students remain unidentified.

Both parents and teachers acknowledge that the challenging behaviors of gifted-HFA students can be attributed to a lack of academic challenge. Placement of gifted-HFA students in a more academically challenging environment may mitigate some of the challenging behaviors. Still, teachers must be aware that merely placing gifted-HFA students in an appropriate class for their academic needs is not enough (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2011). It is still important that teachers find ways to provide challenging academic instruction and accommodations for deficit areas (Rubenstein et al., 2015; Townend & Pendergast, 2015). Gifted-HFA students will still require supports and accommodations for social, emotional, and behavioral deficits (Rubenstein et al., 2015) as well as other challenges stemming from their disability.

Teachers of gifted students must also acknowledge that while gifted-HFA students have high cognitive abilities, they will still face academic struggles. Not only do these students still have the potential to struggle academically, often gifted-HFA students lack the coping skills to deal with the escalating academic demands of a gifted classroom (Baum et al., 2017; Kaufman, 2018; Rubenstein et al., 2015). Gifted-HFA students have trouble planning and organizing assignments, inattentiveness, distractibility, poor time management, and impulsivity (Bailey & Rose, 2011; Baum et al., 2017; Hopwood, 2019; Reis et al., 2014; Ronksley-Pavia, 2015). When faced with academic challenges, gifted-HFA students are at risk for shutting down. Gifted-HFA students have “complex learning profiles” that require teachers to utilize “outside the box” approaches that some teachers

of gifted students may not be aware of or feel comfortable implementing (Hopwood, 2019, p. 41) to keep the students engaged.

Ashburner et al. (2010) conducted a study and found that fifty-four percent of students with autism were underachieving. Townend and Pendergast (2015) posited that underachieving could be a sign of low self-esteem that stems from both the gifted-HFA students' underperformance in gifted education, possibly due to frustration and disability-related deficits. Teachers can misidentify poor performance or underachieving as a sign of laziness or a lack of motivation; however, gifted-HFA students find this belief frustrating as this trait was not unique only to them (Baum et al., 2017; Hopwood, 2019). Gifted peers can also be underachievers. According to Bennett-Rappell and Northcote (2016), almost half of gifted students are underachieving and fail to reach their full potential. Typical gifted students and students with HFA can exhibit impulsivity and lack of self-control (Bailey & Rose, 2011), leading to underachievement academically. Yet, even with these similarities, teachers of gifted students still feel ill-equipped to teach gifted-HFA students.

Strategies for Successful Inclusion

Sanahuja-Gavalda and Qinyi (2012) sought to better understand how the inclusion of students with ASD could improve. One of the key elements identified was the use of acceptable inclusive practices. Teachers of gifted students must receive additional training to obtain a gifted education endorsement. Still, many do not receive any additional training to teach students with disabilities, including students with ASD. Strategies for serving gifted-HFA students may differ from those needed to teach students

with other disabilities or those who are solely gifted. The teacher of gifted students must not only be able to provide strategies to address the gifted-HFA student's giftedness and academic needs, but they must also be able to offer strategies and accommodations to address the student's needs related to their disability (Doobay et al., 2014).

Teachers need to adapt their teaching style to meet the needs of children with ASD to appropriately accommodate the gifted-HFA students (Gunn & Delafield-Butt, 2016). Teachers of gifted-HFA students must include strategies that address the gifted-HFA students' academic strengths and interests and provide social/emotional supports that promote a safe, educational environment that supports these students' success (Baldwin et al., 2015b). As mentioned previously, restricted interests are one of the primary challenges of teaching children with ASD; however, positive gains can be made in both learning and social skills if teachers learn to incorporate the restricted interests of students with ASD (Gunn & Delafield-Butt, 2016).

Teacher Efficacy and Teaching Gifted-HFA Students

Teacher efficacy is the belief that teachers hold about their ability to effectively teach students and produce positive student outcomes regardless of any challenges students may present (Love, 2016). Teachers who believe they can effectively teach and influence their students' performance appeared to have a positive impact on student outcomes (Henson, 2001; Gordon, 2017; Kim & Seo, 2018; Love, 2016; Love et al., 2019, 2020; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Researchers found that teacher efficacy increased when teachers believed their teaching successfully contributed to students' improved performance (Anglim et al., 2019; Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Love, 2016;

Love, 2020; McCullough, 2014). Zee and Koomen (2016) found that teachers with an elevated sense of self-efficacy created productive classroom environments through planning engaging and meaningful lessons. Additionally, teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy established clear and precise classroom procedures and routines (Zee & Koomen, 2016). There is an implication that students learn better from teachers who possess a strong sense of self-efficacy.

Gifted-HFA students pose unique challenges that can lead teachers of gifted students to question their self-efficacy regarding teaching them (Love, 2016; Love et al., 2019. 2020). Researchers have found that teacher efficacy can be context-dependent (Bandura, 2006; Kim & Seo, 2018; Love, 2016; Love et al., 2019, 2020); therefore, teacher efficacy can be influenced by the learning environment, the students' demographics and abilities, and previous teaching experiences (Hoy & Spero, 2005; Kim & Seo, 2018; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). When gifted-HFA students enter gifted programs or classrooms, they still need a system of supports and services to be provided that are tailored to their unique needs (Coleman & Gallagher, 2015). Teachers of gifted students may lack the ability to appropriately teach and accommodate gifted-HFA students in a manner that meets the students' academic strengths and accommodates the students' deficit areas (Cain et al., 2019), thus affecting the teachers' sense of self-efficacy (Love, 2016; Love et al., 2019, 2020).

Inclusion will almost certainly fail if teachers do not believe in their ability to be inclusive successfully (Davidovitch et al., 2017). Teacher efficacy can be influenced by several factors (e.g., professional development, experience, personal beliefs) (Hoy &

Spero, 2005; Love, 2016; Love et al., 2019, 2020). Teachers must be able to articulate the elements that influence their beliefs about their ability to meet the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students to find ways to increase their sense of self-efficacy. Teachers can experience changes in their sense of self-efficacy if they do not feel they are receiving enough support to serve students (Hoy & Spero, 2005). Teachers can increase their sense of self-efficacy when given appropriate support and resources to effectively teach gifted-HFA students (Anglim et al., 2018; Dymond, 2019).

Researchers have identified students with ASD as one of the most challenging student populations to teach (Love, 2016; Love et al., 2019, 2020). Linton et al. (2015) found that teachers with less experience teaching students with HFA tend to focus more on the challenges, behaviors, and atypical thinking associated with students on the autism spectrum. Schools seldom adopt curriculums that address social skills or behavior deficits (Barnard et al., 2000); therefore, teachers are more likely to feel unprepared to meet these challenges. Teachers need specific knowledge of strategies and best practices designed specifically for students with ASD to effectively teach and accommodate this student population (Love et al., 2019). Researchers have recommended that teachers receive training specifically designed to teach students with ASD (Segall & Campbell, 2014). Teachers of gifted students must not only know best practices for teaching gifted-HFA learners, but teachers must also integrate this knowledge with what they know about teaching gifted students in general.

Teachers must often collaborate with other educators (e.g., special education teachers, speech pathologist, etc.) to meet the needs of gifted-HFA students; however,

teachers of gifted students may not know who to call for support, and many school systems do not provide additional resources in a gifted classroom. This lack of support can leave teachers of gifted-HFA students feeling unprepared to teach these students (Love, 2016). Teaching gifted-HFA students often take a team. Unfortunately, teachers of gifted students are not always provided with access to all the key team members (i.e., special education teachers or paraprofessionals). Without adequate supports and resources, some teachers may not feel comfortable teaching gifted-HFA students (Able et al., 2015; Dymond, 2019; Linton et al., 2015).

Often, teachers of gifted-HFA students may need to provide direct instruction of strategies that allow the gifted-HFA student to compensate for deficits, including coping mechanisms that enabled not only academic but also social, emotional, and behavioral successes. Special education teachers receive training to teach their students to capitalize on strengths and compensate for weaknesses (Silverman, 2009), but teachers of gifted students may lack this training. Teachers of gifted-HFA students may be required to direct teach coping mechanisms that could enable gifted-HFA students to be academically successful and emotionally, behaviorally, and socially successful. Teachers of gifted students need to become capable of delivering dynamic and personalized interventions tailored to the gifted-HFA students learning strengths and challenges (Catalono, 2018; Coleman & Gallagher, 2015). Teachers' willingness to include and accommodate difficult or challenging students was related to their sense of self-efficacy (Catalono, 2018; Gao & Mager, 2011; Segall & Campbell, 2014; Soodak & Podele, 1993; Soodak et al., 1998). Teachers' beliefs can influence their willingness to persist in

reaching challenging students and their resilience when faced with the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

All teachers lack some skills, and they need additional support from interventionists, specialists, teachers of special education, and other personnel who have expertise in instructing and accommodating gifted-HFA students. Some teachers of gifted students possess the same in-depth knowledge of teaching strategies for neurotypical students that other teachers possess; however, teachers of gifted students typically do not have access to some of the resources for students with disabilities (SWD) that other teachers do.

Teachers are unlikely to provide accommodations and instructional strategies unless they believe they can implement these accommodations and strategies and support students as needed. A teachers' sense of self-efficacy can facilitate or hinder the successful inclusion of gifted-HFA students in a general education setting (Gordon, 2017). Teachers who have a strong sense of self-efficacy may feel that sense tested depending on the type of tasks, students, or other extenuating circumstances in the classroom (Ross et al., 1996; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Gordon (2017) found a positive correlation between teacher efficacy and their knowledge and ability to meet the needs of students with ASD.

Summary and Conclusions

Teachers of gifted students typically lack an understanding of the characteristics and traits of gifted-HFA students. They have misconceptions and misgivings of these students and their abilities. The perceived and actual challenges of gifted-HFA students

can leave teachers of gifted students feeling inadequately prepared to meet their behavioral, emotional, and social needs efficiently. There is limited research available to help district leaders develop appropriate training for teachers of gifted students to improve the teachers' practice and increase their sense of self-efficacy in terms of meeting the needs of gifted-HFA students. Using Bandura's theory of self-efficacy as a conceptual framework, this study sought to understand teachers' perceptions of the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and determine if any presumed challenges diminished the teachers' sense of self-efficacy in meeting the unique needs of these students.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of perceptions that teachers of gifted students have regarding how challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students influence teachers' sense of self-efficacy. I used a qualitative research design to explore perceptions teachers of gifted students had regarding the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students. Additionally, I intended to gain an understanding of how these perceptions influenced teachers' sense of self-efficacy.

I stated and defined the study's central concept and the research methodology, including my role in the study. I then identified and described the population and recruitment plan. I presented the data collection instrument, collection procedures, and data analysis plan. Additionally, I discussed ethical constraints and the trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design and Rationale

The following questions guided the study:

RQ1: What are perceived challenges that teachers of gifted students have regarding teaching gifted-HFA students?

RQ2: How do teachers of gifted students perceive their self-efficacy regarding teaching gifted-HFA students?

I used these research questions to guide this study. RQ1 involved identifying challenges that teachers of gifted teachers perceived regarding teaching gifted-HFA students. RQ2 involved whether teachers of gifted students believed these challenges influenced their sense of self-efficacy when it comes to teaching gifted-HFA students.

A quantitative approach was not fitting because this study was about understanding teachers' perceptions of the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and the influence these challenges have on their sense of self-efficacy. Quantitative research is used to test hypotheses, establish causal relationships, and use inferential or predictive statistics, which does not align with this study's purpose. Additionally, I had no intention to establish a causal link or draw comparisons using this study. A qualitative study design was most appropriate because I did not use statistics or test a hypothesis, but I intended to explore a phenomenon.

Qualitative methods are often selected when the researcher seeks to answer questions regarding participants' experiences or perspectives. Qualitative researchers may use numerous research methods and designs, such as case studies, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, or phenomenology. I considered a qualitative case study design; however, a case study requires observations as a triangulation technique (Creswell, 2013), and this study did not include any observations. Ethnography involves gaining meaning through field observations and understanding individuals' interactions and the culture of society (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015); I did not conduct field observations to interact with individuals or their culture. Researchers use the grounded theory design to understand a phenomenon and build a substantive theory regarding the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I sought to understand the phenomenon, but I did not strive to create any theories. Finally, phenomenological research involves understanding the "essence and underlying structure of the phenomenon" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I did not strive to understand the essence or underlying structure of the research problem. I

sought to understand how teachers of gifted students made sense of their experiences teaching gifted-HFA students; therefore, a basic qualitative study design was most fitting for this research study.

I used a basic qualitative design to gain detailed information from participants to better understand their perceptions of challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and their ability to meet the needs of these learners. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) said, "qualitative researchers conducting a basic qualitative study would be interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 24). A basic qualitative research design best fits this study because I sought to understand how teachers interpreted their experiences regarding perceived challenges when teaching gifted-HFA students and what meaning they attributed to those experiences. Using a basic qualitative design, I focused on gaining insight into the perceptions teachers of gifted students had regarding challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and the influence these challenges had on their self-efficacy.

