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Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports to Reduce Short Term Suspensions of African American K-5 Students

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, Norfolk State University, 2018

BS, Norfolk State University, 2014

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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November 2021

Abstract

The problem investigated was the disproportionate suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia despite implementing positive behavioral interventions support (PBIS) intended to reduce this disparity. Exploring the implementation of PBIS is important because an increased understanding may lead to the development of additional supports and training that may reduce the short term suspensions of African American students. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory served as the conceptual framework. Two research questions focused on the perceptions of 9 teachers and 1 administrator on why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students. Semistructured individual interviews were conducted. Data analysis involved open coding and the use of the NVivo 12 software program. Findings revealed impediments to PBIS implementation such as (a) student behavior issues, (b) relationship building issues, (c) lack of professional development training, (d) PBIS implementation challenges, and (e) inconsistent discipline. The study recommends alternative suspension and mentoring programs for African American students. Recommendations for future research suggests inclusion of additional school districts, a larger sample size, and interviewing students who have received short term suspensions. In the context of social change, the findings from this study may assist administrators and school districts with improving PBIS implementation that has the potential to increase the educational, and social outcomes for African American students.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to myself, a dedicated woman who was determined to follow this journey, my deceased father (Gilman), a man who truly believed in me and always shared his presence as he would be the one standing at the end of the aisle waiting for me to walk past, and my deceased grandmother (Maggie), the lady who taught me that only the strong would survive, and to the person who told me I would never be anything, because of this I MADE IT!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

According to Morrison (2019), African American students are four times more likely than White students to receive a suspension from school. Green (2018) stated that in the Minneapolis, Minnesota school district, African American students were 41% of the general student population but made up 76% of the suspensions. In 2014, similar percentages across the United States led the Obama administration to draft rigid new policies to address school discipline disparities across the country (Green, 2018). As the suspensions rates for African American students increase, changes must be made to make positive changes for these students.

One of the most punitive actions for an African American student in any local elementary school is short term suspension (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). African American students in a local elementary school received a significant number of suspensions. According to the local elementary school's dashboard, the student population in 2018-2019 the enrollment of African American students in a local elementary school in Virginia was 95.9% with 96.5% of those students receiving short term suspensions. The U.S. Government Accountability Office reported that within the United States, African American students had received more suspensions than White students (Powell, 2019). Suspensions and disciplinary actions can have a negative impact on student success in numerous ways. The suspensions and disciplinary actions take students out of school, which causes a delay in their academic progress and puts them at greater risk of academic failure (Wong, 2016). As the short term suspensions continue to increase, administrators

and teachers must develop strategies to support and increase African American students' chances to succeed academically and in order to reduce short term suspensions.

A positive intervention plan used to support these students may involve positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), a multi-tiered framework that applies applied to accomplish significant behavior changes, according to the National Education Association (2020). It involves implementing and establishing evidence-based behavioral interventions into a cohesive continuum that improves academic performances and behavior results for students (National Education Association, 2020). Some additional interventions may include daily routines with clear expectations, silent signals to get the students' attention, and giving students classroom tasks to help support them when they may display negative behaviors along with giving the students a break when needed (Bennett, 2020). The need for this study was driven by the significantly higher short term suspension rates of African American students versus their White counterparts at the study site, signaling a gap in practice that was worthy of additional inquiry. In the context of social change, this study provides additional insight into PBIS implementation challenges that may help to improve how it is implemented as well as reduce the short term suspensions of African American students.

Background

Federal data with more than 32 million students at nearly 96,000 schools provided information that supported a disciplinary disparity among African American and White students (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). With the increase of disciplinary actions among African American students, there is a need to implement positive behavior interventions

to bridge the disparity in the number of suspensions that African American students receive versus their White counterparts. The school's behavior support system is important to addressing the suspension disparities; therefore, schools should continue to find ways to improve those systems to decrease the suspension rates among African American students.

According to Baule's (2020) research, PBIS is an appropriate choice to address the need for a suitable and reasonable discipline program in schools. It is grounded in behavioral support, social learning, and organizational behavioral principles that can change the school environment and student behavior positively (Pas et al., 2019). Despite the disparities among school districts, PBIS provides a positive ambitious method for student discipline as an alternative of taking a more punitive approach (Baule, 2020). Because African American students are more likely to be punished and suspended for negative behaviors (Zill & Wilcox, 2019), PBIS can be a useful intervention that may reduce negative behaviors and reduce suspensions for African American students. It was essential to understand teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the implementation of PBIS intended to address the suspension disparities. Students are more successful when schools provide an alternative discipline approach other than suspension that can reduce negative behaviors in school.

