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K-12 Principals, Instructional Leadership, and Equitable Gifted Program Placements for Students

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MS, Towson University, 2007

BS, Morgan State University, 1997

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

School leaders struggle to implement best instructional leadership practices to enhance student diversity in gifted programs. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how K-12 school principals implement instructional leadership practices regarding equitable placements of students in gifted programs. Three elements of Hallinger and Murphy's instructional leadership model, (a) developing and promoting expectations, (b) assessing and monitoring student performance, and (c) supervising and evaluating instruction, informed this study. The research questions addressed instructional leadership practices and behaviors of K-12 school principals regarding placements of students in gifted programs. Ten K-12 school principals who worked in a large suburban school district located in the southern United States were interviewed via Zoom; each participant had at least 2 years of service in their buildings and supervised a gifted program. A combination of open and axial coding was used to support thematic analysis. Important themes include (a) principals have a process for placements of students in gifted programs, (b) principals use criteria for placing students in gifted programs, (c) principals' practices are used to identify students for gifted programs, (d) the role of K-12 principals is to support students in gifted programs, (e) every student should be given the opportunity to be placed in a gifted program, and (f) principals need professional development regarding equitable practices. In order to close the placement gap and to support positive social change, principals must communicate a clear vision for the school that supports student growth and achievement and implement processes with set criteria that are fair and equitable to promote the placement of all students in gifted programs.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Rachel Glover Archelus, who taught me to love education and to always advocate for students to receive an equitable and quality education. This dissertation is also dedicated to the memory of my late father, Charles Destin Archelus.

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge and thank Drs. Jerry Collins and Peter Kiriakidis for their guidance, support, and scholarly suggestions during this journey. I would also like to thank Dr. Tina Dawson for her vision, encouragement, and scholarly feedback.

I wish to acknowledge and thank my mother, Rachel Glover Archelus, who was my first teacher and one of the best educators I know. I would not have made it here without your constant love, encouragement, and support. I am because of you. I love you!

To my sisters and brothers, nieces, nephews, cousins, aunt, uncles, extended family, close friends, sorority sisters, and colleagues that called, sent a text, said a word of encouragement, or prayed for me during this journey, I love you and thank you all tremendously for not allowing me to give up and encouraged me to keep pushing forward.

I would also like to acknowledge all the thousands of students whose lives I have been honored to be a part of over the years of my career. You are the reason that I push every day to make sure you have a quality education.

To my teachers, staff, clerical staff, former staff, and assistant principals…there are not enough words to say thank you. Thank you for your support and what you do every day for our students.

Last, but certainly not least, to God be the glory for the great things He has done!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The National Center for Education and Statistics (2018) reported that approximately 56.6 million students attend elementary and secondary schools in the United States. Each of these students have unique academic strengths and needs that educators are required to meet; therefore, a strong instructional leader is needed. The principal, as the instructional leader of the schoolhouse, is responsible for providing educational opportunities and improved outcomes for students (Birt et al., 2016) and is expected to cast a vision that promotes culture and climate that are conducive for all students to work to their fullest potential (Hsin-Hsiange & Mao-Neng, 2015). The job and responsibilities of a school principal are complex and have many moving parts (Windlinger et al., 2020). The principal is responsible for providing an environment that embraces creativity for learning (Tainsh, 2016). Other responsibilities of a principal include overseeing curricula and instruction for gifted students.

The topic of this study was the instructional leadership practices of principals that contribute to a student's placement in gifted programs. Researchers have indicated that strong instructional leadership practices influence student academic outcomes (Windlinger et al., 2020). Gifted programs have long been a topic of discussion in the world of education; however, there is a gap in the literature that exists on how principals' leadership practices influence students' placement in gifted programs (Oyugi & Gogo, 2019; Windlinger et al., 2020). Information regarding principal leadership practices and gifted programs could potentially guide the professional development (PD) of principals that could lead to an increase of student placement in gifted classes.

Background

More than 60 years after Brown vs. Board of Education, gifted programs remained segregated and minority students continue to be denied access to gifted education programs (Ford et al., 2018). African American students are under-represented in gifted programs even when they have a similar profile as their White counterparts when taught by non-African American teachers. Grissom et al. (2017) determined that there is a higher rate of placement of African American students in schools that have African American principals and attributed a 3.8% increase in the placement of African American students to having an African American principal. School administrators and policymakers often fail to implement practices that would recruit and retain an equal number of representations of minority and non-minority students in gifted programs (Ford et al., 2018; Wright et al., 2017). Students of color are not equally represented in gifted programs relative to White students, but the reason for this lack of representation is still poorly understood (Grissom et al., 2017). Grissom et al. stated that there is a relationship between the race of the principal and the placement of students of color in gifted programs. Educators should implement policies that give underserved students an equal opportunity to receive access to gifted programs.

The National Association for Gifted Children reported in 2018 that across the United States, gifted programs' description and definition vary, although federal law acknowledges that gifted students have unique instructional needs. Iowa defines giftedness as "children who possess outstanding abilities who are capable of high performance and who require appropriate instruction and educational services and needs

beyond those provided by the regular school program" (Iowa Code 257.44, para 2). North Dakota defines gifted as "an individual who is identified by qualified professionals as being capable of high performance and who need educational programs beyond those provided in a regular education program" (North Dakota Cent. Code § 15.1-32-01). The characteristics of the gifted child can present in different ways, and how educators and parents define those characteristics of a gifted child can also vary. The Association for Gifted Children suggested that there are positive and negative behaviors that are present in gifted students and that some of the characteristics that are viewed as negative are often why some students are overlooked for gifted programs. The National Association for Gifted Children reported that many states have varying definitions of giftedness while some states have not defined the term at all. The Every Student Succeeds Act defined gifted students as:

> Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. (para 2)

How gifted programs are implemented in schools vary and are the responsibility of the local school district personnel, which increases the chances of creating inequities for some students and variability in the quality of services rendered. The Office of Civil Rights identified in 2018 that there were 3.2 million students enrolled in gifted programs in public school across the United States; however, participation differed from state to state and in demographic subgroups. Researchers reported that students who are not

identified for gifted programs by middle school could not have the opportunity to be on the pathway for advanced classes in high school and beyond. Administrators must implement policies and practices to support the equitable placement of gifted students (Grissom et al., 2017). Handa (2019) agreed that school administrators should use their instructional leadership practices to increase student placements in gifted classes.

Problem Statement

Research on students' placements in gifted programs has revealed that principals struggle to implement instructional leadership practices to place students in gifted programs (Peters et al., 2019). School principals need to be aware of the identification process and placement of students in gifted programs (Callahan et al., 2017). School principals are responsible for creating structures that ensure African American students are equally placed in gifted programs. About 10% of African American students are placed in gifted programs (Hurt, 2018). All students benefit from placements in gifted education programs (Peters et al., 2019).

The research site was a large suburban public school district that serves over 115,000 students, of whom 43% are African American, 35% are White, and 17% are Hispanic (according to local data, 2019). The school district serves rural, suburban, and urban communities, and the population of African Americans increased since 2011. The school district has an office dedicated to gifted programs, and part of the mission of the gifted programs office is to advocate for the placement of students in gifted education.

According to the person in charge of research at the local school district under study, K-12 school principals were inconsistently implementing instructional leadership

practices regarding the placement of students in gifted programs. According to a senior district administrator of the schools under study, K-12 school principals struggled with the placement of students in gifted programs. Senior district administrators decided to support K-12 school principals by visiting their schools to provide support regarding the placements of students in gifted programs. However, according to a senior district official, teachers, parents, and students indicated that K-12 school principals struggled with the placements of students in gifted programs.

School leaders should apply leadership practices to increase the number of African American students in gifted programs (Lewis et al., 2018). Henfield et al. (2017) reported issues with placements of African American students in gifted programs. Allen (2017) found that many students are overlooked for placement in gifted programs. Howard (2018) concluded that school principals should know how to place students in gifted programs. Educators should implement policies that give underserved students an equal opportunity to be identified for and receive access to gifted programs (Wright et al., 2017). The principal is described as one who leads and orchestrates the school's affairs to drive others to achieve a set of academic goals (Dutta & Sahney, 2016). An understanding of the principals' instruction leadership practices may contribute to the placement of students in gifted programs (Ford et al., 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how K-12 school principals implemented their instructional leadership practices regarding equitable placements of students in gifted programs. Day et al. (2016) reported that successful

school leaders used their instructional leadership practices to influence placements of students in gifted programs. Handa (2019) examined the perceptions of principals regarding gifted students and reported that principals should implement leadership practices to place students in gifted programs. Wright et al. (2017) sought to examine why African American students are not placed as often in gifted programs.

Research Question

The research questions that guided this qualitative case study were:

RQ1: What instructional leadership practices do K-12 school principals implement regarding placements of students in gifted programs?

RQ2: What leadership behaviors do principals indicate they use regarding placements?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the instructional leadership model (Hallinger, 1985). Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model of instructional leadership focuses on 10 functions. I used three of these: (a) developing and promoting expectations, (b) assessing and monitoring student performance, and (c) supervising and evaluating instruction to investigate principals' instructional leadership practices. The instructional leadership model was relevant to this study because principals are responsible for creating and implementing instructional leadership practices. For example, school principals should assess and monitor students' performance for placements in gifted programs. In this model, details on principals and their leadership practices are included

because these educators are responsible for developing and promoting expectations to ensure that all students receive equitable access to rigorous courses.

I used the instructional leadership model to research what instructional leadership practices principals apply regarding placements of students in gifted programs. Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model of instructional leadership was used to create the interview protocol to analyze the interview data for this case study and to guide the findings. The findings can be used by district administrators and principals regarding instructional leadership practices principals could apply regarding placements of students in gifted programs.

Nature of the Study

The research design was a case study design. A qualitative case study was appropriate for this study to collect data regarding principals' instructional leadership practices regarding placements of students in gifted programs. Thus, the nature of this qualitative case study was an inquiry into the instructional leadership practices of K-12 school principals regarding placements of students in gifted programs.