Role of the Researcher

My role in this study was to better understand participants' perceptions of challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and explore if those perceived challenges influenced their sense of self-efficacy. I did this by identifying eligible participants, asking interview questions, analyzing data, and reporting my data analysis. It was also my responsibility to safeguard participants and the information they shared. I am employed at the research site and have worked there for 4 years. I did not hold a position

where I supervised or directly influenced, observed, or evaluated potential participants. Furthermore, I play no role in decision-making regarding identifying, developing, or incorporating professional learning opportunities within the school district.

I identified and acknowledged bias and implemented measures to control it. Sutton and Austin (2015) said researchers should not avoid or ignore bias but should articulate their biases. I controlled for bias using member checks, audit trials, reflexivity, and carefully constructed interview questions.

Methodology

The qualitative research design involves how people make sense of their lives and the world in which they live. Researchers use a basic qualitative study to uncover and interpret those meanings. I used a basic qualitative design to obtain detailed information from participants through interviews to better understand their perceptions of challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and how these challenges influenced their sense of self-efficacy. Using a basic qualitative study design, I explored what challenges teachers of gifted students perceived and how those perceived challenges influenced their sense of self-efficacy. I focused on gaining insight into the influence teachers' perceptions of the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students had on their sense of self-efficacy.

Participant Selection

This study's participants were eight middle school teachers from a large southeastern state who held gifted endorsements and had experience teaching gifted-HFA students. I used a convenience sample because members of the target population were easily accessible. Forty-five teachers, administrators, and other personnel who held gifted

endorsements were employed at the study setting. I sent an email to the administrator and requested that the recruitment flyer be forwarded to potential participants. Potential participants completed a Google form (see Appendix A) to identify eligibility for inclusion in the study. Participants selected for this study met eligibility criteria established for this study's purpose (see Table 1). Participants were current certified middle school classroom teachers who held gifted endorsements and had taught gifted students for at least 2 years. Participants also had experience teaching gifted-HFA or HFA students.

Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
• Currently employed teacher • Certified Middle School Teacher • Holds Georgia Gifted Education Endorsement for a minimum of 2 years • Previous experience teaching gifted-HFA or HFA students	• Holds no Georgia Gifted Education Endorsement • Holds Georgia Gifted Education Endorsement for less than 2 years • No previous experience teaching gifted-HFA or HFA students

Instrumentation

An interview protocol was self-created. Interview questions (see Appendix A) were created to inform my research questions (see Table 1), and two interview questions were taken from another research study (see Appendix B). The first few questions were designed to obtain demographic information and establish rapport with interviewees. I

then asked participants open-ended questions that aligned with research questions (see Table 2). I used probing or follow-up questions to gain more details, clarification, or examples from interviewees if needed. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and summarized. Participants then completed member checks.

Table 2

Data Analysis Matrix

Research Question	Data Collection	Data Analysis
RQ1: What are the perceived challenges that teachers of gifted students have regarding teaching gifted-HFA students?	Interview Questions 12-15	Open and axial coding and thematic analysis
RQ2: How do teachers of gifted students perceive their self-efficacy regarding teaching gifted-HFA students?	Interview Questions 5-11	Open and axial coding and thematic analysis

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I completed all required paperwork to gain approval through the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (approval #11-09-20-0127368) before recruiting potential participants. I planned to obtain a letter of cooperation in writing from the school district; however, I was not required to do so by the IRB. The school district indicated their approval through the forwarding of the research invitation by email. I conversed with the school superintendent and study site administrator. I sent a follow-up email informing them of my study and shared a copy of the study proposal. I obtained

approval to conduct the study by requesting permission from the superintendent (see Appendix C) and site administrator (see Appendix D) to forward my recruitment flyer to potential participants. Potential participants were sent a consent form and study participation screener via Google Forms using the school district's email system. The consent form was contained in section 1, and participants indicated "yes," implying consent before being prompted to complete section 2 of the form, which included demographic information questions. Selected participants completed the consent form before any data were collected.

I informed participants that their real names would remain confidential. Participants were assigned a pseudonym, and their identities remained private. Once I obtained consent forms from participants, I scheduled interviews. Participants answered interview questions based on research questions. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I created a contingency plan. Social distancing was still in effect at the time of interviews, so all interviews occurred remotely using telephone calls or Zoom videoconferencing. I explained the study's purpose and assured participants that their responses would be kept confidential before conducting the interview. I reminded participants that they were not required to participate and could withdraw from the study at any time.

I interviewed teachers using a semi-structured interview approach. This semi-structured interview format allowed me to guide responses while allowing participants to elaborate in ways I could not predict or anticipate through scripted questions alone. I outlined the study's purpose and assured participants that pseudonyms were assigned to ensure confidentiality at the beginning of the interview session. Participants received a

$10 gift card to a major online retailer after completing the consent form and participant study screener. Participants received the gift card regardless of eligibility or if they later decided to withdraw from the study.

I recorded interviews and transcribed them immediately following sessions. I originally planned to conduct interviews in person; however, social gathering restrictions were still in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, I conducted interviews over the telephone or other available remote meeting platforms (i.e., Google Meet or Zoom). I recorded all interviews after informing participants they were being recorded.

Data Analysis Plan

Data were analyzed after all interviews had been completed and transcribed. Because interviews were recorded, participants did not complete full transcript reviews. Instead, they completed member checks by reviewing a summary of findings for accuracy.

I began the data analysis by reading through interview transcriptions and taking notes to become familiar with the data. I then identified codes using open and axial coding. I read through transcripts numerous times, highlighted any relevant or interesting information, and created temporary labels for data. First, I used open coding to break the data into small chunks and assigned codes. I then used axial coding to group open codes into categories. Researchers use axial coding to investigate relationships between concepts created during open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). Finally, I reviewed codes and identified any patterns that presented themselves as significant themes or ideas.

During thematic analysis, I reviewed themes to ensure they were pertinent and accurate representations of the data. I determined if themes made sense or needed to be adjusted. I understood it might be necessary to split themes up, combine them, discard them, or create new themes. Once I made a final list of themes, I named and defined each one. I analyzed how themes related to other categories identified via axial coding. I repeated these three phases until I reached saturation. I also used Dedoose, a cross-platform app for analyzing qualitative data, to further assist my coding. I identified and documented discrepant themes as well.

Throughout the data collection period, I maintained a detailed record of the steps taken to complete this study. I kept raw data with all notes, summaries, procedures, findings, and any reflective or personal notes. I will destroy all data following university guidelines after the study.

Trustworthiness

Member checks are common strategies that researchers use to establish credibility. I conducted member checks of my analysis with some participants and asked them if my interpretations were accurate. Member checks were intended to allow participants the opportunity to review my identified themes to ensure that they had accurately captured participants' perspectives. The use of member checks minimized the risks of researcher bias. Additionally, I documented any biases, dispositions, and assumptions that I held in a reflexive journal.

Transferability shows that "the findings have applicability in other contexts" (Sutton & Austin, 2015, p. 229). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested the use of modest

extrapolations to ensure transferability. Using a thick description, researchers can make conjectures regarding the likelihood that this study's findings could apply to similar conditions in other settings. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) referred to this as user generalizability. I provided a complete description of the participants and the research process. Based on the detailed description of the findings, the reader determines if the results apply to them.

Dependability shows that "the findings are consistent and could be repeated" (Sutton & Austin, 2015, p. 229). Dependability was established with the use of audit trails and reflexivity. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stipulated that readers can regard the study as dependable if the data inform the findings. To facilitate dependability, I provided a detailed account of the methods and procedures involved in this study to create an audit trail. I also used self-reflection regarding any biases or assumptions that could affect the study. Furthermore, I used an analysis process appropriate for my research study design (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Confirmability is "the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest" (Sutton & Austin, 2015, p. 229). I also established confirmability by using audit trials and reflexivity. I maintained detailed notes on decisions made during the study to include reflexive thoughts, research materials used, data findings, and data management (Amankwaa, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Audit trails allow for transparency in the research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Additionally, I remained self-aware and reflexive of my role in this process and

acknowledged the pre-conceived assumptions I brought to this study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003).

Ethical Procedures

I obtained IRB approval before conducting any element of this study involving human participants. Participants were safeguarded from harm by following all rules and guidelines provided by the IRB. No member of the school board, district or school leadership, or any other persons directly or indirectly linked with the school system were given access to it. Participants obtained a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. Additionally, I received written approval from the school district to share my recruitment flyer and adhered to their rules and guidelines.

Participants e-signed informed consent forms and receive assurances that they may withdraw from the study at any time. Identifying information was omitted from any document. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Their identity was safeguarded. If a participant withdraws before the study's conclusion, all data associated with that participant was deleted and destroyed. I will destroy all data per Walden University's guidelines at the end of the study. If social distancing requirements are still in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic and interviews are conducted using remote means, interviews conducted using the Zoom application was password protected. Data will be maintained on a password-protected computer, and only I have access to that data.

Summary

I outlined the research method for this study in chapter 3. First, the research questions were reviewed and rationalized. This study will help shed light on the

perceptions of teachers of gifted students regarding the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students as it influences their sense of self-efficacy. My role as a researcher was defined, and I discussed how participants would qualify. I established safeguards to protect participants and minimize the threat of harm. A basic qualitative research design allowed me to gather information from participants to understand their perceptions of the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and answer the research questions. Procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection were reviewed. I developed a data analysis plan that was used to provide the information for chapter 4. Finally, I reviewed measures taken to ensure the study's trustworthiness and the following ethical procedures.

Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions that teachers of gifted students had regarding how challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students influenced their sense of self-efficacy. This study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: What are perceived challenges teachers of gifted students have regarding teaching gifted-HFA students?

RQ2: How do teachers of gifted students perceive their self-efficacy regarding teaching gifted-HFA students?

I outlined the setting, including any personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experiences at the time of the study as they pertained to the study results. I outlined participant demographics and characteristics as relevant to this study, including the number of participants. I described the location, frequency, and duration of data collection. I explained the data collection process. I outlined any deviations from the research plan, as outlined in Chapter 3. I also identified the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent social distancing guidelines on data collection.

I reported the process used to move inductively from coded units to more extensive data representations, including categories and themes. I described specific codes, categories, and themes that emerged from data using quotations as needed to emphasize their importance. I explained qualities of discrepant cases and how they factored into analysis. I addressed each research question and presented data to support each finding. I discussed discrepant cases and nonconforming data. Finally, I provided

evidence of trustworthiness, as discussed in Chapter 3, as well as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of this study.

Setting

I conducted this study in a public school setting in the Southeast United States using middle school teachers who held current teaching certificates and gifted education endorsements. I recruited participants via email. The eight participants gave their informed consent by completing consent forms and study participant screeners (see Appendix A).

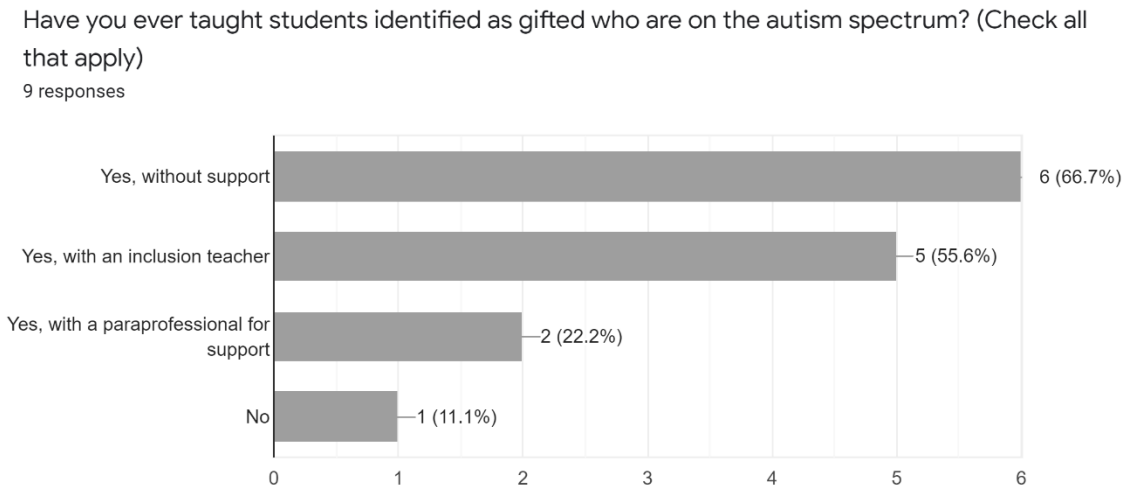
This study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. School systems began shutting down in March 2020. School leaders asked teachers to teach via remote and online formats to minimize the virus's spread. Teachers at the study site began teaching using platforms and technologies that were new and unfamiliar to create virtual or online learning environments. Online platforms may have impacted teachers' sense of self-efficacy because administrators did not have time to provide training to teachers regarding how to use new technologies.