PBIS can generate a warm school climate, improve academics, and decrease negative behaviors that cause African American students to receive suspensions. Although PBIS is implemented differently at each school, the school administration and teachers should implement PBIS consistently, giving African American students a chance

to make change within the climate of the school (Newman, 2019). Schools that implement PBIS with fidelity may see growth in students' academic performances and behavior issues.

Problem Statement

The problem investigated was the disproportionate suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia despite implementing PBIS intended to reduce this disparity. PBIS is a proactive approach that can redefine the school's climate, allowing students to have a positive learning environment (Wadsworth, 2021). Students who have attendance issues because they display negative behavior causing them to receive short term suspension may benefit from the framework of implementing PBIS. The goal of PBIS is to encourage students (Wadsworth, 2021); as a result, educators have opted to use the philosophy of PBIS. This evidence-based three-tiered framework supports teachers in helping students make good decisions (as cited in Center on PBIS, 2020). The implementation of PBIS has increased the academic success for students who had behavior breakouts (Madigan, 2016), supporting the effectiveness of this intervention strategy.

According to the Virginia Department of Education (2019), in the past 3 years at a local Virginian elementary school, African Americans accounted for approximately 96% of the total student population. This school is currently implementing PBIS to reduce disruptive behaviors that lead to short term suspensions. However, according to the Virginia Department of Education (2019), in the 2016, 2017, and 2018 school years, the local site reported, of the total number of African American students enrolled, 96.6%,

96.4%, and 96.5%, respectively were suspended. These data reveal that short term suspension rates for African American students have not declined in the past 3 years. It is important to understand the reasons the PBIS have not resulted in a decrease in short term suspensions for African American students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia. To address the study problem, I used a basic qualitative method. Interviews were conducted to gain insight into teachers' and administrators' perceptions and experiences with implementing PBIS. The interviews allowed teachers and administrators to reflect on the implementation of PBIS. The participants included nine teachers and one administrator. By conducting this qualitative study, my intent was to explore why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students while also providing school leaders with information that may help to increase their understanding of how to improve the implementation of PBIS. This increased understanding may lead to the development of additional supports and training for teachers that may result in the reduction of short term suspensions of African American students.

Research Questions

RQ 1-Qualitative: What are teachers' perceptions of why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia?

RQ2-Qualitative: What are administrators' perceptions of why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory, which has been recognized for his descriptions of the impact of social environments on human development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory categorizes its framework into five levels of external effect. The levels include chronosystem, macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem (as cited in Guy-Evans, 2020). The microsystem is the smallest and consists of the child's natural environments, such as home, school, daycare, and peers. The mesosystem includes the relationships that occur between the microsystems. The exosystem refers to the external relationships that influence the child indirectly. The macrosystem is the largest and consists of the children's cultural patterns and values, precisely based on their cultural beliefs and political and economic structures. Lastly, Bronfenbrenner's chronosystem could include changes that have been made in the family structure, employment, and society changes. The ecological system theory is significant because it supports the notion that the different environments experienced through the lifespan can influence behavior. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) posited that school and family have the most significant effect on a student's life, and the more parent participation, the better the student will achieve (as cited in Firmin et al., 2019). This study was appropriately

grounded in this theory because these levels of external effect explain the connection between the student's external influences and their behavior.

In recent studies, Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory was used to understand how teachers' environment may impact their focus on the student's attention (Munroe, 2019). The focus attention included the school structure for diverse student needs, academic performances, and school requirements for the success and growth of the student, which gives teachers a reason to be concerned (Munroe, 2019). Teachers sometimes find it hard to understand other cultural backgrounds as they are not prepared for the task. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory has been used to develop positive relationships with students to support a vital part of their success (Munroe, 2019). More teachers are learning the cultural differences that are needed to make urban students successful.

In this study, I sought to understand why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia. These negative behaviors may have been influenced by the home and school environment, supporting the appropriateness of applying this theory to this study. It is essential to understand the involvement of implementing PBIS and to develop a support system to help students who continue to receive short term suspensions based on their behaviors and traumatic experiences to be successful.