The research site was a large suburban public-school district located in the southern United States serving over 115,000 students in rural, suburban, and urban communities. The research site consists of 175 K-12 schools. I interviewed 10 K-12 school principals who met the selection criteria. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. I selected the participants based on their knowledge about the instructional leadership practices of K-12 school principals regarding placements of students in gifted programs. Interviews were used to collect qualitative data to answer the

research questions. The participants were asked open-ended interview questions to elicit narrative responses by using an interview protocol.

Definitions

The following key terms are defined:

K-12 instructional leadership practices: This term refers to school principals setting clear school goals, managing curriculum and instruction, handling resources, and promoting student learning (Sebastian et al., 2019).

Placement in gifted programs: School leaders should apply instructional leadership practices to place students in gifted programs (Day et al., 2016). Long et al. (2015) suggested that principals provide resources, supports, and PD for the success of the gifted program.

Assumptions

This study focused on experienced K-12 public school principals. The first assumption was that the participants were knowledgeable about their role as instructional school leaders. The second assumption was that the participants would provide honest responses to the interview questions. Furthermore, it was assumed that the participants were knowledgeable about student placement in gifted programs at their school. These assumptions were necessary in the context of the study in order to receive data on the placement of students in gifted programs.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this case study was on the implementation of K-12 school principals and their instructional leadership practices regarding equitable placements of students in

gifted programs. For this study, 10 K-12 school principals from one large suburban public school district, which serves rural, suburban, and urban communities, were invited to participate. One delimitation was that the selection criteria were K-12 school principals, at the research site, who were state certified and for at least 2 academic years with the school district. Retired, interim, and assistant principals were excluded from this case study because they were not responsible for placing students in gifted programs.

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), transferability is the way in which qualitative research can be applied to other contexts. The findings of this case study may or may not be transferable to other similar school districts. For example, the findings from this study may not be transferable to other public-school districts that do not offer gifted programs.

Limitations

This case study was limited to K-12 school principals. Retired principals and assistant principals were not invited to participate in the study. Retired principals are no longer responsible for the placement students and no longer serve as the instructional leaders of a school building. Assistant principals primarily oversee managerial tasks of a school building and are not solely responsible for implementing instructional practices. School principals are responsible for the implementation of the instructional program of their school building. While principals could provide insight on their leadership practices, the limitation was that the data were obtained from only one lens from each of the participating schools.

Ten K-12 school principals were interviewed who agreed to participate in the study. A limitation was the methodology of this study. I was the primary instrument for data collection. As a result, I ensured validity and addressed limitations such the interview protocol and the design of the interview questions. Regarding confirmability, as a novice researcher, I confirmed that the interview data were accurate and without personal biases. As a novice researcher, I recognized the aforementioned limitations. I used reflexivity processes to monitor my biases. During the interviews, I assured confidentiality of the participants and conducted member checking to ask the participants to verify the accuracy of their responses to the interview questions by reviewing my interpretations in order to reduce the risk of subjective inference. Regarding triangulation, I included elementary, middle, and high school principals to add to the credibility of the study.

Significance

The findings of this research study provide school principals with strategies to assist in better implementing their instructional leadership practices regarding placements of students in gifted programs. School principals have a large responsibility to ensure their instructional programs are equitable and serve all student groups. The findings could also help school district administrators to better support K-12 school principals regarding placements of students in gifted programs and assist in principal preparation programs. School district administrators are responsible for providing PD that further prepares their school principals, as well as future principals. Principal PD and preparation programs provide the guidance to increase leadership capacity in serving diverse student groups.

The more school leaders learn and understand about the diverse needs of their students, the more they have the potential of providing access to rigorous courses.

K-12 teachers could use the findings to better understand principals' instructional leadership practices regarding the placements of students in gifted programs. Teachers will benefit from the findings, as they will have the support and direction needed to identify students for placement in gifted programs. Implications for positive social change include findings for school principals to use to support students to be placed in gifted programs and for these students to graduate from high school and be college or career ready.

Summary

The research site was a large suburban public school district located in the southern United States. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how K-12 school principals implement instructional leadership practices regarding equitable placements of students in gifted programs. The conceptual framework was the instructional leadership model of Hallinger and Murphy (1985). The instructional leadership model focuses on 10 functions for administrators, and I chose three to address in this study: (a) developing and promoting expectations, (b) assessing and monitoring student performance, and (c) supervising and evaluating instruction. The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: What instructional leadership practices do K-12 school principals implement regarding placements of students in gifted programs?

RQ2: What leadership behaviors do principals indicate they use regarding placements?

Findings could help K-12 school principals to implement instructional leadership practices regarding placements of students in gifted programs. Implications for positive social change include these themes for school principals to use to support students to be placed in gifted programs for these students to graduate from high school and be college or career ready. In Chapter 2, I introduce the literature review for this case study. The focus of the literature review was on the topic of instructional leadership practices of K-12 school principals regarding the placements of students in gifted programs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review focused on the phenomenon of K-12 school principals implementing instructional leadership practices regarding placements of students in gifted programs. There is a gap in practice in the ways that principals implement instructional leadership practices regarding placements of students in gifted programs. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how K-12 school principals implement instructional leadership practices regarding equitable placements of students in gifted programs. The focus of the literature review was on the topic of instructional leadership practices of K-12 school principals regarding the placements of students in gifted programs. The literature review begins with a description of instructional leadership practices of K-12 school principals regarding the placements of students in gifted programs. The major sections of Chapter 2 include the introduction of the literature review, the literature search strategy, the conceptual framework, literature review related to key concepts, and the summary and conclusion.

Literature Search Strategy

Online databases were used to find peer-reviewed articles using the search keywords. I used Walden University's library including Education Source, ERIC, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and SAGE. The keywords were: *K-12 school principals, instructional practices, instructional leadership practices, implementation of instructional leadership practices, placements of students in gifted programs, gifted programs, K-12 school principals and instructional leadership practices, regarding placements of students in gifted programs, placements of students in gifted programs, K-*

12 placements of students in gifted programs, and *K-12 school principals implement instructional leadership practices regarding placements of students in gifted programs.* Current literature related to the conceptual framework was also searched. Peer-reviewed articles regarding the conceptual framework were included in the search in order to find theories and theorists related to this case study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership model. Hallinger and Murphy reported 10 functions for school administrators. The instructional leadership model contains these leadership functions: developing school goals, supervising and evaluating teaching, coordinating curriculum, monitoring student progress, assuring instructional time, maintaining learning support, providing incentives for teachers, enforcing academic standards, promoting PD, and providing incentives for learning. Hallinger and Murphy also developed the principal instructional management rating scale.

The instructional leadership model is principal centered (Gumus et al., 2018). I used this model to delve into the principals' instructional leadership practices. Specifically, this model relates to school principals' instructional leadership practices regarding academic achievement. Principals create the school mission, coordinate curriculum, monitor student progress, and promote a positive school learning climate, which entails principals' effort to enforce academic standards.

The following three functions were used to inform this case study: (a) developing and promoting expectations, (b) assessing and monitoring student performance, and (c)

supervising and evaluating instruction (Hallinger, 2013). These three functions of the

instructional leadership model are relevant to this case study because K-12 school

principals are instructional leaders. K-12 school principals should assess and monitor

students' performance for placements in gifted programs. The instructional leadership

model includes functions that K-12 school principals should use by applying their

leadership practices. Specifically, the instructional leadership model includes functions

for educators regarding the development and implementation of expectations at the

school building in order to ensure that all students receive education. For example, the

instructional leadership model can be used by K-12 school principals to provide equitable

access to rigorous courses of gifted programs.

The holistic view of the instructional leadership model is that K-12 school

principals are instructional leaders who have a positive impact on instructional practices

(Gumus et al., 2018). K-12 school principals are communicating school goals and are

managing instructional programs that necessitates principals to supervise and evaluate

instruction, coordinate curriculum, and monitor students' progress. Based on the

instructional leadership model, school principals need to focus on teaching and learning.

For example, the instructional leadership model provides strategies and tools for school

leaders to use to continuously improve instruction (Gumus et al., 2018). The instructional

leadership model has been the most cited instructional leadership model in the literature

and is widely adopted as a framework in EdD and PhD dissertations over the past 3

decades (Gumus et al., 2018). The instructional leadership model was selected for this

case study because it related to the instructional leadership practices of K-12 school

principals who applied the functions of this model regarding placements of students in gifted programs. The instructional leadership was used to create the interview protocol and to analyze the interview data for this case study.

<div align="center">**Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**</div>

Gifted Programs

Peters et al. (2019) examined how gifted program placements have changed over the years and if there is a relationship to state and local mandates that principals have to implement. Peters et al. found that policymakers must work together with school principals to implement policies that lead to consistency in placement in gifted programs. Kettler et al. (2015) examined the role of school principals in gifted programs. Howard (2018) concluded that school principals should have leadership practices in place that allow all students to be considered for placement in gifted programs. Principals' instructional leadership practices should be applied to increase the placements of students in gifted classes (Lewis et al., 2018).

School leaders should apply their instructional leadership practices when placing students in gifted programs (Day et al., 2016). School leaders should also understand the importance of their leadership practices as instructional leaders to be successful school principals in order to achieve and sustain academic outcomes in schools (Day et al., 2016). Long et al. (2015) conducted a case study regarding gifted programs and gifted policy to determine the relationship between the principals and the policy. Long et al. reported that principals with a gifted policy were more likely to provide resources, supports, and PD for the success of the gifted program.

Callahan et al. (2017) examined the instructional leadership practices of K-12 school principals regarding gifted programs and stated that school principals need to ensure consistent implementation of the gifted programs for all students. School principals' instructional leadership practices are essential to enhance teachers' capacity for educating gifted students (Gui, 2019; Handa, 2019). Allen (2017) examined how students are placed in gifted programs and found that many students are overlooked for placement in gifted programs. Allen (2017) identified a need for increased collaboration among educators concerning gifted programs.

Gifted Programs and African American Students

Wright et al. (2017) examined the placement of African American students in gifted programs in schools in the United States. Wright et al. sought to examine why African American students are not placed as often in gifted programs. Wright et al. provided insight into the contributing factors of African American placement in gifted programs. Henfield et al. (2017) explored African American students enrolled in gifted programs and concluded that there were issues with placements in gifted programs of African American students. According to Grissom et al. (2017), African American students who scored the same as other students on assessments were less likely to be placed in gifted programs.