Demographics

This study's participants were eight middle school teachers from a large southeastern state who held gifted endorsements and had experience teaching gifted-HFA students. I had nine individuals volunteer for participation; however, one teacher did not meet the outlined criteria. She only recently earned her gifted endorsement and had less than one year of experience as a gifted-endorsed teacher. She had no experience teaching gifted-HFA students (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Experience Teaching Gifted-HFA Students



The remaining eight participants were all general education teachers who held current gifted endorsements for 4 years or longer (see Table 3). Participants' ages ranged from 27 to 61. Seven out of the eight participants who met the criteria were female, and one participant was male. Participants' years of teaching experience ranged from 6 to 25 years, and the number of years that participants held their gifted endorsements ranged from 4 to 12. One teacher held a bachelor's degree, five participants held master's degrees, and two held specialist degrees. Degrees were not specified because some participants had obtained degrees in areas that would make them identifiable. I gave each teacher a pseudonym to better ensure identity confidentiality.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Highest Degree	Years of Teaching	Years Gifted Endorsed

P1	Female	Master	20	5
P2	Female	Master	13	12
P3	Female	Specialist	25	10
P4	Female	Specialist	20	7
P5	Male	Master	6	5
P6	Female	Bachelor	22	4
P7	Female	Master	10	7
P8	Female	Master	14	9

Participants had a wide variety of teaching experiences and collectively taught almost every subject at the middle school level. P2 previously taught at the elementary level. P8 worked as a paraprofessional before becoming a certified teacher and previously taught Christian ethics at a private Christian school in a different state. Three participants taught English Language Arts (ELA), two taught social studies, two taught science, and one taught an exploratory elective class at the time of the study. All participants had previously taught other subjects during their careers.

Two additional participants had experiences that set them apart from the other participants. P7 was a speech therapist before becoming a classroom teacher. She worked extensively with students on the autism spectrum and better understood communication and language deficits than participants or the average teacher had. P2 has a child diagnosed on the autism spectrum. Her son is high functioning, and she had done more research on the topic than a typical teacher. She had insights that stemmed from personal experiences and research beyond what other participants who did not share similar experiences had.

Experience Teaching Gifted-HFA Students

All participants reported teaching students with disabilities, but they had varying experiences teaching gifted-HFA students and gifted students with other disabilities. P5 had taught students with HFA, whom he strongly believed were gifted; however, previous teachers had not recommended these students for gifted evaluations. P2 taught students who had various disabilities, but the gifted students she taught were diagnosed with autism. P6 taught gifted-HFA students as well as students with ADD/ADHD and other behavior-related disabilities. P1, P4, and P3 worked with gifted students identified with Asperger's. P3 and P7 taught gifted students with learning disabilities and those who they felt were unidentified high achievers. P7 and P8 taught students with dyslexia as well as others diagnosed with ADD/ADHD.

Teaching Environment

P5 had served as the general education teacher in a coteaching inclusion setting. P1, P4, and P2 taught gifted-HFA learners in a coteaching inclusion setting, with autism being the primary disability category. P4 also taught gifted-HFA students without support in the classroom. P2 taught students with disabilities with a paraprofessional who assisted in the classroom.

When P6 first started teaching, she taught students with disabilities in a general education setting without support. Students with disabilities came to her science and social studies classes to develop their socialization skills. P7 spent 15 years as a speech therapist in a pediatric clinic in a hospital setting before becoming a classroom teacher.

She had taught students with disabilities, including gifted-HFA learners, in a coteaching inclusion setting after transitioning to a new career as a classroom teacher.

P8 taught in a coteaching inclusion setting in a public school. She had support in the general education setting, but she was not given an inclusion teacher after being moved to the gifted team. She had been able to consult with the special education teacher and case manager for her gifted-HFA students. P3 taught 2e and other students with disabilities in coteaching inclusion and general education settings without direct support.

Data Collection

The school district indicated approval to conduct the study via the agreement to forward my invitation to participate to school faculty. I emailed the superintendent first (see Appendix C). I then sent a request to the school administrator to forward an email that included invitations to participate (see Appendix D). Potential participants accessed a link within the email to the consent form and study participant screener.

Once potential participants completed the consent form and study participant screener, I determined if they met the outlined criteria to participate (see Table 1). I then sent each qualified participant a link to an online schedule platform, Doodle, to sign up for an interview session convenient for them. The Doodle scheduler included a link to my private Zoom account. The day before the interview, I sent out a reminder with another copy of the Zoom link.

I interviewed eight participants to better understand their perceived challenges in teaching gifted-HFA students and the impact these challenges had on their sense of self-efficacy. I conducted interviews remotely using Zoom conferencing (six participants) or

telephone interviews (two participants) due to the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing guidelines. I recorded all interviews using the Zoom recording feature and saved them to my password-protected laptop.

I used the interview questions as described and outlined in Chapter 3. I asked some participants probing questions to elaborate when they used vague terms that others could interpret differently or when responses were brief or unclear. I explained the purpose of the study at the beginning of each interview. I reminded participants that pseudonyms would better ensure confidentiality, and they may withdraw from the study at any point. I also confirmed that participants received gift cards and let them know that it was theirs whether they chose to continue or withdraw from the study. I informed participants that interviews would be recorded and asked them to turn off their cameras. Either the participant or I then changed the participant's screen name to the given pseudonym. The average interview duration was 28 minutes, with the longest interview lasting 56 minutes and the shortest lasting 19 minutes.

Data Analysis

I recorded all interviews using the Zoom conferencing platform. I transcribed dialogue after each interview. I chose to transcribe interviews instead of using the Zoom transcription feature for two reasons. Use of the Zoom transcription feature required that recordings be stored in the cloud. I wanted to better ensure the confidentiality of participants by keeping interviews stored on my password-protected laptop. Transcribing interviews also allowed me to listen to interviews again and become more familiar with data as I transcribed it.

I skimmed through each interview transcript and made notes as I completed and transcribed each interview. I reread interviews in their entirety once I conducted and transcribed all interviews. I used a spreadsheet to group responses by question, which allowed me to look for recurring thoughts quickly. I then went back through each interview and labeled relevant words, phrases, sentences, and assigned codes (see Table 4). I uploaded all data into Dedoose to assist in further exploration of data.

Table 4

Initial Codes

Characteristics	**Rapport**	**Accommodations**	**Learning Env.**	**Teacher Training**
Academic Challenges	Homelife/External Factors	Academic Focused	Academic Growth	Academic Self-Efficacy
Atypicality	Home-School Connection	Accommodations	Autonomy	Educator Personal Growth
Conflict Resolution Skills	Communication Skills	Generalization	Class Size	Inadequacy
Inattentive	Rapport	Individuality or Individualized	Ineffective	Lack of PD or Training
SEB Challenges	Relationship Building	Personalized	SEB Growth	Parent Support
Interests	Social Skills	SEB Focused	Situational Awareness	Personal Research
Personal Strengths	Social Interactions	Strategy	Student Pers. Growth	Preconceived Notions
Lack of Control		Student Supports	Time Constraints	Preservice Training
SEB Inadequacy		Teacher Support	Training Neg Impact	Professional Development
Situational Dependent			Training Pos Impact	SEB Self-Efficacy
Spectrum variations				Self-confidence or self-efficacy

Typical Behaviors	Teacher Personal Growth
Uniqueness	Training
	Desire for Training

I reread the interviews and grouped codes into categories after reading transcripts and developing initial codes. Initially, I had five categories, but I created three more categories after additional reading and coding. The codes fell into one of eight categories: Situational dependent, characteristics and traits, rapport and relationship development, limited/restrictive interests and attention, social interactions and skills, supports and accommodations, learning environment, and training and professional development. I defined each category and used excerpts to support them.

Situational Dependent

Participants believed that challenges and their ability to meet those challenges depended on gifted-HFA students and their situations (see Table 5). The situational dependent category refers to responses that indicated identified challenges or participants' confidence depended on situations or circumstances. Participants were aware that students' needs varied and changed. Participants used terms such as "depends," "situational," or "varies" to describe their experiences.

Table 5

Interview Excerpts Regarding the Situation

Participant	Excerpt
P4	Supports and accommodations provided for gifted students with high-functioning autism varies by the student.
P5	It depends on the kid.

P6	It all depends on the situation, doesn't it?
P8	It's situational. I think that for some kids because it can be such an array of what their needs are. For some students that I've had, good, great. Then, other students, it's been a struggle because, you know, it's just been a difficult struggle to figure out how to reach them. Where's that point that you can connect with them, and so I say it's very much situational.

Characteristics and Traits

Participants found that varying characteristics and traits that stemmed from students' autism and giftedness posed unique challenges (see Table 6). The category of characteristics and traits refers to responses that indicated identified challenges or participants' confidence depended on understanding characteristics and traits associated with giftedness, HFA, and gifted-HFA. Participants acknowledged they had limited awareness of characteristics and traits of gifted-HFA students. P3 said these students needed to "do things differently," and P7 said, "their triggers are different."

Table 6

Interview Excerpts Regarding Characteristics and Traits

Participant	Excerpt
P3	They do things differently. Some may need a different push, a different lesson, or a different style of teaching. Some may need to verbally explain themselves versus writing for the assignment. Some may need an alternate assignment, or assignment that just grabs their attention immediately, and they can hang on, or a short segment of the assignment that can grab their attention to hang on, to get what I want from them.
P4	I would need some help. All [gifted-HFA] kids are different. My understanding of the characteristics and traits of gifted students with high functioning autism is limited.
P7	Their triggers are different. Like what sets them off. What sets them into a tantrum, and what calms them down once they are having a tantrum.

P8	Our autistic kids are so different. None of them are exactly alike. None of them are exactly alike, and you know, I've had some students who are very quiet, and they are very focused, and they have really learned to work through it. Then I've had other students. They come in, and they are sitting underneath the desk. They are so different, and none of them are alike. Some of them I feel like I can really do well with, and others, I'm just oh my goodness. I just don't know to do, you know, with this child.

Rapport and Relationship Development

Participants saw the importance of establishing rapport and building a positive relationship with gifted-HFA students (see Table 7). The rapport and relationship development category refers to responses that indicated that identified challenges or participants' confidence depended on developing rapport and establishing a positive relationship with gifted-HFA students. Participants, such as P2, saw the importance of developing a relationship to facilitate learning. Participants felt it was important for gifted-HFA students to know that their teachers cared for them and supported them. P7 saw the importance of "figuring out how to relate to them so that we could have a good relationship, so [she] could help them out academically, behaviorally, and socially."

Table 7

Interview Excerpts Regarding Rapport and Relationship Building

Participant	**Excerpt**
P2	I feel like my relationship with them helps foster the learning in my classroom. I try to build a relationship with the student as much as I can.
P3	It's not how much I know; it's how much I care. I think it goes back to know the kid. Learning what makes them tick. Learning what makes them happy. Learning what makes them frustrated. Managing their surroundings. They don't accept change easily. Most of them. Gaining their trust. It's got to be built. It's got to be shown both ways.

P6	I try to make my time with them memorable, you know, be the reason they want to come to school and want to have a relationship with an adult when they can't have that at home.
P7	Figuring out how to relate to them so that we could have a good relationship so I could help them out academically, behaviorally, and socially.
P8	I really try to pour that into them and let them know that no matter what, whether I've been frustrated with them that day or something has gone wrong that day, that I really do love them and that I do care about them.

Limited/Restrictive Interests and Attention

Participants found limited and restrictive interests and inattentiveness to be challenging behaviors exhibited by their gifted-HFA students (see Table 8). The category of limited/restrictive interests and attention refers to responses that indicated that identified challenges or participants' confidence depended on the gifted-HFA students' limited/restrictive interests and the teachers' ability to incorporate them into the lessons. This category also included the challenges that the gifted-HFA student's inattentiveness presented in the classroom. Participants, such as P5 and P1, found that some gifted-HFA students preferred to read or only complete activities that interested them.

Table 8

Interview Excerpts Regarding Limited/Restrictive Interests and Attention

Participant	Excerpt
P1	He is just sitting back there reading, and he's not paying any attention.
P3	Some may need an alternate assignment, or assignment that just grabs their attention immediately, and they can hang on, or a short segment of the assignment that can grab their attention to hang on, to get what I want from them.
P5	He loved to read but only about things he was interested in. If he had no interest in it, he just wasn't going to do it. So really, it's a challenge to find that balance between what they had to do and what they were interested in.

P7	It was finding what interest them in that subject area and then getting them interested in the part they were not interested in and keeping their attention.
P8	Keeping attention is huge. Keeping their attention and their focus. Most of the time, if they were not interested, they were going to figure out some way to interrupt the class or make it about them.

Social Interactions and Skills

Participants identified social interactions or social skills as challenges in the classroom environment that impacted academic and social-emotional learning. (see Table 9). The category of social interactions and skills refers to responses that indicated that identified challenges or participants' confidence depended on gifted-HFA students' inability to develop and maintain appropriate social interactions and skills in the classroom setting. Often, gifted-HFA students misread social cues or engage in inappropriate social exchanges. P1 found it was helpful to allow her gifted-HFA student to initiate social interactions, while P8 had a student who wanted to be the "center of the show." The gifted-HFA student in both cases exhibited behaviors that were not considered within social norms.

Table 9

Interview Excerpts Regarding Social-Emotional Learning

Participant	Excerpt
P1	There was no interaction unless he instigated it because I knew he would curse someone out just to.
P2	I have put a lot of work into dealing with social-emotional needs of children with autism. I think that relationships and how they have to form with autistic children is probably the greatest hindrance to social-emotional learning.
P4	These students rise or fall to the level of the expectations of those around them.

P5	It could be the smallest little thing but would throw him off. It wouldn't even be direct towards him, and he would have to go in the hall.
P6	In classrooms, in general, free time, unstructured time is frowned upon, but I feel it is essential. Not just for special children but for all middle school children to have that time to communicate with others or self-reflect.
P7	Teaching them right from wrong and how to resolve arguments without it being necessarily a fight, like using fists or ugly words.
P8	I had one who just wanted to be the center of the show, and it was very hard. The bonus for us is that the students around them are more accepting, so that kind of eliminates that part of it.

Supports and Accommodations

Participants identified supports (for the student and the teacher) and accommodations as necessary to manage the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students (see Table 10). The category of supports and accommodations refers to responses that indicated that identified challenges or participants' confidence depended on the supports and accommodations participants used. The participants also identified their inability to locate and use supports and accommodations that met the gifted-HFA student's need as a challenge. P3, for instance, realized that gifted-HFA students needed "a different push, a different lesson, or a different style of teaching." Some participants could not identify supports and accommodations, so they sought external support from counselors, special education teachers, school psychologists, or administrators.

Table 10

Interview Excerpts Regarding Supports and Accommodations

Participant	**Excerpt**
P1	I would have to modify some stuff for him. We always allowed them extra time and things if we need to with what they're going through. Or we may contact the counselor.

P2	I also ask for outside help because sometimes it takes more than me. Sometimes I need a psychological, you know, like a counselor or a therapist, or somebody who is more skilled in those kinds of things than I am.
P3	Some may need a different push, a different lesson, or a different style of teaching. Some may need to verbally explain themselves versus writing for the assignment. Some may need an alternate assignment, or assignment that just grabs their attention immediately, and they can hang on, or a short segment of the assignment that can grab their attention to hang on, to get what I want from them. I feel that we need someone else in our classroom to help us as well, so I can balance the needs of all learners versus one learner.
P4	I know I can refer them to a counselor. Accommodations provided for gifted students with autism varies by student. Some general examples may include extended time, counseling services, and guided instruction.
P5	I feel like I can go to their case manager if they are a sped student or counselor, or principal.

Learning Environment

Participants identified the learning environment as contributors to the challenges (i.e., class size, classroom management) (see Table 11). The learning environment category refers to responses that indicated that identified challenges or participants' confidence depended on the learning environment and creating a learning space conducive to meeting gifted-HFA students' needs. Participants saw the importance of creating a positive learning environment. Some participants, such as P2 and P4, were concerned with class size and felt it contributed negatively to the classroom environment and could be overstimulating for gifted-HFA learners.

Table 11

Interview Excerpts Regarding the Learning Environment

Participant	Excerpt
P2	I feel like I have a really positive environment. I set high standards for them that I expect them to reach but also in a positive way.

	You know, things like being overstimulated, or being, or having too much sensory. You know the sensory issues—things like that that can hinder their education. He was in a class with, gosh, 28 or 29 students, and so because of that, it was often overstimulating.
P3	One of the rules I have is no one gets left out, so they know they have to ask someone to join them in their group, and I don't have to ask them or tell them.
P4	You know 'cause there are so many kids in the class, but they [gifted-HFA students] require so much attention, or they [gifted-HFA students] are ready to move forward. You know, the number of kids makes this hard to do. In order to accommodate gifted students with high-functioning autism, I have had to modify seating arrangements and assignments.
P6	I did it all alone even, even so with the self-contained children.
P8	But then you have a whole classroom full of students, other students too, and when you're in the gifted atmosphere, you know typically, you know, this isn't always true, but typically, the majority of gifted students are more focused.

Training and Professional Development

Participants recognized that they had limited training and needed ongoing professional development to successfully meet the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and increase their confidence in their ability to do so (see Table 12). The training and professional development category refers to responses that indicated that identified challenges or participants' confidence depended on the teachers' preservice training or ongoing professional development. All participants shared that they received little to no preservice training. Participants who recalled a preservice course shared that it was brief and limited. Professional development was offered, but as P5 stated, "it wasn't anything that I would be offered to attend." Many participants shared this view.

Table 12

Interview Excerpts Regarding Training and Professional Development

Participant	Excerpt
P1	I think we could use a little more help for autistic kids. I don't recall ever being offered that.
P4	I'm a regular ed teacher. Maybe some special education teachers have taken it, but I have not. I just don't ever look for or take those classes.
P5	I may have received an email from XZY, but it wasn't anything that I would be offered to attend.
P7	We had some professional learning on social-emotional learning, but they were only 15-20 minutes per week. They were not in-depth, and they were not especially for kids with autism.
P8	I worked at a residential foster home with a lot of issues. So, most of my training with kids and emotional, behavioral things came from that time period, not in the educational atmosphere.

Teacher Impact

I asked participants if they believed they made a difference in their students' lives. Most thought that their ability to influence their students was situationally dependent and unique to each child. P1 believed she positively impacted her students but acknowledged that "it depends on the child." P5 shared the same sentiment, "Sometimes, it's just being their teacher. Sometimes, it's listening to them when they need someone to vent to or talk to. It just kind of depends on the kid and the situation." P7 pointed out the various roles she played depended on the student and the student's needs. Her role may be to serve as "a mother figure that they don't have anymore, a mentor for some of them, [or] just being a sounding board" for others.

P4 and P8 believed that their impact depended on the student and the student's needs, but they also felt compelled to help their students set goals and dreams for their future. P4 believed that "all students have a certain route that they should take, and learning should be personalized" because their goals and dreams are unique to each of them. P8 believed that many students "come in and they have those dreams and goals," and it was her job to help them achieve them; however, "some students come in, and they don't have any dreams and goals." P8 believed she was there to inspire them in these cases. and help them identify those dreams and set up goals to "make it happened for them."

Some participants focused on their role as an educator. P2 believed she made a difference in her students' lives by developing a "relationship with them," which helped "foster the learning." P3 focused on developing her students' reading skills. She knew she made a difference when a "child who was reading below average suddenly read on average or above and bloom[ed] in front of [her] eyes." P6 thought she made the most significant difference by teaching her students "how to think, how to process and think."

I asked what part of their students' lives they felt they had the most impact, and participants believed they had the most impact on their students' academic growth. P1 saw the most significant impact on her students' reading and writing. P2 looked for evidence in her students' "progress as they go throughout the year." P5 identified academic growth as his most significant impact. He knew he had accomplished that when he saw "the look on a kid's face" that indicated that the student was beginning to "get a

concept that they've been struggling with or just understanding a topic they hadn't been understanding."

P3 believed that the most apparent ways she impacted her students occurred in the classroom, but she also thought she had "an impact in their lives." P3 wanted students to learn how to accept and give kindness. She stressed how students deserved to be treated and how they should treat others. She wanted to create an environment in which students were "willing to help others when [she hadn't] asked them to." Similarly, P4 believed she was "more there to inspire." She wanted students to "gain a sense of how they are feeling each day. Just something they can take from school back home." She believed that teachers could "inspire them to do better" and "be the best versions of themselves." P6 wanted to impact students in a way that would benefit them outside of school. She wanted to develop her students' ability to "think independently" and "go with their gut feeling, to go with their instincts."

P7 wanted to impact her students by teaching them "to be a better person." She focused on character development and conflict resolution skills. "I have gotten letters from kids after they graduated, thanking me for teaching them right from wrong, and how to resolve arguments without it necessarily being a fight, like using fists or ugly words." P8 pointed out that while grades are important, "in the grand scheme of things, it really is not gonna matter, but who you are as a person, and your integrity and your character will always matter. That's gonna last a lifetime."

I asked participants what part of their students' lives in which they had the most negligible impact. All participants acknowledged that there were aspects of their

students' lives in which they have little to no effect. Specifically, participants felt they made little impact on their students' home life and things outside of school. Some participants tried to establish a positive rapport with parents and encourage communication between home and school to alleviate the lack of impact participants thought they had in these areas. P4 found that "sometimes parents [were] very receptive" and were willing to work with the teachers. P2 strived to create a school environment where "kids feel safe and secure and loved" because "they were not getting that at home." Some participants felt many students bring "extra baggage" to school that interfered with learning and left teachers feeling inadequate. P5 thought that he was "supposed to be able to fix things for these kids." He found that his students' needs often went "beyond the scope of a classroom teacher." P1 and P6 reached out to the school counselors for help when they felt their needs exceeded their capabilities. P1 pointed out how "fortunate we are to have certified therapists on campus."

Challenges of Teaching Gifted-HFA Students

I asked participants to identify challenges in teaching gifted-HFA students (see Table 13) and challenges in meeting their social, emotional, and behavioral needs (see Table 14). Participants believed that understanding and identifying the characteristics and traits associated with autism created a challenge. P3 asserted that gifted-HFA students are often "sensitive, experience social difficulties and anxiety, require routine and dislike change." P4 admitted that she had little understanding of gifted-HFA students, and she recognized "they [had] certain conditions that [were] required in order to help them perform at their highest potential."

Further compounding the challenge of identifying the characteristics and traits of gifted-HFA students, some participants found the differences that each gifted-HFA student presented as an additional challenge. P3 noted that "they do things differently." According to P8, "None of them are exactly alike. I've had some [gifted-HFA] students who are very quiet, and they are very focused and have learned to work through it. Then I have others who come in, and they are sitting under the desk." P7 found that no two gifted-HFA students were alike, and "their triggers [were] all different." She had a difficult time determining "what sets them off, what sets them into a tantrum, and what calms them down once they are having a tantrum."

Table 13

Interview Excerpts Regarding Perceived Academic Challenges

Participant	Excerpt
P1	I don't know how to help them with the emotional. He just needed to be away from everyone. You couldn't just give him regular, rote work.
P2	I would say that the biggest challenge is going to be the behaviors are not typical of students who are normally sitting in my classroom. I am thinking of one student in particular. He had to be removed from the classroom a good bit because of overstimulation.
P3	Understanding their needs and how they do things differently. Some need a different push, a different lesson, or a different style of teaching. Some may need to be verbally explain themselves versus writing assignments. Some may need an alternate assignment or assignment that just grabs their attention immediately.
P4	The biggest challenge was those who came with accommodations from last year… sometimes, it kind of hurts their performance going forward. It seems like people put them in a box. I couldn't really focus on or spend a lot of time with that student or those students. There are so many kids in the class, but they require so much attention.
P5	If they get derailed or sidetracked by something and get fixated on that something instead of focusing on the task at hand, that can be a struggle to

	really get them past whatever has derailed them and get them back on track. It's a challenge to find that balance between what they had to do and what they were interested in.
P6	Group work and interpersonal skills. Group work was the worst, especially if you were trying to do something spontaneous and work together. That took some planning. If you have a child who can spin an answer to be right in multiple ways, that's extremely challenging. You're trying to get them to use application to choose one that is best, so best versus right.
P7	Their triggers are all different. Then finding what calms them down and how to reach those kids. It's finding what interests them in that subject area and then getting them interested in the part they are not interested in and keeping their attention.
P8	I think our autistic kids are so different. None of them are exactly alike. I've had some students who are very quiet, and they are focused, and they have really learned to work through it. Then I've had other students. They come in, and they are sitting underneath the desk. Keeping attention is huge. Keeping their attention and their focus and interrupting. I had one who just wanted to be the center of attention. And organizational skills were terrible. Other students begin to get aggravated with the. You don't want to make that kid a target or feel like you don't like them.

Table 14

Interview Excerpts Regarding Perceived Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Challenges

Participant	Excerpt
P1	I just had to move him away from the other kids and really watch him to make sure there was no interaction unless he instigated it because I knew he would curse someone out.
P2	Autistic children don't form relationships the same way. With the typical student sitting in my classroom, I can usually find something I can talk to them about. I think that relationships and how they have to form with autistic children is probably the greatest hindrance.
P3	I think it goes back to knowing the kid. Learning what makes them tick. Learning what makes them happy. Learning what makes them frustrated. Managing their surroundings. They don't accept change easily. Gaining their trust.
P4	It went moment by moment sometimes. There were moments, but me, I thought they had moments like other kids have moments.