Gifted Programs and Hispanic Students

Vega et al. (2018) examined the placement of African American and Hispanic students in the gifted identification process. Peters et al. (2019) stated that more students would be identified and placed in gifted programs if building norms were used for

identification purposes as opposed to national norms. Vega et al. (2018) examined gifted program placement for African American and Hispanic students. The findings indicated that African American and Hispanic students were less likely to be placed in gifted programs.

Gifted Programs and Instructional Leadership Practices of Principals

Lewis et al. (2018) examined leadership practices to increase the number of African American students in gifted programs. Lewis et al. discussed the standards of gifted education and the selection of PD that principals use to support African American students in gifted programs. Grissom et al. (2017) examined how African American students are placed in gifted programs. Grissom et al. (2017) focused on how a principal's instructional leadership practices affect the placements of African American students in gifted programs.

Instructional Leadership Practices of K-12 School Principals

According to Intxausti et al. (2016), school principals need to have a clear vision of the school. School staff have a clear idea of the school's mission, principles, and values when administrators support teachers and students (Intxausti et al., 2016). School administrators should have the ability to convey their motivation, commitment, and sense of belonging to the school (Intxausti et al., 2016). Intxausti et al. (2016) concluded that leadership practices may have different effects depending on the situation of the school.

Instructional leadership should be inclusive of all students (Samuels, 2018). According to Perrone and Tucker (2019), leadership is considered the primary driver of organizational improvement at the school level. Principals should encourage a student-

centered learning environment (Perrone & Tucker, 2019). Perrone and Tucker (2019) reported that principals impact student learning.

K-12 school principals can help increase the number of students placed in gifted programs. According to Balyer et al. (2017), school principals could help teachers for students to improve their academic progress. Balyer et al. (2017) stated that school principals do not support teachers' autonomy in schools. Balyer et al. (2017) confirmed that shared vision depends on principals' instructional leadership.

A priority of a school principal is instructional leadership (Wallin et al., 2019; Windlinger et al., 2020). School principals establish academic achievement (Wallin et al., 2019). The four main themes for a school principal as an instructional leader are: (a) academic focus, (b) high expectations, (c) staffing, and (d) decision making (Wallin et al., 2019).

School principals should adjust to school changes by using appropriate actions and practices (Lacey, 2019). School principals should be responsible for leading instruction and student assessment (Lacey, 2019). There is a relationship between school leadership and students' achievement (Morgan, 2018). School principals' leadership practices make a difference in students' achievement (Windlinger et al., 2020). Hsin-Hsiange and Mao-Neng (2015) demonstrated that school principals have a significant impact on students' performance. A successful principal should strive for all students to be successful (Cosentino, 2019). Research revealed that successful principals bring about student academic achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Strong leadership is about creating relationships with all educational stakeholders (Jefferies, 2019). The principal is in an ideal position to get to know every student in order to create a learning environment that is responsive to the individual needs of each student (Jefferies, 2019). A principal can be a change agent (Tdou & Dou, 2019). A principal can also balance administrative and managerial duties (Tdou & Dou, 2019). Principals should provide curriculum and guidance to educational stakeholders through role modeling as instructional leaders (Tdou & Dou, 2019).

School Principals' Leadership and Student's Academic Success

Oyugi and Gogo (2019) stated that principals' leadership styles impact students' academic performance. Oyugi and Gogo (2019) used a descriptive survey research design and a correlational design regarding the influence of leadership style on students' performance. Oyugi and Gogo (2019) reported that leadership styles positively affect students' academic achievement and general school performance because they motivate teachers to collaborate with principals to achieve school objectives.

Ross and Cozzens (2016) reported that the principal's instructional leadership to a great extent influences students' achievement. Principals need to lead through the guidelines and objectives of the policymakers (Ross & Cozzens, 2016). The instructional leadership practices of school principals should be used to create a platform for influencing students' development (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Windlinger et al., 2020). School principals should be agents of change (Boyce & Bowers, 2018) and encourage good academic performance (Oyugi & Gogo, 2019). The principal should communicate

the school goals and roles to the teachers, students, and parents and should closely monitor students' progress (Wartini, 2016). The principal needs to communicate the school goals and roles to the teachers' students and parents (Wartini, 2016).

A principal should embrace instructional leadership practices to ensure a good learning environment (Urick, 2016). The principal should exercise instructional leadership practices for a positive performance of students (Urick, 2016). The principal should manage instructional leadership to improve the quality of delivering quality curriculum (Urick, 2016). Instructional leadership includes communicating school goals, coordinating curriculum, and framing school goals (Urick, 2016). Most gifted students have reported to learning through interactive-based learning processes.

Gifted Students and Educators

Gifted students are those as having outstanding talent and remarkable high levels of accomplishment when compared with other students. Gifted students are also those who are excelling in specific academic subjects (according to local data, 2020). School districts are expected to develop and implement policies for gifted students (according to local data, 2020).

According to Stockard (2020), administrative decisions affect the implementation of instruction programs. Stockard (2020) reported that administrative decisions can influence successful implementation of programs and student success. Students are more likely to master the material, and as a result, students have higher achievement. Stockard (2020) said that strong organizational and administrative support is necessary to support gifted students.

Distributed and Instructional Leadership Practices of K-12 School Principals

Principals should place emphasis on instructional practices and on sharing leadership. Sukru Bellibas and Liu (2018) investigated the extent to which leadership styles predict school climate. Sukru Bellibas and Liu (2018) indicated that principals perceive distributed and instructional leadership practices are significant predictors of staff mutual respect in the school. Sukru Bellibas and Liu (2018) concluded that principals use instructional leadership and distributed leadership. Both leadership types are significant predictors of mutual respect. For example, "The variation in mutual respect among staff in the school can largely be explained through the extent to which principals apply instructional and distributed leadership to improve instructional effectiveness and empowering staff" (Sukru Bellibas & Liu, 2018, p. 12). Principals should provide students with the opportunity to take part in the decision-making processes in the school.

Gifted Students and Educators

Researchers reported the need for increased collaboration among educators during the gifted referral and identification processes. Allen (2017) explored the role teacher perceptions play in the underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in gifted programming. Allen (2017) indicated that the language barrier and the overemphasis on standardized testing contributes to the underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse learners in gifted programming. Allen (2017) collected qualitative interview data from the gifted specialists and found that gifted learners are often overlooked because of language barriers. For example, "When teachers aren't able

to notice gifts and talents among students, they often do not refer them for gifted

evaluation, thus creating a significant barrier for these students who desperately need

access to gifted programming and more challenging curricula" (Allen, 2017, p. 7). Allen

reported the need for increased collaboration among educators during the gifted referral

and identification processes

Gifted Students and Gifted Programs

According to The National Association for Gifted Children (http://nagc.org/),

gifted students need analytical thinking opportunities for high-level thinking and problem

solving. Gifted students have highly focused interests, advanced understanding, and

advanced memorization. Gifted students use creative ability in problem solving and have

a richness in imagination and informal language.

According to The Local State Department of Education (2020), gifted students are

found in all schools. School administrators should be identifying gifted students and

should be developing and implementing the gifted education programs and services

needed to develop these students' full potential (The Local State Department of

Education, 2020). Also, according to The Local State Department of Education (2020),

each local school system shall establish an equitable process for identifying gifted

students. For example, a gifted program should aim at accelerating, extending, or

enriching instructional content, strategies, and products to demonstrate and apply learning

for gifted students. Gifted programs should be based on policies and procedures, and tests

and instruments pertaining to screening and identification of gifted students (The Local

Board of Education website). "Gifted students of color want, need, and deserve to see

themselves mirrored in curriculum and literature. Positive influence on the social and

emotional needs and development of students of color includes racial identity and pride"

(The Local Board of Education website, 2020, para 3).

Gifted Programs for underrepresented Students

According to Lakin (2016), researchers have consistently reported

underrepresentation of many race/ethnicity minorities. School district administrators

should be advocates for gifted students who come from diverse backgrounds (Lakin,

2016). Lakin (2016) recommended the implementation of universal screening procedures

to ensure fair access to gifted services for students. Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2017)

examined gifted education for underrepresented students. According to Ecker-Lyster and

Niileksela (2017), there is limited recruitment and retention of minority students in gifted

education programs. Minority students are significantly underrepresented within gifted

education programs Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). For instance, Ecker-Lyster and

Niileksela (2017) reported, "Problems with the identification and recruitment methods

used to solicit students for gifted education are frequently cited as major contributing

factors to the underrepresentation of low-income and minority students" (p. 5). Ecker-

Lyster and Niileksela (2017) concluded, "If our educational system seeks to provide

equitable educational services to all children, then increasing underrepresented student

populations in gifted programming is essential" (p. 16).

According to Ford et al. (2018), "Despite their responsibility for referrals,

nominations, and teaching gifted students, educators tend to receive little or no formal

training in gifted education" (p. 9). The preparation of current and future educators to

teach in gifted education calls for meaningful consideration of cultural responsiveness. Culturally responsive educators are adept at motivating all gifted students and understand that students of color may face more challenges than their White classmates and peers. White teachers comprise a significant proportion of the education profession (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Nationally, Whites comprise 85% of teachers, while African American and Hispanic teachers each represent 7% of the teaching populations Asians make up 1% of teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Gifted Programs Discrepancies

Kettler et al. (2015) examined discrepancies in educational opportunity for gifted students at the program services level. Kettler et al. (2015) indicated that locale, school size, and economic disadvantage were the strongest predictors of variance in funding and staffing gifted education programs. "Rural schools, small schools, and schools with larger economically disadvantaged populations allocate proportionally less fiscal and human resources to gifted education services" (Kettler et al., 2015, p. 1).

According to Kettler et al. (2015), although equity and access in identification and participation practices have been widely addressed in the research literature, less attention has been paid to the equitable distribution of educational opportunities after students are identified for gifted education services. Kettler et al. (2015) reported, gifted education programs appropriately serve high-ability and high-potential students across all races, ethnicities, economic conditions, and locales.