P5	When they derail, it took a while for them to get back. If something really sidetracked them, it could be next to impossible to get them back on topic in a relatively short amount of time. It could be the smallest thing but would throw him off. It wouldn't even be directed towards him, and he would have to go in the hall.
P6	Free time. Unstructured time is frowned upon, but I feel it is essential to have time to communicate with others or self-reflect. They need some unstructured time, a brain break. Sometimes, they can't handle that time, though.
P7	Figuring out how to relate to them so that we could have a good relationship, so I could help them out academically, behaviorally, and socially.
P8	Oftentimes, trying to figure out what's going on, what's making them tick, is very difficult. When it comes to the deep parts, and the student is really struggling with what to do in the classroom, that's where I become very. I feel inadequate. That's when I seek out folks who know who've been with this kid for a while.

Participants believed that forming a connection and building rapport with students was important, but P2 thought that "autistic children don't form relationships the same way." P3 felt that "knowing the kid, learning what makes them tick, learning what makes them happy, learning what makes them frustrated" was key to getting to know the gifted-HFA student and building a relationship with them. P8 identified a similar need to "figure out what's going on, what's making them tick" but felt it was challenging to do this with gifted-HFA students. P7 found it challenging to "figure out how to relate to them so that we could have a good relationship." She believed that relationship was key to her helping them "academically, behaviorally, and socially."

Many gifted-HFA students can successfully navigate their day, but they can react differently from their neurotypical peers. P5 found that when "they get derailed or sidetracked by something and get fixated on that something instead of focusing on the task at hand, that can be a real struggle." P1 admitted that she is not sure how to help

gifted-HFA students with “the emotional stuff.” P4 identified “moments” in which gifted-HFA students did not seem to be able to “get it together.” The trigger could be something that seemed meaningless to others, but it would sidetrack the gifted-HFA student. P5 found that “it took a while to get them back.”

P2 believed that her biggest challenge was “the behaviors that are not typical of students who are normally sitting in [her] classroom.” Even when children with autism do not have behavior issues, P2 found that “there are certain behaviors that set them apart from the other students.” P2 found that these behaviors “kind of hinder their education.” I asked P2 to be more specific about what these behaviors were, and she identified “being overstimulated” or “having too much sensory input” as behaviors some gifted-HFA students exhibit. P7 found it challenging to “find what calms them down” once they were overstimulated or upset.

Gifted-HFA students often experience social difficulties and lack appropriate social skills and may exhibit inappropriate social interactions or limit their social interaction or isolate themselves. P1 had a student who preferred to sit by himself and would ‘seldom interact with his peers. P6 saw that her gifted-HFA students had “difficulties with interpersonal skills and group work.” P6 was a science teacher, and she would often put her students in small groups to work on projects or experiments, and “group work was the worse.” She felt that planning for group work was the most challenging part of teaching gifted-HFA students because she had to be purposeful in how she grouped her students.

P5 saw that social difficulties often stemmed from misreading social cues or reading into others' intentions. P5 recalled one student who often believed that others were talking about him or directing behaviors towards him. "It could be the smallest thing, but it would throw him off. It wouldn't even be directed towards him, and he would have to go in the hall." P8 saw that often gifted-HFA students are "not socially accepted by their peers because of their differences." Peers would sometimes "steer clear of them" because they found the gifted-HFA students "odd." P1 believed that the "personality quirks" exhibited were "fine" when the gifted-HFA student "didn't seem to care." She would allow them to sit by themselves "as long as they worked and didn't become a distraction."

Some students, such as P1's, choose to be isolated from their peers, while other gifted-HFA students exhibit behaviors that require removal from the classroom setting. P2 recalled one student who "had to be removed from the classroom a good bit because of overstimulation." She knew that each time she removed this student, he missed instruction, which impacted his academic progress. P1 also had a student who needed to be set apart from his peers. The student did not have to leave the room, but he needed to be "moved away from the other kids and really watched to make sure there was no interaction unless he instigated it because he would curse someone out."

Participants removed some students from the classroom due to overstimulation or other sensory deficits, but some gifted-HFA students exhibited inappropriate behaviors and required removal from the class. P8 described a student who seemed to want to be the center of attention. "If he wasn't interested in what [P8] was teaching, he would

figure out some way to interrupt the class or make it about him." P8 found it challenging to manage his behaviors while trying to gain his interest and still meet the other students' needs in the classroom.

Some participants found that gifted-HFA students sometimes fixated on limited or specific interests or had difficulty paying attention. P5 had a student who would only read if he found the topic interesting, but "if he had no interest in it, he just wasn't going to do it." P5 found it challenging to "find that balance between what they had to do and what they are interested in." P1 also had a student who fixated on books that he found interesting, but he would "tune out everything else." P7 struggled to find "what interests them or to get them interested in the parts they were not interested in and then keep their attention." P8 found it challenging to gain and keep gifted-HFA students' interest because sometimes her subject (social studies) "could be boring."

Participants felt they needed to find new methods and strategies to accommodate gifted-HFA students. P3 realized that gifted-HFA students required "a different push, a different lesson, or a different style of teaching." Some participants found it challenging to identify and appropriately use a wide array of tools. Some participants needed to manipulate the environment and better manage the gifted-HFA students' surroundings. P3 noted that gifted-HFA students do not seem to "accept change easily." P6 believed teachers could help gifted-HFA students adjust to change by posting a schedule or warning students of upcoming changes. She also thought that gifted-HFA students, as well as other middle school students, needed scheduled "brain breaks." P4 and P2 saw class size as challenging because gifted-HFA students may require more attention and

specialized instruction. P4 believed that large class sizes made it difficult to give gifted-HFA students the attention and time they needed to master standards. P2 thought that large class sizes contributed to the overstimulation of her gifted-HFA students with sensory deficits.

Self-Efficacy Regarding Teaching Gifted-HFA Students

I asked participants how confident they felt in meeting the academic needs of their students. Overall, participants felt confident that they were capable of meeting the academic needs of all of their students (see Table 15). P5 was "pretty confident" that he could meet most of his students' academic needs. Students sometimes "throw in a question" not anticipated, but P5 felt that he could tackle those unforeseen questions. P1 felt "about 99%" confident in her ability to teach her students as long as they did not have other issues (i.e., home, social) that impeded their learning. When students had outside factors that affected them at school, P1 expressed a lack of confidence. P4 was confident that she could meet most students' academic needs. Overall, P2 was confident in her ability to teach her students. P6, P7, P8, and P3 were optimistic that they could meet most of her students' academic needs. P8 acknowledged that she had had more success with some students than with others.

Table 15

Interview Excerpts Regarding Confidence in Meeting Academic Needs

Participant	Excerpt
P1	I'd say about 99%.
P2	I'm very confident.

P3	I feel very confident that I can if I can find the right way.
P4	On a scale of 1 to 10, I say a 10.
P5	I am pretty confident that I can meet most of their academic needs.
P6	I'm pretty confident.
P7	85-90% confident that I can teach the average student.
P8	I think in the area of social studies, I am pretty confident.

Most participants were not confident (see Table 16) when meeting the academic needs of gifted-HFA students. P5 felt that it was a struggle. He found teaching students with HFA easiest when they were "in their element, and they are comfortable… and [didn't] get derailed by anything." P5 felt confident that he could keep the student engaged if the student was complying and following along with the instruction; however, should something happen to "derail" the student, P5 thought it was a struggle to get the student back on track and focused on the learning. P4 acknowledged that she was less secure when meeting the needs of gifted-HFA students. P6 admitted that she often had more difficulty meeting the academic needs of higher functioning students with disabilities. P3 was only "semi-confident" that she could meet the academic needs of gifted-HFA learners. P2 was the only participant who felt confident and contributed that confidence to her research regarding gifted-HFA learners. She "delved into the autistic world" to better understand and help her child, and it had increased her confidence in the classroom with her gifted-HFA students.

Table 16

Excerpts Regarding Confidence in Meeting Academic Needs

Participant	Excerpt
P1	Thinking of one little guy, after I knew him, I was fine. At first, I was wondering because he just sat back there and didn't engage. Once I knew him and how to modify some stuff for him, we were fine. If I get another kid, it starts all over. I just can't get it right until I know them better. It's hard.
P2	II am pretty confident in that. I've dealt with them before, so I am very confident that I can meet their needs. I have spent the last few years studying autism and stuff because my own personal child is autistic and high functioning. So, in trying to meet his needs, I have delved into the autistic world.
P3	I'm semi-confident. I feel that we need someone else in our classroom to help us, so I can balance the needs of all learners versus one learner.
P4	I would say 8. I still don't know about it as much. I would need someone to help. I would definitely put that at an 8 because I would need some guidance from someone else.
P5	It's a struggle sometimes, but I feel like when they are in their element, and they are comfortable, and they are going with it, and they don't get derailed by anything, I feel like I'm pretty confident. If they get derailed, that can be a struggle.
P6	I would say somewhat confident. I am less confident with the higher functioning kids than the lower functioning children.
P7	I feel 75-80% confident.
P8	Some students were better than others. I feel like I have been successful with some, and then I think back to some other students. I feel like I wanted to be more successful with them. It was frustrating as a teacher because you want all your children to do well, but you can't always find that point that helps them to do as well as they can. It's hard.

I asked participants how confident they felt in meeting their students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs. Participants were not as confident in their ability to meet the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of gifted-HFA students (see Table 17).

P1 was not confident in her ability to meet any of her students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs. She preferred to ask for assistance from other faculty members, such as the student's special education case manager or a counselor. P2 was "fairly confident" but acknowledged that it was more of a struggle because sometimes she was not "able to reach a student because of their predisposition, attitude, based on their home environment, or their attitude towards school." P2 had personal experiences with her son with HFA that helped her understand the need to "build a relationship with the student as much as [she] can." P3 saw meeting the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of gifted-HFA students as more of a challenge as well. P3 tried to have empathy for these students and "place [herself] in their shoes" to understand better how they felt.

Table 17

Excerpts Regarding Confidence in Meeting Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Needs

Participant	Excerpt
P1	I would almost fail with that. I feel like I need more support to do this.
P2	I would say that I'm fairly confident. I can't always meet those. I feel like sometimes I'm not able to read a student because of their predispositions, attitude, based on their home environment, or their attitude towards school. I try to build a relationship with the students as much as I can, and I also ask for outside help because it takes more than me.
P3	That's a challenge, but I think I can get it. I have to place myself in their shoes for a minute.
P4	I don't know. We have a lot of kids who need to go to counseling, so I say like a 6.
P5	It depends on the situation. I feel like I can handle a lot and help with a lot, but I feel there are some things that are beyond my area. I need to go to somebody who has a little more power than me. I feel like I can

	go to their case manager if they are a sped student or counselor, or principal. I feel like 75-80% confident I can meet them.
P6	I am confident about that if I am left alone to teach in the manner that I feel the children learn, and I don't have to be in line with everyone else. If I can have the freedom to run my classroom, sees fit versus how the admin sees fit.
P7	I am 60% confident, maybe 55-60%.
P8	I would say, in general, I feel okay about it, but I want to find out information. I want to go to those people who know about these kids. It's also situational. I think that for some kids because it can be such an array of what their needs are. For some students, I'm great. Then, other students, it's been a struggle. It's just been a difficult struggle to figure out how to reach them.

Overall, P5 felt equipped to help students; however, he acknowledged that some things go beyond his expertise area. P5 went to somebody who "has a little more power" than he did when this occurred. P5 identified someone with more power as an individual who can help with that student's needs in that situation. It could be the student's IEP case manager, a counselor, or a principal. P5 felt that he could quickly go to any of these individuals for direct support for the student or guidance for himself. P1 found that she had to go to other teachers or staff members for additional support to meet these needs. She did not feel confident in her ability to meet the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of gifted-HFA students.

Gifted-HFA students often have social, emotional, and behavioral needs that require additional support outside of the classroom setting. Students often come to school with needs that go beyond merely academic. P4 often felt that other school personnel, such as counselors or therapists, could better meet these students' needs. P2 elicited

outside sources, such as the school psychologist, counselor, or the student's case manager, if the gifted-HFA students were eligible for special education services. P7 previously worked in a school system where she did not feel supported, and she lacked the resources and understanding needed to meet these students' needs in an academic. She felt that her current administrators and team teachers provided the support and resources needed to better meet these students' needs. P8 was not confident in her ability to address the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of gifted-HFA students, so she regularly consulted with the case manager or special educators. She preferred to consult with these "experts" to find out more about the student and their needs.

P2 felt that some gifted-HFA students came to school with a "predisposition, attitude, based on their home environment, or their attitudes towards school" that made it harder to reach that student. P2 tried to build a positive relationship with the gifted-HFA students. P7 was unsure about how to relate to gifted-HFA students and harness a positive relationship with them. P8 found that meeting the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of gifted-HFA learners could also be situational. "For some students that I've had, great! Then, other students, it's been a struggle. It's just been a difficult struggle to figure out how to reach them."

P3 tried to empathize with her students and put herself in their position. She thought, "what would I want if I was them?" P3 felt that she must first get to know her students better to build a sense of empathy. She accomplished this by creating a positive relationship with each of her students and establishing a positive rapport. She felt that

once she "gets the kid," she could better help them through the social, emotional, and behavioral hurdles.