According to Kettler et al. (2015), there was no relationship between the proportion of non-Caucasian students and the amount of money spent on gifted education. Schools with greater proportions of students identified and receiving special education services tended to allocate fewer faculty members to the gifted education program. Kettler et al. (2015) examined equitable access to gifted education services. Kettler et al. (2015) indicated that disparities exist in the funding and staffing of gifted education programs based on locale. Kettler et al. (2015) concluded that students attending small, rural schools and gifted students attending schools with higher prevalence of economic disadvantage are more likely to experience inadequately supported gifted programs.

Applying Instructional Leadership Practices

Whitehouse (2016) stated that school principals' instructional leadership practices are guided by the goals set forth by school district administrators (Prachee et al., 2017; Sinnema et al., 2016). School principals should promote positive change within the school district (Morgan, 2018). Goddard et al. (2015) stated that principals' instructional leadership support the degree to which teachers work together to improve instruction. Goddard et al. (2015) suggested that strong instructional leadership can create structures to facilitate teachers' work. Goddard et al. (2015) measured the perceptions of school principals regarding the frequency with which they passed specific instructional leadership behaviors and indicated that the magnitude and direction of principal-teacher differences varies among schools.

Summary and Conclusions

There is a relationship between school leadership and students' achievement (Morgan, 2018). School principals' leadership practices make a difference in students' achievement (Windlinger et al., 2020) because a principal is a change agent (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Tdou & Dou, 2019). Principals' administrative decisions influence the successful implementation of programs (Stockard, 2020) and they should place emphasis on instructional practices and on sharing leadership (Sukru Bellibas & Liu, 2018).

Principals' instructional leadership practices should be applied to increase the placements of students in gifted classes (Lewis et al., 2018) because instructional leadership practices are essential to enhance teachers' capacity for educating gifted students (Handa, 2019). Allen (2017) identified a need for increased collaboration among educators concerning gifted programs because instructional leadership should be inclusive of all students (Samuels, 2018). Strong leadership is about creating relationships with all educational stakeholders (Jefferies, 2019). Gifted students need analytical thinking opportunities for high-level thinking and problem solving because they have highly focused interests, advanced understanding, and advanced memorization. Gifted students benefit from gifted program. School district administrators should advocate for gifted students (Lakin, 2016).

According to Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2017), there are limited recruitment and retention of minority students in gifted education programs. Lakin (2016) recommended the implementation of universal screening procedures to ensure fair access to gifted services for students. Kettler et al. (2015) indicated that locale, school size, and

economic disadvantage were the strongest predictors of variance in funding and staffing gifted education programs. Gifted programs can serve high-ability and high-potential students across all races, ethnicities, and economic conditions.

In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology of this study. I also describe how I invited participants, and the details related to the instrumentation, data collection, and analysis. I include how I safeguarded the participants' rights and confidentiality and how I strengthened the trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In this chapter, the research design, role of the researcher, data collection, and data analysis are presented. Ethical issues and procedures are also presented. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how K-12 school principals implement instructional leadership practices regarding equitable placements of students in gifted programs. School leaders should apply their instructional leadership practices when placing students in gifted programs (Day et al., 2016). Callahan et al. (2017) stated that school principals ensure that consistent implementation of the gifted programs is for all students. Handa (2019) reported that school principals' instructional leadership practices are essential to enhance teachers' capacity for educating gifted students. The major sections of Chapter 3 include the introduction, research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, trustworthiness, ethical procedures, and summary.

Research Design and Rationale

I used interviews to collect qualitative data. I developed the interview protocol. The interview protocol consisted of interview questions developed based on the conceptual framework and literature review. A case study design was used. Qualitative researchers attempt to understand individuals, groups, and phenomena in their natural settings in ways that are contextualized and reflect the meaning that people make out of their own experiences (see Henry, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Trochim, 2006). A case study was appropriate to engage participants in the interviews related to the research study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

I did not conduct a quantitative study because I did not have independent and dependent variables. I did not develop a theory and did not use a grounded theory design. An ethnographic design focuses on an entire cultural group (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Ethnography was not suitable for this study because I did not examine a phenomenon over an extended time (see Trochim, 2006). Phenomenology was also not appropriate for this research because the purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how K-12 school principals implement instructional leadership practices regarding equitable placements of students in gifted programs. Thus, a qualitative research study was selected for this research. The research questions that guided this case study were:

RQ1: What instructional leadership practices do K-12 school principals implement regarding placements of students in gifted programs?

RQ2: What leadership behaviors do principals indicate they use regarding placements?

Role of the Researcher

I was a middle school principal for the past 6 years, a state certified educator for 24 years, and an elementary and middle school teacher. As a novice researcher, I interviewed K-12 school principals to understand how they implemented instructional leadership practices regarding placements of students in gifted programs. I applied knowledge from my doctoral level research courses to establish a good rapport with the participants. I did not have any personal or professional relationship with the participants.

I maintained professionalism and ethics and reduced my personal research biases. I was

the only person to collect and analyze data from the interviews.

Methodology

In this section, the population and sampling strategies are presented. The sources

of data, instrumentation, and interview protocol are also presented. I collected data from

K-12 school principals regarding placements of students in gifted programs. Thus, I

conducted qualitative research to collect data about specific experiences from the

viewpoint of K-12 school principals. Qualitative research allows researchers to see,

engage with, and make meaning of the complexity of people's lives (see Ravitch & Carl,

2016). Qualitative research is conducted to understand the thoughts and feelings of the

participants (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Participant Selection

The school district consisted of 175 K-12 schools. The participants for this

research study were 10 K-12 school principals. The selection criteria were: (a) principals

for at least 2 years at the research site, (b) state-certified, and (c) had a gifted program at

the school. I invited all K-12 school principals who met the selection criteria via email.

Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants. The sample was 10 K-12 school

principals. Data saturation was reached when there was enough information to replicate

the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Patton, 2015).

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument was interviews. The interview process includes

access to and selecting participants, building trust, the location and length of time of the

interview, and clarity of questions (see Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Qualitative interviewing

provides a method for collecting detailed information (Oltmann, 2016).

An interview protocol was used for the interviews (see Appendix). The interview

protocol contained open-ended interview questions based on the conceptual framework,

literature review, and the core constructs of the research questions. I developed the

interview questions found in the interview protocol and each interview question by using

conversational language or language free of ambiguity for each participant to answer

freely and in their own words. The interview questions were created to gain clarity and to

keep each interviewee on topic in order to collect sufficient data to answer the research

questions.

Content validity of the interview protocol was established using a dialogic

engagement process with retired school principals from the schools under study. Dialogic

engagement is used to increase the rigor and trustworthiness of the research processes by

engaging with peers who can help refine the procedures intended to achieve the goals of

the study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I asked two retired principals to review my

interview questions because they were knowledgeable colleagues and experts in gifted

programs and leadership practices of principals. These retired principals advised as

reviewers and were be included as participants in this case study. I provided the

reviewers with the research questions and the interview protocol. The reviewers

scrutinized the interview protocol by confirming that responses to the interview questions

would provide enough data to answer to the research questions. The feedback I received

was that no further revisions were necessary because the interview questions were clear

and descriptive of placements of students in gifted programs.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I sought Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Walden University and

the research site. I completed the training *Protecting Human Research*

Participants offered by the National Institutes of Health. At the research site, each school

had its own website. I visited each school's website to get the name of the school

principal, their school email address, and credentials. Each school principals' educational

qualifications were listed on the school's website together with the number of years in the

role of school principal. I compiled a list of emails of school principals who were in this

role for at least 2 years.

I sent an email to each principal and included my email address and cell phone

number, a copy of the consent form, and information about the research. In the email, I

included a consent form for the participants to review and to reply with "I consent" in

order to participate in this research study. The email to the participants included

information about the research study such as the research problem, purpose, and question.

Information about the duration of each interview was included. For example, I included

in the email that each interview lasted 1 hour, and that each interview was audio-taped

with the participants' permission. Those K-12 school principals who contacted me by

email, I invited to the interviews by responding to their emails. All K-12 school

principals who met the selection criteria were asked if they were interested in

participating in this research. The participants were encouraged to reply to the email to ask questions that they may had.

I scheduled the interviews by emailing each participant the link to the Zoom meeting. The school's and each school principal's name were not included in the findings. Each interview took about 1 hour to complete. I explained to each participant that my role was that of a novice researcher. I established a good rapport with each participant. I informed each participant that their responses to the interview questions will be kept confidential. I emphasized that the participation in the interviews was voluntary. I used the letter P followed by a number to refer to each participant.

Each interview transcript is stored electronically in a password-protected file on my personal computer. All files containing the interview transcripts are encrypted. Data will be kept secure for 5 years, per the protocol of Walden University. After 5 years, I will destroy all the interview transcripts. I did not know saturation was reached until I conducted the interviews. When the participants provided the same responses over and over and no new information gleaned from the interviews, then I knew I had reached data saturation.

Data Analysis Plan

Interview data were collected in 6 months. K-12 school principals were asked the same interview questions. I used the conceptual framework and literature review to analyze the data. NVivo, which is a software program, was used to organize the interview data. According to Nowell et al. (2017), qualitative researchers must "demonstrate that

data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner" (para

3). After each interview, I color coded the transcribed interviews.

Coding was used during the reviews of the interview data. Coding can be

conducted both manually and using computer assisted software (see Vaughn & Turner,

2016). A critical part of the data analysis is coding (see Vaughn & Turner, 2016). Coding

is used to prevent the interviewer overemphasize the importance of any one aspect early

in the study and to help ensure a thorough analysis of the entire interview (see

Zamawe, 2015). Thematic analysis is (a) a method of analyzing qualitative data (Nowell

et al., 2017), (b) usually applied to a set of texts, such as interview transcripts, and (c)

used to closely examine the data to identify common themes such as topics, ideas, and

patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly in the interviews. Thus, thematic analysis

was used for emergent themes.

During the data analysis, I identified similarly coded data. A combination of open

and axial coding was used to support thematic analysis to identify emergent themes.