Each participant was asked the same follow-up question: Given the challenges you identified; how do you perceive your ability to teach gifted-HFA students? P4 stated, "I am able to provide adequate educational service to these students. Their overall learning may be increased with the addition of parents, counselors, and other members of the student's support team." P3 simply stated, "it's challenging." P5 felt that if he had more training, he could get his students to show improvements. P6 shared, "I perceive my ability to teach gifted-HFA students as average." She focused on the students' progress versus grades to maintain her confidence. She felt that grades were not always an accurate reflection of her ability to teach and her students' abilities. P7 felt "anxious" about her ability to teach gifted-HFA students because of these students' challenges with social interactions. She also believed that her content area made grouping necessary, and she had to be more mindful of who she paired with her gifted-HFA students.

Preservice Training and Professional Development

Teachers who have had preservice training and opportunities for ongoing professional development tend to have a higher sense of self-efficacy (Anglin et al., 2018; Boujut et al., 2017; Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Dymond, 2019; Gordon, 2017; Rowan & Townend, 2016). I asked the participants about their previous training regarding gifted-HFA students to better understand the preservice training and continuing professional development. All certified educators in the state of Georgia are required to take coursework in the "identification and education of children who have special

educational needs" (Georgia Code Title, 2020, p. 2). The "exceptional learners" course offered a general overview of students with disabilities without highlighting students with autism or gifted-HFA students. P3, P5, and P6 recalled completing the "exceptional learners" course; however, the remaining participants did not remember taking the course.

P4 did not recall any undergraduate work that focused exclusively on students with autism or HFA. She did take the introductory exceptional learners' course and believed it gave her a basic understanding of students with disabilities. P1 and P6 described the "exceptional learners" course as a general overview of students with disabilities that had no emphasis on students with autism or gifted-HFA students. P2 did not remember a course that helped prepare her to work with students with disabilities. She does remember sitting in her first IEP meeting and being "blown away by it." She "didn't have any clue of students, like how to serve students with disabilities before [she] walked into a classroom." She has learned "along the way" through experience and doing research.

Two participants, P7 and P8, were not traditionally trained teachers. P7 was previously a speech therapist, and she had "lots of classes on helping kids who had language barriers and language needs." She did not obtain any preservice training focused on teaching gifted-HFA students because she took a non-traditional route to become a teacher. P8 also did not get an undergraduate degree in education. She had not planned to become a teacher and worked at a residential foster home before changing career paths. She later went back to school and earned her master's in curriculum and

instruction. P8 received a "generic introduction to kids with disabilities" in one of her graduate courses. She felt most of her understanding and knowledge came from working with kids with "a lot of issues" in the residential home.

Most of the participants held advanced degrees. P1 pursued her master's degree and took a course that focused on students with special needs. She felt this course introduced her to strategies and accommodations that she incorporated immediately in the classroom setting. P5 had his masters but thought it was more content-specific, and there was no focus on students with disabilities. P3 was working on her doctorate at the time of the interview and was learning about students' different reading abilities based on IQ and other skills. Still, she did not believe that she had received the training needed to work effectively with gifted-HFA students.

All participants also took a gifted endorsement course, which consisted of 4 classes taken over a school year. A section of this gifted endorsement course dealt explicitly with 2e learners. None of the participants were in the same cohort, so their gifted endorsement course experiences varied. P1 and P2 recalled being taught some techniques and strategies for gifted-HFA and other 2e learners in her gifted endorsement course. P2 found it beneficial. P4 remembered some elements regarding 2e learners with autism from her gifted endorsement coursework but could not remember much of it. P6 received a brief overview of gifted students' characteristics and traits and the characteristics and traits of 2e learners in her gifted endorsement class. P8 was introduced to the concept of 2e learners by the instructor of her gifted-endorsement course. Still, once again, P8 gained only a "general knowing… and making sure you know about IEPs.

It wasn't anything in depth." There were two participants, P7 and P5, who recall a class that focused specifically on students with autism.

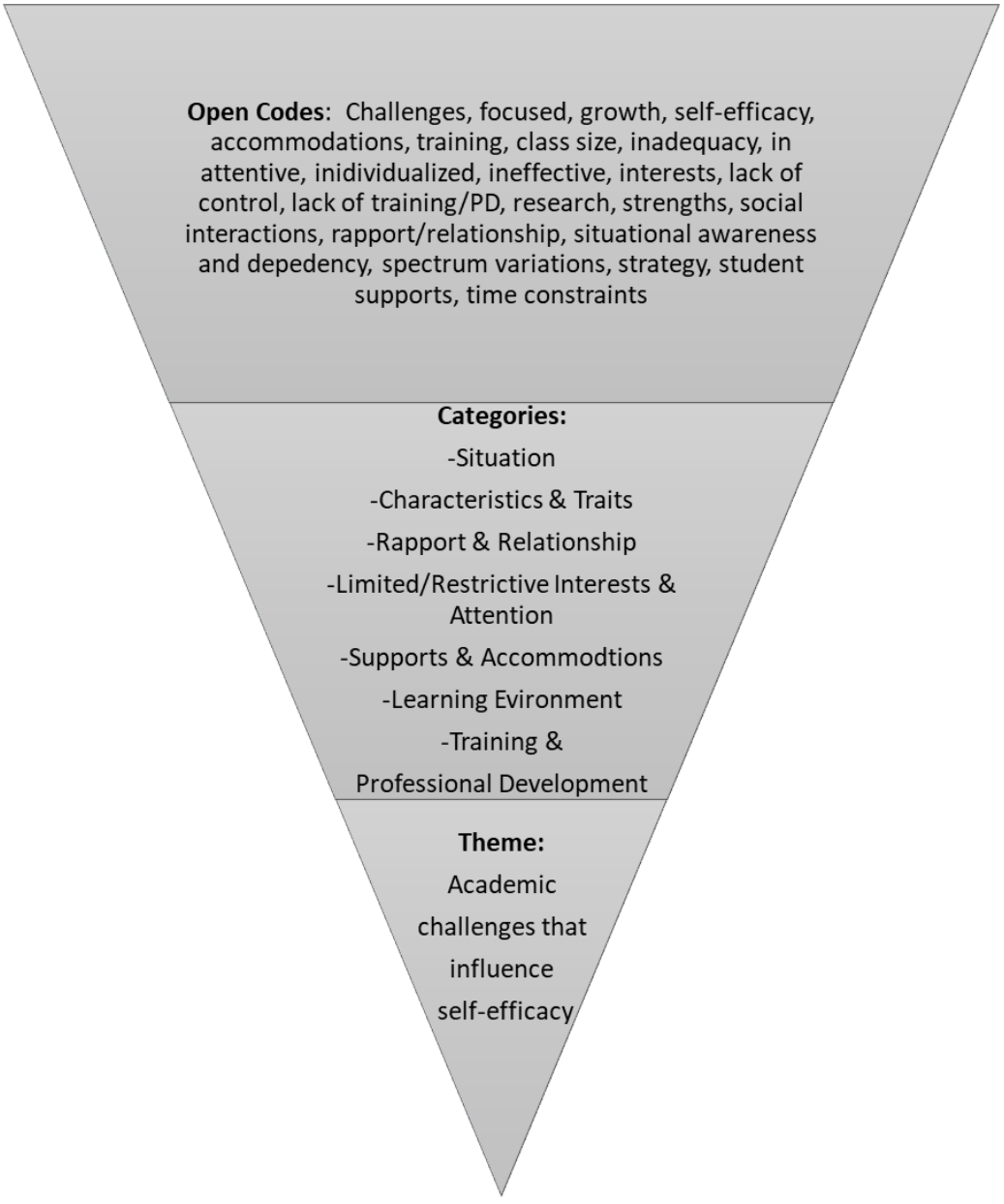
Participants reported that the school district had not provided any additional training on students with disabilities or gifted-HFA learners beyond what was offered in the gifted-endorsement course. P1 felt that she would benefit from ongoing professional development, particularly regarding students with autism. P4 admitted that she was not aware of any ongoing support or training that may have been offered at the district because she does not seek out those types of training. P3 does not recall the school system offering any other professional developments or training regarding gifted-HFA learners. P6 has not received any further training or professional development beyond that regarding gifted-HFA learners. P7 had ongoing professional development that focused on social-emotional learning, but the training was brief and "were not in-depth, and they were not especially for kids with autism." P8 had relied on collaboration with colleagues with "expertise in working with gifted-HFA learners" and her team to figure out how to best teach and manage gifted-HFA students in a classroom setting.

Themes

Two themes emerged while analyzing the open and axial codes. The first theme dealt with "academics" (see Figure 2). Participants discussed the academic implications of teaching gifted-HFA students and the challenges that specifically affected student learning and growth. Participants knew that the gifted-HFA student could learn and grow and saw that elements associated with their autism interfered with the learning process.

Figure 1

Academic Theme

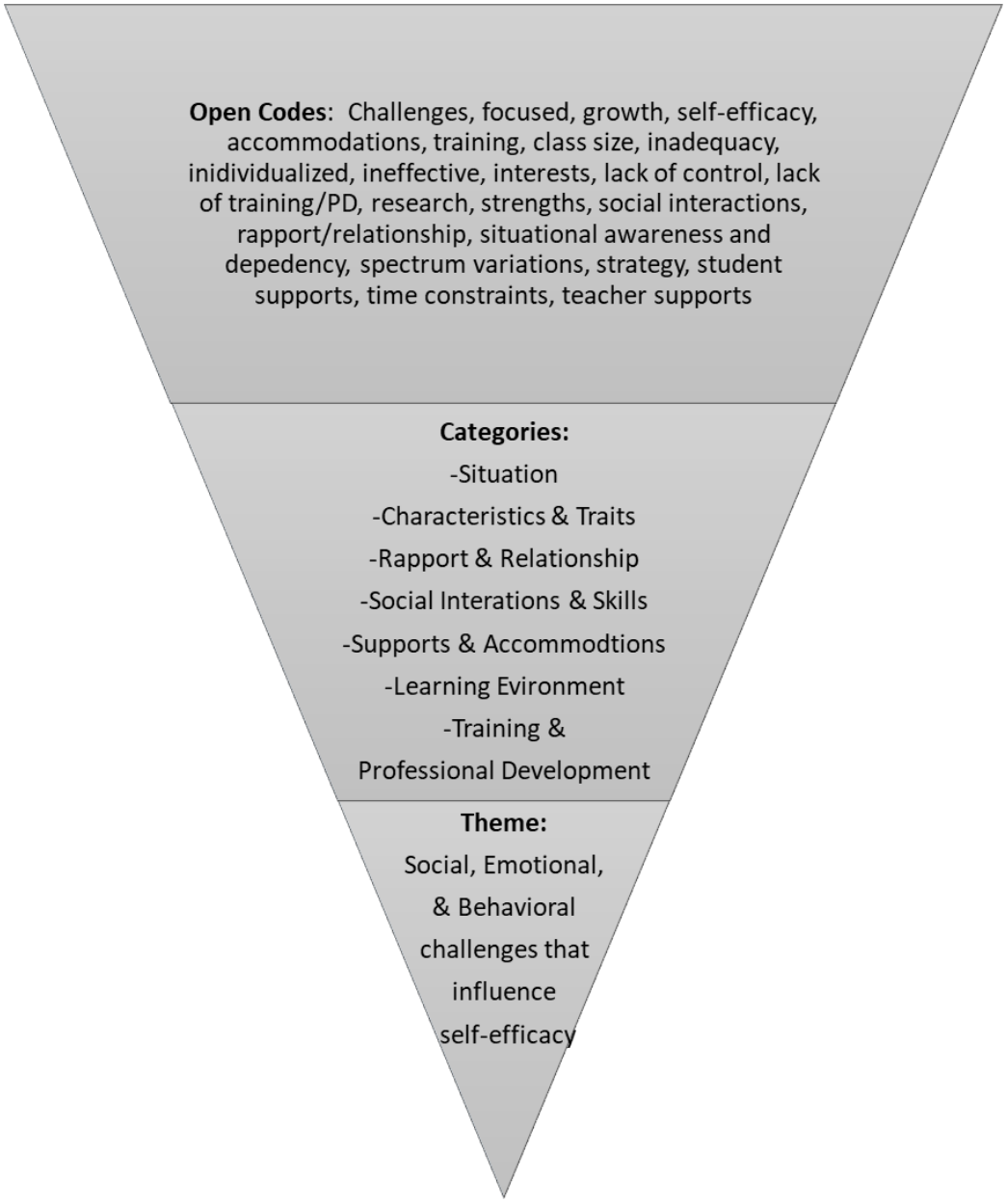


The second theme was "social, emotional, and behavioral" concerns (see Figure 3). Participants discussed the challenges of navigating the social, emotional, and behavioral aspects of teaching gifted-HFA students. Participants mostly felt unprepared

to deal with these challenges and often enlisted the help of special educators or counselors to help.

Figure 2

Social, Emotional, and Behavior Theme



Results

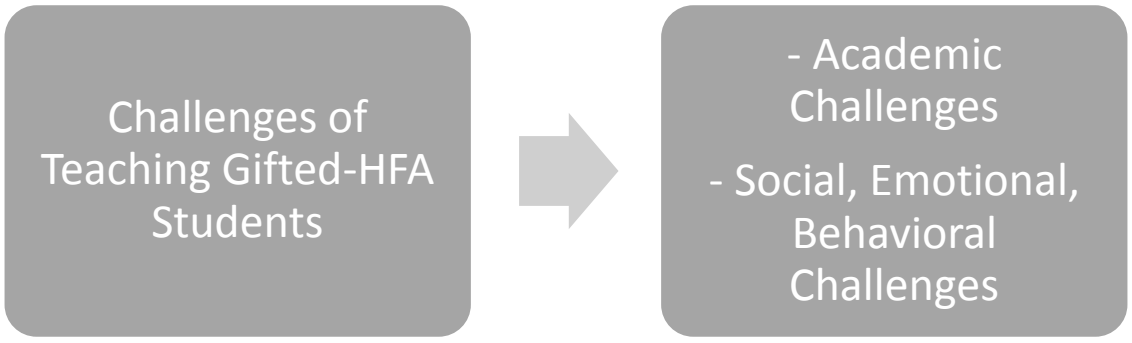
Participants' responses to the interview questions varied when asked about the impact they believed they had on their students, the challenges they perceived regarding teaching gifted-HFA students, and their ability to meet the gifted-HFA students' needs in an academic setting. Still, there were common themes that emerged in the data. Participants felt that the challenges stemmed from the gifted-HFA students' academic needs or social, emotional, and behavioral needs. The participants believe that their ability to mitigate these challenges effectively was influenced by the level of support they received from special education teachers, counselors, administrators, and other personnel, as well as preservice and ongoing professional development they had received.

RQ1

Participants identified challenges that impacted two areas that coincide with the identified themes: Challenges based on meeting the academic needs of gifted-HFA students and challenges based on meeting the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of gifted-HFA students (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Challenges of Teaching Gifted-HFA Students



Academics

Participants found it challenging to identify the types of work or assignments given to gifted-HFA students. P1 knew that the assignments often needed to be novel and go beyond "regular, rote work." Teachers often need to find challenging and engaging lessons for any learner; however, participants found that gifted-HFA learners would respond differently once they disengaged with the task or found the work too demanding. P5 found that once the gifted-HFA student was "derailed," it could be challenging to get the student back on track. These "derailments" could often lead to the student being removed from the learning environment, which P2 found challenging.

Gifted-HFA students also needed to have lessons presented "differently." P3 found that gifted-HFA students often required "a different push, a different lesson, or a different style of teaching." Participants found it challenging to accommodate all the

"differences" they encountered in the classroom. Academic challenges often lead to social, emotional, or behavioral difficulties when participants could not meet the gifted-HFA students' academic needs.

Social, Emotional, and Behavioral

Participants found meeting the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of gifted-HFA students more challenging than meeting the academic needs. Participants found it particularly challenging to establish rapport and develop a positive relationship with the gifted-HFA students. P2 pointed out that children on the spectrum often had difficulty forming relationships and found that the relationship development with a student with ASD was "probably the greatest hindrance" in the academic setting.

Participants also found the social difficulties that some gifted-HFA student experience is also a challenge. Some gifted-HFA students have a hard time establishing relationships with peers and engaging in typical classroom social interactions. P6 liked to design lessons and activities centered on group work; however, she found that gifted-HFA students often preferred to work independently. P1 and P5 had similar experiences and had students who seemed to self-isolate and avoided interacting with peers.

RQ2

Participants' sense of self-efficacy was influenced by the challenges of meeting the gifted-HFA students' academic needs and social, emotional, and behavioral needs (see Figure 5). Participants felt more confident in their ability to meet their gifted-HFA students' academic needs than in their ability to meet the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of their gifted-HFA students.

Figure 5

Influence of Challenges on Teacher Self-Efficacy

P4 felt she could appropriately accommodate gifted-HFA students, especially if given adequate support from parents, other educators, and administrators. Participants acknowledged a need for additional training to build confidence in their ability to meet gifted-HFA students' needs. P3 shared that she was reluctant to include gifted-HFA students because she lacked an understanding of their characteristics and traits and was not prepared to meet the gifted-HFA students' needs.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I used member checks and a reflexive journal to establish credibility, as outlined in Chapter 3. I conducted member checks of my analysis; however, because I had 8 participants, I shared a summary of my analysis with each participant and asked them if my interpretation was accurate. Each participant reviewed the summary and overall found

that my identified themes accurately reflected their perspective. 5 out of the 8 participants accepted the summary without any input. 3 of the participants added comments regarding their sense of self-efficacy.

I also maintained a reflexive journal in which I documented biases, dispositions, and assumptions throughout the interview process. I noted that I needed to frame questions in a manner that did not imply a preference in answer. I had one participant who would ask, "Is that what you are looking for." I reassured the participant that I was not looking for anything specific and only wanted to understand their perspective. As I analyzed the data, I highlighted the comment if I was uncertain about what a participant meant. I included it in the member check summary to allow them to clarify their response.

I tried to ensure transferability by providing a complete description of the participants and research process described in Chapter 3. I made conjectures about this study's findings as they could apply to similar conditions in other settings. Still, the reader of this study must make the final determination if the results apply to them.

I used audit trails and reflexivity to establish dependability and conformability, as outlined in Chapter 3. I provided a detailed account of the methods and procedures used in this study, and I used the data to inform the findings. I used my reflective journal to reflect on any biases or assumptions I held that could affect the study. I also used open coding and thematic analysis to analyze the data.

Summary

Participants answered interview questions to shed light on their perceptions of the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and the influence those perceptions had on their sense of self-efficacy. Participants identified challenges that they believed impacted their ability to effectively teach gifted-HFA students. Participants realized that they positively impacted gifted-HFA students, particularly when they developed a positive relationship with them. Participants identified challenges that they felt impacted gifted-HFA students' progress in the classroom, stemming from academic deficits and social, emotional, and behavioral deficits. I found that participants believed that the academic and social, emotional, and behavioral deficits and strengths intertwined and impacted one another.

Participants had more confidence in their ability to meet the academic needs of gifted-HFA students. They felt less confident in their ability to meet the gifted-HFA students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs. This lack of confidence decreased their sense of self-efficacy in teaching gifted-HFA students. Participants felt that they would better support gifted-HFA students academically and socially, emotionally, and behaviorally if they had ongoing training and professional development.

I interpreted the findings of this study by describing how the results confirmed, disconfirmed, or extended knowledge of the self-efficacy of teachers of gifted students regarding teaching gifted-HFA students by comparing them with what I found in the peer-reviewed literature described in Chapter 2. I analyzed and interpreted the findings in the context of the conceptual framework. I explained the limitations to trustworthiness

that arose during this study and made recommendations for further research based on this study's strengths and limitations and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Finally, I described the potential impact of positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of perceptions that teachers of gifted students had regarding how challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students influenced their sense of self-efficacy. Using a basic qualitative research study design, I interviewed eight middle school teachers who held gifted endorsements and previously taught gifted-HFA students. I asked questions that allowed me to gain an understanding of the challenges participants perceived regarding teaching gifted-HFA students and their beliefs regarding their ability to meet these students' needs.

Participants identified challenges that impacted two main areas: academics and social, emotional, and behavioral skills. These challenges were categorized in terms of situations, characteristics, and traits of gifted-HFA, rapport and relationships between participants and gifted-HFA students, gifted-HFA students' limited/restrictive interests and attention, social interactions and social skills, supports and accommodations gifted-HFA students received, learning environments, and participants' training and professional development. Based on participants' comments, identified challenges regarding teaching gifted-HFA students influenced their sense of self-efficacy. Participants reported a decreased sense of self-confidence regarding teaching gifted-HFA students and their ability to meet academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs of gifted-HFA learners.

Interpretation of the Findings

I interviewed eight middle school teachers who held gifted endorsements and had previous experience teaching gifted-HFA students. Participants answered interview

questions that involved challenges they perceived regarding teaching gifted-HFA students and the influence these challenges had on participants' sense of self-efficacy. Participants identified academic and social, emotional, and behavioral challenges that impacted teaching gifted-HFA students.

Challenges in Teaching Gifted-HFA Students

Teaching SWDs, particularly students with ASD, was more challenging than teaching students without disabilities (Catalono, 2018; Love et al., 2019; McCullough, 2014). Participants in this study identified challenges they perceived regarding teaching gifted-HFA students. Teaching students who are only gifted or on the autism spectrum can be challenging. The combination of exceptionalities can add a complex mixture of unique strengths and weaknesses to each learner. Participants identified challenges in understanding and identifying characteristics and traits of gifted-HFA students, triadic impairments, social skills, communication deficits, and limited or specific interests that they believed impacted their ability to teach gifted-HFA students effectively.

Characteristics and Traits

Participants acknowledged their lack of understanding of characteristics and traits associated with autism (see Table 6) and identified it as a challenge. Gifted-HFA students come with a unique set of characteristics and traits that participants felt varied from student to student as well as situation to situation. Autism and giftedness are on spectrums, making characteristics and traits of gifted-HFA students more complicated to identify (Costis, 2016). Teachers often feel additional stress when teaching gifted-HFA students because these learners often have complex sets of characteristics that are unique

to each gifted-HFA student (Accardo et al., 2017). Participants made repeated references to how different each gifted-HFA student was, not only from their neurotypical peers, but also from one another. The complexity and uniqueness of each gifted-HFA student made it difficult for participants to apply a single strategy or accommodation that teachers of gifted-HFA students could use that would consistently prove helpful for multiple learners.

Most participants felt confident in their ability to meet the academic needs of gifted-HFA students; however, they felt less confident meeting these students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs. Groups of participants struggled to understand these needs and accommodate the students. There was a need to address strengths of giftedness and weaknesses associated with these students' disabilities. Typically, gifted-HFA students' strengths derived from their academic abilities, which participants felt comfortable addressing; however, weaknesses presented as behavioral were more challenging. Participants in this study did not feel confident managing these problematic behaviors and relied on others such as special education teachers or counselors for support. Researchers have corroborated the need for additional support for teachers of gifted-HFA students and other 2e learners.

Triadic Impairments

Burger-Veltmeijer and Minnaert (2011) identified social interactions, communication, and imagination as a triad of impairments experienced by individuals with ASD. Participants in this study found managing social interactions of gifted-HFA students to be challenging. Participants acknowledged that social, emotional, and

behavioral traits displayed by gifted-HFA students often created disruptions that interfered with everyday classroom routines and practices.

Social Interactions

Bolic-Baric et al. (2016) said students with HFA had difficulty interacting with their peers. Gifted-HFA students find social interactions difficult and often display inappropriate behaviors that compound their classroom difficulties (Foley-Nicpon, 2013). Gifted-HFA students' interactions are often misunderstood, and they feel "excluded, ignored, and rejected by peers" (Bolic-Baric et al., 2016, p. 187). P1 and P5 said some students experienced social isolation from peers or self-imposed isolation. Students with ASD are often stigmatized and isolated from their neurotypical peers (John et al., 2018; Reis et al., 2014; Majoko, 2016). P2 reported that some of her gifted-HFA students demonstrated difficulty developing age-appropriate relationships with peers and adults. Gifted-HFA students demonstrate difficulty developing social relationships (Foley-Nicpon, 2013; Yager, 2016); however, they still want to establish friendships and connections with others (John et al., 2018). Additionally, participants found it necessary to limit or closely monitor peer interactions between gifted-HFA students and their peers to minimize undesired behaviors.

Communication

Participants in this study reported that their students typically exhibited age-appropriate language skills and could communicate verbally; however, gifted-HFA students struggled to conform to social conventions of age-appropriate conversations with peers. P1 had a student who would use inappropriate language to express himself,

particularly when he was frustrated or felt others invaded his personal space. These sorts of verbal outbursts hindered not only this student's ability to communicate with peers but also impacted his ability to develop meaningful relationships with others.

Some gifted-HFA students misread nonverbal communications, which lead to misunderstandings, and in some cases, outbursts or tantrums. P5 and P8 shared instances in which gifted-HFA students misread verbal or nonverbal communications and responded negatively. In some cases, other students were not directing their communications towards the gifted-HFA student. However, the gifted-HFA student believed that the communication was directed towards them.

Imagination

Imagination is a challenge for gifted-HFA students, but no participants in this study directly identified any challenges concerning imagination. Dymond (2019) said gifted-HFA students prefer to engage in imaginative play or fantasy worlds to compensate for their lack of friendships. No participants reported such challenges; however, some participants reported that students preferred to read rather than interact with peers. Participants viewed gifted-HFA students' preference to read as an attempt to escape into imaginative or fantasy worlds within texts and avoid tasks.

Asynchrony

Asynchronous development is seen in gifted students and students with autism (Assouline et al., 2009; Burger-Veltmeijer et al., 2014; Costis, 2016; Doobay, 2010; Foley-Nicpon et al., 2011; Silverman, 1997). Participants reported discrepancies between gifted-HFA students' strengths and weaknesses identified in the literature as

asynchronous development. P5 said he strongly suspected he had students with HFA who were gifted; however, previous teachers had not formally identified those students as gifted.