Open coding is when a researcher highlights or labels sections of text (see Ravitch &

Carl, 2016). Axial coding is begun once a researcher has chucked data and then sees how

the codes come together into categories (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I reread my field

notes, reviewed my memos during the coding stages, and included details about relevant

codes by highlighting and labeling quotes and referencing the quotes to emphasize the

relationship to a theme, identifying and making notes of recurring or outlier data, and

creating diagrams to show the relationships among codes and how the codes evolved into

categories and themes.

Trustworthiness

I scheduled follow-up meetings for member checks within 4 weeks for each participant to examine the participants' responses for accuracy. I focused on trustworthiness and included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (see Amankwaa, 2016; Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). Member checking is a technique for exploring the credibility of results (see Birt et al., 2016; Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). I also asked the participants to review the interview transcripts for accuracy. Thus, interview transcripts were shared with each participant within days of the interview for their comment, feedback, and input.

Credibility

The credibility of this study is supported because I protected the participants' confidentiality. I accurately represented the participants' responses. I addressed credibility by limiting my personal biases (see Stewart et al., 2017). To establish credibility, I interviewed school principals from elementary, middle, and high school settings. Using triangulation, I gathered interview data from multiple sources of data such as elementary, middle, and high school participants. I triangulated the data by using actual quotes from the participants and referencing reflective bracketing notes and field notes to support the emergent themes.

Member checking is used to minimize the researcher's biases (see Birt et al., 2016; Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). Member checking was used to increase credibility by asking participants to review and verify the accuracy of the data. For instance, during the interviews, I summarized responses and asked each participant if my understanding was

an accurate interpretation of what the participants intended to convey. Using this strategy, the participants confirmed my thoughts or further explained their responses. After I analyzed the data, I sent to each participant a summary of preliminary findings to request feedback or corrections within 2 weeks.

Confirmability

Researchers should verify data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers should control personal biases (see Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). Confirmability describes the notion that other researchers would be able to confirm the findings of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I diligently analyzed the interview transcripts to ensure that the findings reflect a synopsis of the participants' responses. I documented the procedures for checking and rechecking the data during the entire research. To improve confirmability, I conducted a data audit to inspect the data collection and analysis procedures and to control for research biases (see Kornbluh, 2015).

Dependability

If the researcher does not maintain any kind of audit trail, the dependability cannot be assessed, and dependability and trustworthiness of the study are diminished (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Regarding dependability of this study, I ensured that the details from the data collection and analysis to the reporting of the findings are explained thoroughly enough that another researcher can conduct the same process and yield similar results (see Creswell & Creswell, 2020).

An audit trail, triangulation, and transparent reporting of the research process is imperative for establishing dependability (Yin, 2016). I created a journal to log each

phase of the process for data collection and analysis. For example, I used the journal to record in detail each step including any adjustments to the original plan, the rationale to support the change, and any consequences that may result from the modification (see Creswell & Creswell, 2020). The journal served as an audit trail that was used to review my processes to ensure transparency and reliability. During the data collection, I kept fieldnotes to record observations and reactions.

Transferability

Transferability is how to apply or transfer a comprehensive context while maintaining its richness of the context from the participant's responses (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Transferability in this research was established by interviewing multiple K-12 principals that lead schools with student populations of various demographics, grade levels and socioeconomic status. According to Burkholder et al. (2016), transferability is the application of the results of a qualitative study to other contexts or settings. Therefore, the findings of this study could be transferable to other similar K-12 schools.

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Ethical Procedures

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Approval from the Walden University IRB (#11-20-20-0750795) confirmed that I complied with the proper ethical standards for recruitment, interviewing, and the data collection process. I kept all recorded and transcribed data confidential and will hold them in a filing cabinet for a period of 5 years. I am the only one who has a key to the filing cabinet. No demographic details, such as age or ethnicity, will be shared in the findings. I will not include other details that could reveal any of the participant's information.

Summary

In Chapter 3, the research design, the role of the researcher, data collection, and data analysis were presented. Ethical issues and procedures were also presented. The phenomenon for this research is that K-12 school principals are inconsistently implementing instructional leadership practices regarding placements of students in gifted programs. The participants were K-12 school principals. The selection criteria for the participants were: (a) principals for at least 2 years at the research site, (b) state certified, and (c) having a gifted program at the school building. The data collection instrument was interviews. I compiled a list of emails of school principals who had been in this role for at least 2 years. I sent an email to each principal and included a consent form for the participants to review. I scheduled each interview via Zoom. Coding the interview transcripts or breaking them down into meaningful and manageable chunks of data, was a critical part of the data analysis. Coding was used in order to focus on the interview analysis. Thematic analysis was used for emergent themes. In Chapter 4, I reflect and add the conclusions to the study. I describe any personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experience at the time of study that may affect interpretation of the results.

Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions

In Chapter 4, I present the findings of this study. I describe the methodology that I used to collect and analyze the interview transcripts. Researchers of student placement in gifted programs revealed that school leaders struggle to implement best instructional leadership practices to identify and place students in gifted programs. The research problem was that K-12 school principals were inconsistently implementing instructional leadership practices regarding the placement of students in gifted programs. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how K-12 school principals implement instructional leadership practices regarding equitable placements of students in gifted programs.

The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: What instructional leadership practices do K-12 school principals implement regarding placements of students in gifted programs?

RQ2: What leadership behaviors do principals indicate they use regarding placements?

African American students are under-represented in gifted programs (Ford et al., 2018). There is a higher rate of placement of African American students in schools that have African American principals (Grissom et al., 2017). School administrators do not recruit or retain an equal number of minority and nonminority students in gifted programs (Wright et al., 2017). Also, school administrators should use their instructional leadership practices to increase student placements in gifted classes (Handa, 2019). An understanding of the principals' instruction leadership practices may contribute to the

placement of students in gifted programs (Ford et al., 2018). There are issues with placements of African American students in gifted programs (Henfield et al., 2017). School principals should know how to place students in gifted programs (Howard, 2018).

Setting

The research site was a large suburban public school district that serves rural, suburban, and urban communities. There are over 115,000 students, of whom 40% are African American, 35% are White, and 20% are Hispanic. The research site has the office of gifted programs. The mission of the gifted programs office is to advocate for the placement of students in gifted education. The school district consists of just over 170 K-12 schools.

Data Collection

According to Henry (2015), Ravitch and Carl (2016), and Trochim (2006), qualitative research is used to understand individuals, groups, and phenomena in their natural settings. I used a case study to engage participants in the interviews related to the research study (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Upon IRB approval (#11-20-20-0750795) from Walden University, I started the data collection process.

I used interviews and an interview protocol to collect qualitative data. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended interview questions that I developed based on the conceptual framework and literature review. Content validity of the interview protocol was established using a dialogic engagement process with retired school principals from the schools under study. Dialogic engagement is used to increase the rigor and trustworthiness of the research processes by engaging with peers who can help

refine the procedures intended to achieve the goals of the study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I asked two retired principals to review my interview questions because they were knowledgeable colleagues and experts in gifted programs and leadership practices of principals. These retired principals advised as reviewers and were be included as participants in this case study. I provided the reviewers with the research questions and the interview protocol. The reviewers scrutinized the interview protocol by confirming that responses to the interview questions would provide enough data to answer to the research questions. The feedback I received was that no further revisions were necessary because the interview questions were clear and descriptive of placements of students in gifted programs.

Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants The selection criteria for the participants were: (a) principals for at least 2 years at the research site, (b) state-certified, and (c) had a gifted program at the school building. I visited each school's website to get the name of the school principal, their school email address, and credentials. Each school principals' educational qualifications were listed on the school's website together with the number of years they were in the role of school principal. I compiled a list of emails of school principals who were in this role for at least 2 years. I sent an email to each principal and included my email address and cell phone number, a copy of the consent form, and information about the research. In the email, I included a consent form for the participants to review and to reply with "I consent" in order to participate in this research study. The email to the participants included information about the research study such as the research problem, purpose, and question.

Information about the duration of each interview was included. For example, I included

in the email that each interview lasted 1 hour, and that each interview was audio-taped

with the participants' permission.

Those K-12 school principals who contacted me by email, I invited to the

interviews by responding to their emails. All K-12 school principals who met the

selection criteria were asked if they were interested in participating in this research. The

participants were encouraged to reply to the email to ask questions that they may had.

Ten K-12 school principals agreed to be interviewed. I scheduled the interviews by

emailing each participant the link to the Zoom meeting.

Each interview took about 1 hour to complete. I explained to each participant that

my role was that of a novice researcher. I established a good rapport with each

participant. I informed each participant that their responses to the interview questions will

be kept confidential. I emphasized that the participation in the interviews was voluntary. I

used the letter P followed by a number to refer to each participant. I collected data from

K-12 school principals to explore their perceptions regarding placements of students in

gifted programs.

The interviews were recorded, with the permission from each participant, and

transcribed within 10 days of each interview. I electronically sent each participant their

completed interview transcription to ensure that the interview data were accurate. All

participants were given a chance to amend their responses or insert information to their

transcript to fully answer the interview questions. I took notes about their responses as

they took place and immediately after each interview as part of first cycle coding, which

also included highlighting and labeling portions of the participants' responses (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Via qualitative interviewing, I collected detailed information from 10 K-12 school principals (see Oltmann, 2016). I focused on how the participants described their experiences and the meaning they make of those experiences (see Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Interview data were collected within 3 months. K-12 School principals were asked the same interview questions. Each interview transcript is stored electronically in a password-protected file on my personal computer. All files containing the interview transcripts are encrypted. Data will be kept secure for 5 years, per the protocol of Walden University. After 5 years, I will destroy all the interview transcripts. I did not know saturation was reached until I conducted the interviews. When the participants shared with me the same responses over and over and no new information gleaned from the interviews, then I knew I had reached data saturation.