Teacher Efficacy

Individuals with a high sense of self-efficacy have confidence in their ability to perform tasks and achieve goals. For teachers, self-efficacy is the belief in their ability to help their students succeed (Armor et al., 1976; Ashton et al., 1984; Ashton & Webb, 1982; Berman et al., 1977). Teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy create productive learning environments (Koomen, 2016). Participants in the study reported a decreased sense of self-efficacy regarding teaching gifted-HFA students. Haynes (2015) said experience could influence teachers' sense of self-efficacy when teaching SWDs; however, participants shared that because each gifted-HFA learner was so different from others, they often felt that their previous experiences did not help.

Limitations of the Study

This study involved using a basic qualitative research method in which I recruited participants through emails in the school system in which I work. There were only eight participants in this study (see Table 3), with seven females, one male and seven Caucasians, and one African American. Additionally, all participants were employed in the same school in a small school district.

My employment at the study site could create a potential for response bias. The diversity of participants was limited. One participant during the interview process would ask, "Is that what you are looking for?" or make comments such as "I don't know if that's

what you are looking for." I tried to reassure the participant that I was not looking for any particular responses, but the participant's desire to provide answers she believed I was looking for could create bias.

I conducted interviews remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic and adhered to mandates for social distancing to minimize the virus's spread. All participants had adequate access to remote technologies. One participant was uncomfortable with using the Zoom platform and preferred to be interviewed over the telephone. Another participant was quarantined during the time of the scheduled interview, and the interview was rescheduled. There were no technical issues with audio, connectivity, or recordings, and interviews were recorded and saved to my personal password-protected computer as planned.

The COVID-19 pandemic also led to the creation of unusual circumstances that could impact the study. School system leaders at the study site decided during fall 2020 that staff and students would return to school with options for both online and in-person environments. Teachers at the study site began teaching in a hybrid instructional setting. The school district gave parents and students three options. The first was virtual learning, where teachers on the site campus served as facilitators and did not plan or design the lessons. Students could complete assignments at any time during the day. Students did not have to adhere to a rigid daily schedule, but teachers expected students to make adequate progress each week. Remote learning involves an online platform in which teachers provide live instruction via Zoom. Students participate by logging in to Zoom following an assigned schedule as if they were physically in the building. Initially,

teachers taught entirely remote classes; however, as students returned to campus, teachers began teaching a blend of online students and students physically in the classroom. Traditional learning is an in-person teaching format in which teachers use traditional structures with students physically in schools. Teachers and students use masks and practiced social distancing whenever possible, given various classroom sizes.

A hiring freeze was put in place due to unexpected budget cuts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Administrators asked some teachers at the study site to move to positions they had not previously held. Administrators created a five-person team to oversee the virtual learning program, so teachers who typically taught in traditional classrooms setting moved to entirely virtual classroom environments. Administrators also asked other faculty and staff members to move to fill vacant positions. Two participants in the study were impacted by this decision and transferred to new roles within the school.

Recommendations

There is a need for continued research regarding challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and the influence these challenges may have on teacher self-efficacy. Research regarding the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and their influence on teacher efficacy is limited. The results of this study and limited current literature suggest the need for further research to better understand how challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students influence teacher efficacy.

Teachers of gifted-HFA students need professional development to increase their knowledge and understanding of gifted-HFA students to meet challenges they may

encounter while teaching this population. Teachers of gifted students can increase their confidence when teaching gifted-HFA students and subsequently improve their sense of self-efficacy through increased knowledge and understanding. Chao et al. (2018) said collaboration between teachers, parents, and community yielded the highest sense of teacher self-efficacy. Additionally, teacher training needs to be school-level specific and should focus on collaborative efforts to improve teacher efficacy regarding inclusive practices (Chao et al., 2018)

Implications

Musgrove (2015) issued a memorandum to state directors of special education urging them to evaluate all children, including those with disabilities, for eligibility in giftedness. Some students with disabilities possess high cognition and meet the criteria to be considered gifted; however, they do not typically receive gifted services (Bechard, 2019). Researchers have indicated that this lack of service was partly due to educators' lack of understanding of 2e learners (Bechard, 2019; Lee & Ritchotte, 2018).

Participants' responses indicated a need for preservice and ongoing professional development to increase the awareness teachers of gifted students have of gifted-HFA students. Yet, teachers often receive little to no training regarding 2e learners (Bechard, 2019). Educators must receive preservice training and ongoing professional development to instruct and accommodate gifted-HFA students effectively. Teachers' ability to meet gifted-HFA students' needs can increase their sense of self-efficacy and lead to positive student outcomes (Love et al., 2019; Love et al., 2020). Accardo et al. (2017) identified the need to understand influences on self-efficacy to better support teachers of students

with ASD. Understanding the factors that influence teacher efficacy can help school leaders identify professional development that can increase teacher efficacy (Accardo et al., 2017; Ruble et al., 2013).

Conclusion

Students with autism are among the most challenging students to teach (Khasaakhala & Gavala, 2016; McCurdy & Cole, 2014). These challenges are often compounded when these students have also been identified as gifted (Barnard et al., 2000; Catalono, 2018; Love et al., 2019. McCullough, 2014; Missett et al., 2016; Spence et al., 2019). Researchers have found that gifted-HFA students pose unique challenges that influence teachers' self-efficacy (Anglim et al., 2019; Love, 2016; Love et al., 2019, 2020; McCullough, 2014). The results of this study supported this assumption. Still, additional research is needed to deepen our understanding of the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students and their influence on teachers' sense of self-efficacy.

Researchers hold that teacher efficacy is imperative to teacher effectiveness and student outcomes (Anglim et al., 2019; Bray-Clark, 2003; Love, 2016; Love et al., 2020; McCullough, 2014). Teachers are in a unique position to promote changes in their practice that can ignite social and educational shifts that will positively impact marginalized populations (Allen, 2017). Teachers have the opportunity to open doors for their students; however, this opportunity diminishes when teachers lack the self-efficacy to do so.

The demand for teaching gifted-HFA students in gifted programs will increase as the number of students identified as gifted-HFA increases (Anglim et al., 2019: Love et

al., 2019). Today's teachers of gifted students will need to be better prepared to meet the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students. School system leaders and teachers of gifted students could identify and incorporate training programs and professional development that would increase teacher knowledge and understanding of how to meet the academic and social, emotional, and behavioral needs of gifted-HFA students by better understanding the perceptions that teachers of gifted students held regarding the challenges of teaching gifted-HFA students. These teachers could increase their sense of self-efficacy by increasing their ability to meet gifted-HFA students' needs.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What subject(s) have you taught? 1b. What subject are you currently teaching?
2. How long have you been teaching? 2b. How many years have you taught a gifted class? 2c. How many years have you taught in the XYZ program at XYZ Middle School?
3. Have you ever taught students with disabilities? 3b. What was your role? 3c. What was the setting?
4. Have you ever taught twice-exceptional learners? 4b. What was the exceptionalities?
5. Do you believe you make a difference in your students' lives (Norton, 2013)? 5b. In what ways?
6. What part of your students' lives do you feel you have the most impact (Norton, 2013)? 6b. How do you know?
7. What part of your students' lives do you feel you have the least impact? 7b. How do you deal with this?
8. How confident are you that you can meet the academic needs of your students?
9. How confident are you that you can meet the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of your students?
10. How confident are you that you can meet the academic needs of a gifted student with autism?
11. How confident are you that you can meet the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of a gifted student with autism?

12. What do you see as the biggest challenges(s) in teaching a gifted student with autism?
13. What are some of the challenges you see in meeting the academic needs of a gifted student with autism?
14. What are some of the challenges you see in meeting the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of a gifted student with autism?
15. What, if any, coursework did you complete in college to prepare you to work with students with disabilities? 15b. Was there any focus on accommodating students on the autism spectrum?
16. You had to go through the gifted endorsement course to become a teacher of gifted students. Did the course include preparation for teaching gifted students with autism?
17. Has the school(s) in which you are(have been) employed provided on-going training to prepare you to meet the needs of gifted students with autism?
18. How prepared do you feel regarding meeting the academic needs of gifted students with autism?
19. How prepared do you feel regarding meeting the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of gifted students with autism?
20. Are you ever offered opportunities for professional development to prepare you to better meet the needs of gifted students with autism?

Appendix B: Permission to Use Interview Questions

Re: Permission to use interview questions
Yvette Morrell <yvette.morrell@waldenu.edu>
Sun 4/12/2020 5:15 PM
To: snorton@oconeeschools.org <snorton@oconeeschools.org>

Dr. Norton,

Thank you very much!

Yvette Morrell
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

From: snorton@oconeeschools.org <snorton@oconeeschools.org>
Sent: Sunday, April 12, 2020 5:13 PM
To: Yvette Morrell <yvette.morrell@waldenu.edu>
Subject: Re: Permission to use interview questions

You are more than welcome to use the questions! Let me know if you need anything. Congrats!

Sent from my iPhone
Shana Market Norton, EdD
Special Education
North Oconee High School

On Apr 12, 2020, at 5:06 PM, Yvette Morrell <yvette.morrell@waldenu.edu> wrote:

Dr. Norton,

My name is Yvette Morrell, and I am a middle school inclusion teacher in South Georgia. I am currently working on my dissertation at Walden University. I am writing to request permission to use some of your interview questions from your dissertation regarding self-efficacy: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/739/

"A Phenomenological Investigation into the Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Tea" by Shana Market Norton - Scholars Crossing

This phenomenological study investigated the lived experiences of 12 secondary school teachers from public secondary schools in northern Georgia regarding their feelings about self-efficacy and why they have persisted in the teaching profession. The research questions centered around their perceptions on how self-efficacy influences the academic achievement of their students, on what ...

digitalcommons.liberty.edu

I have attached a copy of my Study Participant Survey and Interview Questions. I highlighted the specific questions that came from your study. I do not have a completed dissertation at this time, but I will share a copy once it is finished if you like.

Thank you,
Yvette Morrell
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

<Appendix A & B.docx>

Appendix C: Letter to Superintendent

Participant Recruitment

Inbox

Article I. **Morrell, Yvette <ymorrell@[redacted]>** Nov 10, 2020, 5:51 AM

to [redacted]

Dr. [redacted],

I am a teacher at [redacted] and am currently working on my EdD specializing in Special Education. I have gone through the IRB process and because of the nature of the study, the IRB does not require a Letter of Cooperation.

I had spoken to you previously at the beginning of the school year about my research, and I still wanted to let you know about my study. I will conduct a study entitled Self-Efficacy and Gifted Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Gifted Students with High-Functioning Autism. I will ask [redacted] to forward an email that includes an invitation to participate in my research study. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

I will only ask that [redacted] to forward an email to recruit participants. Interviews and member check activities will be scheduled outside of normal workday hours.

Data collected will remain entirely confidential and will not be provided to anyone outside of my supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Thank you,

Yvette Morrell

[redacted]

Article II. [redacted] Nov 11, 2020, 10:07 AM

to me

Thank you for making me aware of your request. I wish you all the best with your research study.
Please let me know if there's anything that I can do to help.

[redacted]

[redacted]

Appendix D: Letter to Principal

Participant Recruitment

Article III. Morrell, Yvette <ymorrell@[redacted]> Tue, Nov 10, 5:55 AM

to [redacted]

Mr. [redacted],
As you know, I am working on my EdD, and I have successfully defended my proposal and obtained IRB approval from my university. I am now seeking participants in my study titled, " Self-Efficacy and Gifted Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Gifted Students with High-Functioning Autism." I am requesting that you forward an email with an invitation to participate. I will send that email separately.

Thank you,

Yvette Morrell
[redacted]

Please forward

Inbox

Article IV. Morrell, Yvette <ymorrell@[redacted]> Tue, Nov 10, 6:07 AM

to [redacted]

Basic Qualitative Research study seeks participants who hold a gifted endorsement and have taught a student with high-functioning autism

There is a new study called *"Self-Efficacy and Gifted Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Gifted Students with High-Functioning Autism"* that could help educators better understand the challenges of teaching gifted students with high-functioning autism. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences teaching gifted students with high-functioning autism.

This survey is part of the doctoral study for Yvette Morrell, a doctoral student at Walden University.

About the study:

- One 30-60-minute interview
- To protect your privacy, pseudonyms will be used

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Currently employed middle grades teacher who have held a GA Gifted Education endorsement for a minimum of two years, and
- Have previous experience teaching gifted students with high-functioning autism or students with high-functioning autism

To confidentially volunteer,

click the following link:

https://forms.gle/X3RNiHokYHqWzkP77

Thank you for your consideration,

Yvette Morrell

[redacted]

[redacted]

Article V. [redacted] Thu, Nov 12, 6:40 AM

to [redacted]

Please help Mrs. Morrell and her quest for a higher degree.

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[redacted]

Principal