Data Analysis Plan

A critical part of the data analysis is coding (Vaughn & Turner, 2016). Qualitative researchers demonstrate that data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner (Nowell et al., 2017). NVivo, which is a software program, was used to organize the interview data. After each interview, I color coded the transcribed interviews. Coding was used during the reviews of the interview data. Coding was conducted both manually and using computer-assisted software (see Vaughn & Turner, 2016). Coding is used to prevent the interviewer overemphasize the importance of any one aspect early in the study and to help ensure a thorough analysis of the entire

interview (Yin, 2016). During the data analysis, I identified similar coded data. I organized the data into combined categories to identify emergent themes. I reread my field notes, reviewed my memos during the coding stages, and included details about relevant codes by highlighting and labeling quotes and referencing the quotes to emphasize the relationship to a theme, identifying and making notes of recurring or outlier data, and creating diagrams to show the relationships among codes and how the codes evolved into categories and themes.

Thematic analysis is: (a) a method of analyzing qualitative data (Nowell et al., 2017), (b) usually applied to a set of texts, such as interview transcripts, and (c) used to closely examine the data to identify common themes such as topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that came up repeatedly in the interviews. Thus, thematic analysis was used for emergent themes. I grouped phrases and themes according to the interview questions that I had asked in the video conference interviews. Participants' similar responses to specific interview questions were categorized using a chart. I charted similar and key phrases, words, and terms to assess them using axial coding design to classify subcategories of principals' instructional leadership practices and literacy that emerged. I arranged the ideas into columns that were labeled with each interview question by creating a spreadsheet to filter and sort the text. I placed handwriting codes onto sticky notes and then on large posters.

I reread the field notes and memos I recorded during the coding stages about relevant codes, highlighted and labelled pertinent respondent quotes and referencing the quotes to emphasize the relationship to each theme. I created diagrams to illustrate the

relationships among codes and how the codes evolved into categories and themes (see

Yin, 2016). I compiled commonalities in relation to the interview questions and arranged

the ideas in a logical format to scrutinize the data into smaller codes (see Yin, 2018).

Discrepant cases refer to data uncovered that may not align or contradict with the

assumptions that support the conceptual lens that frames a research study (Yin, 2018). I

addressed discrepant cases during the data analysis stage. I evaluated any plausible

contradictions during all stages of data analysis. However, after I examined all the data, I

found no discrepant cases that conflicted with the emerging themes.

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

Most of the participants had been in their current positions as a school principal

for at least 3 years. The average number of years the participants had been school

principal was 10. All participants had placed students in gifted programs. The participants

reported that on average the minimum number of African American students is 25% and

the maximum is 70%.

Theme 1: Principals Have a Process for Placements of Students in Gifted Programs

The participants reported that there is process for teachers to make

recommendations for placements in gifted programs. P1 said that an advanced academics

facilitator works with the assistant principal, teachers, and counselor for decision-making

regarding placement of students in gifted programs. This team consults with teachers

regarding the students who meet the criteria to be placed in gifted program. P2 reported

that teachers submit recommendations to the administrative team regarding placements of

students in the gifted program. P3 said that teachers make recommendations and there is

a committee of teachers and administrators to discuss the placement for each student. P4

stated that the principal makes the decisions of which students are placed in gifted

programs by using a policy for advanced academics. P5 said that the placement in gifted

programs is based on teachers' recommendation in consultation with the guidance

counselors. P6 mentioned that instructional leaders who are teachers make

recommendations for students who meet the highest level of academic achievement to be

placed in gifted programs.

P7 said that parents can also make recommendations to teachers to place students

in gifted programs. P7 stated that there is a program called *rising star* designed to

purposely select African American students because these students are underrepresented

in gifted programs. According to P7, the *rising star* program is designed to give students

opportunities for participation in gifted programs, and to help teachers understand that the

focus of the program is to recruit "children who should be in the program." According to

P8, teachers do a universal screening and take a look in Grade 3 to see which students

would truly access the advanced curriculum that the district has set in place. P8 also

reported that a team of teachers called facilitators work with a group of teachers,

including the guidance counselor. The team of teachers collect data from the teachers in

Grades 3, 4, 5 to do the universal screening. Thus, according to P8, teachers make

recommendations based on achievement data. P9 said the selection process begins early

at the elementary level in terms of identification and at the secondary level, a specific

process is in place to make recommendations to place students in gifted classes. P9

reported that every ethnicity is overrepresented in gifted classes except for the African

American students. P9 mentioned that teachers work together to strategically work with the office of advanced academics and to look at the process by looking through the equity lenses. P9 said that there is 7% increase of representation of African American students for the next school year. P10 reported that the gifted program has changed dramatically over time because of expectations to place students in the program. Thus, the participants reported that parents and teachers make recommendations for placements in gifted programs.

Theme 2: Criteria for Placing Students in Gifted Programs

Regarding the criteria for placing students in gifted programs, the participants review not only state test scores but also school district test scores, the gender, and ethnicity. P1 provided teachers and school counselors with criteria for placement of students in gifted programs such as state test scores, district test scores, gender, and ethnicity. P1 reported that these criteria are failing students of color such as African American students because they're all scoring below 30% on state and district tests. P2 uses state and district test scores to place students in gifted programs; however, African American students have overall state and district scores below 30%. Similar to P1 and P2, P3 said that state and district test scores are used for the placement of students; however, African American students have below average scores on state and district tests and are not placed in these programs. P4 reported that state and district test scores are used as criteria for the placement of students and suggested to include an equity policy as a criterion to place African American students in these programs. P5 reported that about 65% of the students at the school are African American students and academic

achievement is the main criterion for the placement of students. P5 also stated that African American students have average below state scores and are not placed in these programs. P6 used the same criteria for placement of students in gifted programs and said that an equity policy should be a criterion. P6 encourages African American students to do better on state tests. P6 aimed to help African American students who really have the potential to be given the opportunity to be placed in the gifted program. P6 expects teachers to support African American students. P7, similar to P1-P6, used the same criteria for placement of students in gifted programs and stated that these criteria are not met by African American students because of their low state test scores. P7 suggested that the criteria should include more criteria to encourage African American students to be placed in gifted programs. Also, P8, P9, and P10 reported that the same criteria have been used for years to place students in the gifted program and suggested that equity should be added as a criterion.

Theme 3: Principal Practices Used to Identify Students for Gifted Programs

P1 had discussions at grade level meetings with teachers and guidance counsellors. P1 said, "I think we need to give the teachers the tools to be able to identify students for gifted programs." P1 also said, "We meet once a quarter to identify students for gifted programs looking for ways to support these students. P1 reported, "Need to find resources to help students improve their state test scores." P2 said, "Individual conversations with counselors are useful to identify students for gifted programs." P2 also stated, "We have a 6-year plan to coach and guide students to do their best to join the gifted programs, and additional training for teachers to help them identify students for

gifted programs." P3 mentioned that the administrative team has discussions with the teachers and talk about grades, assessments, and placements in the gifted programs." P4 stated that teachers "follow a process to provide the names of students who could be placed in gifted programs. The process of selecting students involves teachers, guidance counsellors, and parents of students." P5 reported that a committee makes decisions regarding the placement of students in the gifted program. According to P5, the committee consisted of the English language arts chair, the administrative team, and guidance counsellors. This committee meets every month to discuss which students can be placed in the gifted program. P6 used a screening process regarding the placement of students in the gifted program, which includes teachers to use state test scores to screen every student at the school. A committee was responsible for the screening process and makes recommendations regarding the placement of students in the gifted program said P6. P7, P8, P9, and P10 reported that a committee made decisions regarding the placement of students in the gifted program.

Theme 4: Role of K-12 Principals in the Placement of Students in Gifted Programs

The role of K-12 principals in the placement of students in gifted program is to support teachers to improve their teaching strategies and students to improve their state test scores. The participants reported that their role in placing students in the gifted program is important. P1 attended every meeting regarding gifted programs and supports teachers in making recommendations to the gifted programs committee. P1 also met with students to emphasize the importance of academic achievement and the gifted programs. P1 made decisions with teachers by having in mind the best interest of all students.

P2 aimed to support teachers and students. For example, supports teachers to improve their teaching strategies. P2 said that by supporting teachers to help students improve their critical thinking skills, students may improve their state scores and meet the criteria to be placed in the gifted programs. P2 also stated as the principal of the building they are responsible for staffing and master schedule by ensuring first, that their school offers the courses for students to be able to take them in order to have the opportunity.

Similar to P1 and P2, P3 attended all meetings regarding gifted programs. P3 supports teachers in making recommendations to the gifted programs committee. P3 encouraged students to improve their academic achievement to be placed in the gifted programs. P3 supported support staff to assist students by placing students in courses that students can score above state average.

P4 and P5 focused on student achievement and help teachers to improve their teaching practices. Both P4 and P5 reported that by working well with both teachers and students, more students could do better on state tests and be placed in gifted programs. P7 attends all meetings regarding gifted programs and meets regularly with teachers to help them improve their teaching strategies. P8 encouraged teachers in making recommendations to the gifted programs committee and encourages students to focus on high academic achievement. P9 encouraged students to improve their academic achievement and to focus on being placed in the gifted programs. P10 supported guidance counselors to assist students with course selections based on the abilities of students to increase their proficiency in academic subjects.

Theme 5: Every Student Should Be Given the Opportunity to be Placed in a Gifted Program

P1 said that every student should be given the opportunity to be placed in a gifted program. P1 also said that she feels more comfortable as an administrator and as a parent to make these decisions. P1 used her administrative and parental lenses to identify in fourth grade students for the gifted program because these students are working on the fifth-grade curriculum. P1 emphasized that teachers need to really make good decisions going into that gifted committee meeting to make recommendations for students to be placed in gifted programs.

P2's perception was that every student should be given the opportunity to be placed in a gifted program. P2 reported that state assessments and district placement exams give a good idea of who should be placed in these programs. According to P3, the placement in gifted programs is somewhat subjective and her perception is that equitable strategies should be used for every student to be given an opportunity to be placed in gifted programs. P4's perception is that every student should be given the opportunity to be placed in a gifted program in elementary school. P5's perception is that every African American student should be given that opportunity to be placed in gifted programs. P5 supported students to be going to the higher level rather than keeping them in a lower level. P5's perception is that every student should be given the opportunity to be placed in a gifted program and a principal should be collaborating with teachers to make equitable decisions for these placements. P6 shifted the paradigm at the school and her perception is that every student should be given the opportunity to be placed in a gifted

program. Similarly, P7, P8, P9, and P10 reported having the same perception that every

student should be given the opportunity to be placed in a gifted program.

Theme 6: Professional Development (PD) for K-12 School Principals

The participants stated that PD can be helpful to learn new strategies to include

African American students in the gifted programs because the current selection process is

based only on academic achievement and these students often have low state scores. P1

said that PD can help K-12 school principals learn ways to support African American

students to increase state test scores to meet the selection criteria to be placed in gifted

programs. P2 reported that PD can be helpful to K-12 school principals to learn strategies

to support African American students to increase their proficiency in academic subjects

and as a result to increase their state scores to meet the selection criteria to be placed in

gifted programs. P3 mentioned that PD on how to support African American students to

increase their test scores. P4 stated that K-12 school principals can learn strategies to

support African American students to increase their proficiency in state tests. P5 said that

PD can help K-12 school principals to learn strategies to support African American

students to increase their proficiency in state tests. P6 – P10 said that PD on strategies for

teachers to use to support African American students to increase their proficiency in

academic subjects.

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Evidence of Trustworthiness

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According to Burkholder et al. (2016), trustworthiness includes dependability,

credibility, transferability, and confirmability. I used member checks to ensure the

participant's responses were valid (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I summarized the interview

data and involved the participants to confirm the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The findings provide an accurate reflection of the participants' experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). During the interviews, I studied the participants' lived experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Credibility

I conducted peer reviews, member checking, and reflexivity to ensure credibility for this study. I examined the participants' feelings during the different phases of this research study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I kept a reflexivity journal during the interviews and data analysis to record my predispositions, emotions, and reactions to reduce researcher biases and reactivity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I asked trusted and qualified retired school principals of the interview questions, and they provided me with feedback and the interview questions were not revised.

Transferability

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), transferability refers to whether the findings of a qualitative study can be applied to other contexts. I believe that the findings of this study can be transferable to other similar school districts offering gifted programs (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As a novice researcher, I considered whether the findings of this study are transferable to other situations of public-school districts offering gifted programs to students (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Based on the responses to the interview questions, the leadership practices of the K-12 school principals at the research site may be applied in the same way by other school principals in a similar setting. I believe I

established transferability by using the interview data to provide a thick description of the data that supported external validity (O'Reilly & Parker, 2017).

Dependability

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), dependability refers to the consistency of the data. I used the interview protocol and asked the same questions to all participants for the data to be consistent (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For dependability, I used a structure for how I collected data that were aligned to the problem and purpose of this research. I kept a reflexivity journal during the data collection and analysis and found no possible researcher biases. I also recorded and transcribed verbatim all interviews. I asked all participants to review the interview transcripts to confirm accuracy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used NVivo for coding interview transcripts.

Confirmability

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), qualitative researchers need to understand how their own biases may influence the interpretation of data. According to Burkholder et al. (2016), confirmability of a study exists when similar conclusions about the data analysis and findings of a study would be made by other researchers. I used peer review and reflexivity to mitigate potential researcher biases.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I presented the findings of this study. I described the methodology that I used to collect and analyze the interview transcripts. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how K-12 school principals implement instructional leadership practices regarding equitable placements of students in gifted programs. The

research site was a large suburban public school district that serves rural, suburban, and urban communities. I used interviews and an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to collect qualitative data. Ten K-12 school principals agreed to be interviewed and I scheduled the interviews. Each interview took about 1 hour to complete. The interviews were recorded and transcribed within 10 days of each interview. NVivo was used to organize the interview data. Open and axial coding were used to support thematic analysis. In Chapter 5, I interpret the findings, discuss the limitations of this study, and make recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how K-12 school principals implemented their instructional leadership practices regarding equitable placements of students in gifted programs. The conceptual framework was adapted from the instructional leadership model by Hallinger and Murphy (1985). I used this model to delve into the principals' instructional leadership practices because this instructional leadership model relates to school principals' instructional leadership practices regarding academic achievement and includes functions that K-12 school principals should use by applying their leadership practices. The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: What instructional leadership practices do K-12 school principals implement regarding placements of students in gifted programs?

RQ2: What leadership behaviors do principals indicate they use regarding placements?

Data were collected through individual interviews and used to answer the research questions. Data analysis resulted in six themes. RQ1 was answered through Themes 1, 2, and 3. RQ2 was answered through Themes 4, 5, and 6. A combination of open and axial coding was used to support thematic analysis and the following six themes emerged:

Theme 1: Principals have a process for placements of students in gifted programs. Principals have various processes in place for the identification of students to be recommended for placement into gifted programs at their school. The process varies depending on school and school level.

Theme 2: Criteria for placing students in gifted programs. Principals need to ensure staff follow the criteria for placing students that is equitable and includes varies data points. Some principals follow a system of criteria to place students in gifted programs, while some principals place students based mainly on recommendations.

Theme 3: Principal practices used to identify students for gifted programs. Principal leadership practices should include establishing a clear vision for equitable placement of students. Principals use various practices at their schools to guide the placement process for students.

Theme 4: Role of K-12 principals in the placement of students in gifted programs. The role of the principal is to be the instructional leader of the school and to promote student achievement. The principal serves as the instructional leader of the school and thusly, has a role in the instructional decisions of the school, which include placement of students into gifted programs.

Theme 5: Every student should be given the opportunity to be placed in a gifted program. Some principals use their equity lens to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to be placed in gifted programs.

Theme 6: PD for K-12 school principals. Principals should participate in PD on gifted program to support the placement of all student groups.

Interpretation of the Findings

Research Question 1

School principals have a process for the placement of students into gifted programs (Theme 1), they use criteria for the placement of students (Theme 2), and

principal practices are used to identify students for gifted programs (Theme 3). Principals are responsible for assessing and monitoring students' progress, which would include having a process for the placement of students in gifted programs. Sebastian et al. (2019) reported that principals' instructional leadership practices include strong organizational management skills that allows principals to implement processes and systems. School principals have a process in place for the identification of students to be recommended for placement into gifted programs at their school. At the elementary level, principals reported that parents and teachers make recommendations for placements in gifted programs. The middle and high school levels mainly depended on the recommendations and identifications made from the elementary level. School principals said the selection process begins early at the elementary level in terms of identification and at the secondary level, a specific process is in place to make recommendations to place students in gifted classes. At each school level, the gifted committee, led by an advanced academic facilitator, collaborates to make decisions regarding the placement of students in gifted programs based on recommendations from teachers and parents. However, the process varied greatly from school to school and from level to level. Allen (2017) identified a need for increased collaboration among educators concerning gifted programs in order for a consistent process to be administered for the placement of students.

Theme 2 was that some principals follow a system of criteria to place students in gifted programs. Gifted programs can be based on policies and procedures, and tests and instruments pertaining to screening and identification of gifted students; however, such programs should be evaluated with cultural and equitable lens. P4 reported that state and

district test scores are used as criteria for the placement of students and suggested to include an equity policy as a criterion to place African American students in these programs. P1 reported that these criteria are failing students of color such as African American students because they are all scoring below 30% on state and district tests and thusly, those students are not recommended for gifted programs although other data points show that they have the potential for placement. The elementary principal participants spoke about a universal screening process that is used. However, the data analysis included that in some areas of the district, parent recommendations outweighed the universal screening process which led to overrepresentation of some student groups. Peters et al. (2019) found that a "multiple pathway" may result in an increase in student identification and placement in gifted programs. Dai (2019) argued that criteria for gifted program placement is set on an individual student basis and students are allowed to be identified through non-curriculum-based needs such as:

- Select individuals for various enrichment experiences and explorative activities.

- Select advanced learners for specialized projects (movie making, research on World War II, writing on Shakespeare, robot building, computer programming, and so forth).

- Select individuals for specialized clusters, classes, or schools.

- Identify poor or less than optimal social and educational situations for disadvantaged gifted and talented students for improvement purposes.

- Identify individual weaknesses (e.g., endogenous sources of underachievement) for intervention purposes (Dai, 2019, p. 6-7).

Theme 3 aligned to RQ1 was principal practices used to identify students for gifted programs. Principals use various practices at their schools to guide the placement process for students. P1 stated, "We meet once a quarter to identify students for gifted programs and look for ways to support these students." P5 reported that a committee makes decisions regarding the placement of students in the gifted program. According to P5, the committee consists of the English language arts chair, the administrative team, and guidance counselors. This committee meets every month to discuss which students can be placed in the gifted program. P6 reported that using a screening process regarding the placement of students in the gifted program, which includes teachers to use state test scores to screen every student at the school. Howard (2018) concluded that school principals should have leadership practices in place that allow all students to be considered for placement in gifted programs. School staff should have a clear idea of the school's mission, principles, and values when principals support teachers and students (Intxausti et al., 2016). The clear vision allows staff to know the process for student identification and for the process to be equitable. Principals' leadership practices make a difference in students' achievement, which can lead to placement in gifted programs (Windlinger et al., 2020).

Research Question 2

In alignment with the RQ2 of principal leadership behaviors, the findings revealed that principals have a role in the placement of students and should include equitable practices that give every student the opportunity to be placed in a gifted program. P1 attended every meeting regarding gifted programs and supports teachers in making recommendations to the gifted programs committee. P1 also met with students to emphasize the importance of academic achievement and the gifted programs. Both P4 and P5 reported that by working well with both teachers and students, more students could do better on state tests and be placed in gifted programs. The principal's role includes ensuring there are systems in place to promote academic achievement and the equitable practices of student placement in programs. P2 stated as the principal of the building, they are responsible for staffing and master schedule. Hiring teachers that have a mindset for student growth is crucial for the achievement of all students. The master schedule of a school drives the availability of courses students can enroll in, especially at the middle and high school levels. My findings indicated that the principal serves as the instructional leader of the school and thusly, has a role in the instructional decisions of the school, which include placement of students into gifted programs. Looking through the lens of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership model, principals are responsible for developing and promoting expectations. Morgan (2018) stated there is a relationship between school leadership and students' achievement.

Theme 5 was that every student should be given the opportunity to be placed in a gifted program. The data analysis showed that some principals use their equity lens to

ensure that all students are given the opportunity to be placed in gifted programs. According to P3, the placement in gifted programs is somewhat subjective and her perception is that equitable strategies should be used for every student to be given an opportunity to be placed in gifted programs. P4's perception is that every student should be given the opportunity to be placed in a gifted program in elementary school, which would lead to students being on the pathway for more rigorous courses in middle and high school. P5's perception is that every student should be given the opportunity to be placed in a gifted program and a principal should be working with teachers to make equitable decisions for these placements. Allen (2017) found that many students are overlooked for placement in gifted programs. Allen collected qualitative interview data from the gifted specialists and found that gifted learners are often overlooked because of language barriers. For example, "When teachers aren't able to notice gifts and talents among students, they often do not refer them for gifted evaluation, thus creating a significant barrier for these students who desperately need access to gifted programming and more challenging curricula" (Allen, 2017, p. 7). Henfield et al. (2017) explored African American students enrolled in gifted programs and concluded that there were issues with placements in gifted programs of African American students. According to Grissom et al. (2017), African American students who scored the same as other students on assessments were less likely to be placed in gifted programs. Peters et al. (2019) recommended that principals diversify their teaching staff so that there is a better chance that student groups are not overlooked. Peters et al. (2019) argued that teachers are a significant component in the gifted identification process. Therefore, a potential pathway

to better representation of diverse student groups in gifted programs is to have a teaching staff that better represents the student population (Peters et al., 2019).

Theme 6 was that school principals need PD on how to support the diverse student groups in their schools, such as African American students. According to Asiyai (2021), PD for school principals should be differentiated based on the needs of their instructional leadership to help improve their instructional leadership practices. P2 reported that PD can be helpful to K-12 school principals to learn strategies to support African American students to increase their proficiency in academic subjects and as a result to increase their state scores to meet the selection criteria to be placed in gifted programs. P4 stated that K-12 school principals can learn strategies to support African American students to increase their proficiency in state tests. According to Novak et al. (2020), schools in the United States have a long history of underrepresentation in gifted programs of certain student groups due to not having PD. Novak et al. (2020) reported that school principals and teachers lack the cultural knowledge that pertains to gifted youth and as a result, some student groups are not placed in gifted programs (Novak et al., 2020). The training and development of school principals is needed in order to recognize the needs of their teachers and staff to be culturally responsive and to meet the needs of their gifted students (Novak et al., 2020).

Limitations of the Study

I conducted this case study to understand the instructional leadership practices of K-12 school principals regarding placements of students in gifted programs. A limitation was the transferability of findings to more rural districts. According to Ravitch and Carl

(2016), transferability refers to whether the findings of a qualitative study can be applied to other contexts. The findings of this study can be transferred to other similar school districts offering gifted programs. The study was limited by a sample size of 10 K-12 school principals who agreed to participate in the study. The principals were from one large suburban school district. The participants were current principals who had at least 2 years of experience as a principal. Principals who were new principals to the district or who had retired were not included in the study.

Another limitation was the methodology of this study. I was the primary instrument for data collection. As a result, I ensured validity and addressed limitations such the interview protocol and the design of the interview questions. I used reflexivity to monitor my research biases. I assured confidentiality of the participations and conducted member checking to ask the participants to verify the accuracy of their responses to the interview questions by reviewing my interpretations in order to reduce the risk of subjective inferencing.

Recommendations

The placement of students in gifted programs in K-12 schools in the United States remains an issue (Vega et al., 2018). I researched a gap in the existing educational body of research and practice on gifted programs in determining the instructional leadership practices of K-12 principals regarding placements of students. The findings were (a) principals need a consistent process for student placement into gifted programs, (b) principals need to ensure staff follow the criteria for placing students, (c) principal leadership practices should include establishing a clear vision for equitable placement of

students, (d) the role of the principal is to be the instructional leader of the school and to promote student achievement, and (e) principals should participate in PD on gifted program placement. Recommendations for further research studies aligned with instructional leadership practices regarding placements of student in gifted programs are:

- expanding the study to include district leaders to gain additional perspectives on placement of students in gifted programs

- increasing number of participants to gain additional perspectives on instructional leadership practices regarding gifted programs

- expanding the study to include teacher perspectives on gifted programs

- duplicating the study in a smaller district or alternative district to determine if the findings would be similar to the findings in this study

Implications

The findings from my study and from the related literature indicate that principals need a process for the placements of students in gifted programs. A consistent process that uses criteria for placement may allow all students to be given the opportunity for placement in gifted programs. Peters et al. (2019) said that the inconsistency in the process for gifted placements vary from state to state and the field of gifted education needs to expand their awareness of the inequities in order to resolve the problem. School district personnel can start by having principals use a universal process or criteria that is equitable in the identification of students (Heuser et al., 2017). Using universal criteria that allow for students to be identified through "multiple pathways" may increase the identification and representation of diverse student groups (Dai, 2019).

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the principal's role includes ensuring there are systems used to place students in gifted programs. The principal's role includes establishing a clear vision for placing students in gifted programs. Tan (2018) explained that a principal's leadership can affect student outcomes and achievement. As the instructional leader of the building, school principals must establish a vision and expectation that supports the equitable placement of students in gifted programs (Al-Oweidi & Freihat, 2020). Peters et al. (2019) stated that more students would be identified and placed in gifted programs, if building norms were used for identification purposes as opposed to national norms.

Along the same lines, when building norms are consistent, it gives way for the opportunity to all student groups to be placed in gifted programs. As the research revealed, currently some student groups, such as African American students, are underrepresented in gifted programs while other students groups are overrepresented (Yaluma et al., 2021). In order to decrease the underrepresetation of certain student groups, school principals must communicate a clear vision and implement processes and criteria that is fair and equitable and promotes the placement of all students in gifted programs.

Finally, the findings indicated that PD is needed for K-12 principals in the area of supporting the placement of students in gifted programs. My study revealed that most principals wanted to support the placement of all students into gifted programs. However, principals lacked the strategies to implement processes to support the placement of diverse student groups into gifted programs. Principals can only implement this change in

their building when they have received training and PD (Hébert et al., 2020). Dai (2019)

noted that principal instructional leadership practices that are consistent are crucial for the

placement of student groups in gifted programs. The findings from my study addresses

this assertion and filled the gap in literature pertaining to the ways that principals

implement instructional leadership practices regarding placements of students in gifted

programs. The potential social change includes the findings from my study for school

principals to use to support students to be placed in gifted programs in order for these

students to graduate from high school and be college or career ready.

Conclusion

Effective principal instructional leadership practices have a great influence on

student achievement. As a part of principals developing and promoting expectations, they

set a clear vision for equitable practices in the classroom and school building which

allows all students to be given the opportunity to be placed in gifted programs. When

equitable instructional leadership practices are not in place, it gives way to over or under

representation of student groups in gifted programs. The identified strategies from the

key findings of my research study were (a) principals need a consistent process for

student placement into gifted programs, (b) principals need to ensure staff follow the

criteria for placing students, (c) principal leadership practices should include establishing

a clear vision for equitable placement of students, (d) the role of the principal is to be the

instructional leader of the school and to promote student achievement, (e) every student

should be given the opportunity to be placed in gifted programs and (f) principals should

participate in professional development on gifted program placement.

Instructional leadership practices should enforce academic standards and allow students the pathway to college and career goals. The instructional leadership practices outlined in this research study may be useful for the PD of K-12 principals and to improve the accessibility of all student groups to gifted programs. It is imperative that principals create a vision and environment that promotes high student achievement and allows for all students to be given the opportunity to be placed in gifted programs. A former, late superintendent stated to district leaders, "All means all," meaning that all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, have a right to an equal, quality education. School leaders can ensure that students are given the opportunity to achieve at their fullest potential. In the words of the late Nelson Mandela, "It is not beyond our power to create a world in which all children have access to a good education."

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Start Time: _____

End Time: _____

Interviewee Pseudonym: _____

Male ____

Female ____

Introduction

- Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

- I am interested in gaining knowledge about how K-12 school principals implement instructional leadership practices regarding placements of students in gifted programs.

- Please feel free to speak openly and state your honest opinions to the questions I will ask.

- Please ask me questions before we proceed.

Conversation Dialogue

I would like to get to know you a little more by gathering some information that may help me with my study:

1. How long have you been in your current position? _____ (years)

2. Have you placed students in gifted programs? _____(yes/no)

General Questions

1. How is placement of students in gifted programs defined in your school district?

2. What are your general feelings about placements of students in gifted programs?

3. How are African American students placed in the gifted programs?

Main Questions

1. How would you describe your role in the placements of students in gifted programs?

    Tell me more about…

    Can you give me an example?

2. What kinds of practices are in place to identify students for gifted programs?

    Tell me more about…

    Can you give me an example?

3. Who determines accurate identification of students and placement in gifted programs?

    Tell me more about…

    Can you give me an example?

4. What kinds of instructional leadership practices support the high expectations for all students?

    Tell me more about…

    Can you give me some examples?

5. What kinds of instructional leadership practices support the high level of instruction in the classrooms?

Tell me more about…

Can you give me some examples?

6. What kinds of challenges are there regarding the placements of students in gifted programs?

Tell me more about…

Can you give me some examples?

7. How do challenges influence overall placements of students in gifted programs?

Tell me more about…

Can you give me some examples?

8. What are the criteria for placements of students in gifted programs?

Tell me more about…

Can you give me some examples?

9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Additional Questions

1. Tell me how you are supervising and evaluating instruction regarding gifted programs at the school.

2. Callahan et al. (2017) examined the instructional leadership practices of K-12 school principals regarding gifted programs and stated that school principals need to ensure consistent implementation of the gifted programs for all students. Your thoughts?

3. African American students are less likely to be placed in gifted programs. Your

   thoughts?

Concluding Remarks

Thank you for taking the time to answer the interview questions. Your experiences and perceptions will help me further understand how K-12 school principals implement instructional leadership practices regarding placements of students in gifted programs.

You will have an opportunity to review my preliminary findings to make sure I convey your experiences accurately. When and how may I contact you?