Nature of the Study

This basic qualitative provided insight into the support African American students need that will decrease short term suspensions. Qualitative researchers study entities in

their natural settings attempting to make sense of or understand the phenomena in terms of the values people bring to them (McLeod, 2019). However, Hagaman and Wutich (2017) determined that 16 or fewer interviews were sufficient to recognize common themes from sites with relatively homogeneous groups. I conducted interviews with 10 participants, including nine teachers and one administrator from from the same elementary school. The participants of this study knew African American students who had received multiple short term suspensions from the school in Virginia during the 2018-2019 school year. The local site's inability to reduce short term suspensions of African American students revealed a gap in practice. The study addressed this gap by investigating the perceptions of implementing positive behavior interventions at the school. The collected data were analyzed relative to the research questions. To reduce bias, the transcription and analysis was conducted externally. I used Temi.com to transcribe the recorded data and NVivo 12 software program to identify the themes and maintain consistency. NVivo 12 software program organized and sorted words and phrases from the recorded data to developed several categories and themes.

Definitions

Positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS): An anticipated framework with three-tiered systems to promote school safety and encourage behavior with positive teaching and strategies used to prevent negative behaviors (Lee, 2020).

Short term suspensions: A short term suspension is a suspension of 10 school days or less given by the principal or assistant principal of the school (School Discipline Laws & Regulations by State & Category, 2021).

Assumptions

A local elementary school in Virginia was selected as the study site because of the location, African American student population, and the number of short term suspensions received. The following basic qualitative study included many different assumptions. The first assumption was that each participant answered each question honestly and accurately. The entire study was conducted with integrity as I asked each participant to respond precisely and give detailed information in the interview. I assumed that the administrator and teachers knew the students who had received short term suspensions. Another assumption was that the student's behavior led to their suspension. Lastly, I assumed that previous experiences and current research literature would provide enough information to understand the phenomenon

Scope and Delimitations

The setting for this study was an urban K to 5 elementary school in Virginia that had students who had received multiple short term suspensions. Although other students had received short term suspensions, African American students were identified because they had a higher rate of suspensions. The sample size for this study included one administrator and nine teachers who were employed at the local site for the 2018-2019 school year. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), to reach saturation in a qualitative study, the recommended sample size is five to 25 participants. The study participants included nine teachers and at least one administrator. The administrator and teachers provided detailed information on how they perceived the implementation of PBIS. Other qualitative methods were not considered, such as focus groups due to

restrictions resulting from the pandemic as well as time and feasibility. Conducting one-on-one semistructured interviews allowed for the collection of in-depth data with made the use of focus groups obsolete. The findings from this study may be applicable in other school districts that implement PBIS, but its implementation has not resulted in positive behavioral outcomes for students.

Limitations

This study was subject to some limitations due to potential researcher bias. Researchers must be aware of their own bias as the researcher's values and experiences could influence the research questions, design, and data collection procedures (Fleming, 2018). My personal experiences with African American students who have received multiple short term suspensions could be perceived as a bias. I did not have any affiliation with any of the administrators or teachers being interviewed to reduce this bias. The participants involved in the study answered open-ended questions to decrease the chances of being bias towards the study. There are also limitations in the use of qualitative research methods. Silverman (2010), as cited in Rahman (2016), argued that a disadvantage for qualitative research methods can be its failure to include background understandings and its concentration on values and involvements. However, in this study, I focused on teachers' and administrators' perceptions of PBIS, which deemed a qualitative research method most appropriate.

Significance

This basic qualitative study allowed teachers and administrators to explore why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African

American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia. According to McInerney and McKlindon (2015), teachers must understand who experiences trauma and how it impacts learning and behaviors. There are positive social change implications to supporting African American students who display negative behaviors by implementing positive behavior interventions. Identifying the perceived challenges that impede the reduction of short term suspensions for African American students may better position schools to improve their PBIS plans. An effective method can decrease negative impact, support critical learning, and generate a more positive school setting (McInerney & McKlindon, 2015). The findings from this study contribute to the literature that exists on implementing PBIS and provide insight to educators and administrators as to how best to implement these practices to optimize positive academic and social results.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I introduced the problem of the disproportionate suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia despite implementing PBIS intended to reduce this disparity. African American students receive short term suspensions at higher rates than their White counterparts in an urban elementary school in Virginia. Students need support that will help reduce negative behaviors that lead to short term suspensions and ultimately affect their academic success. According to Rosales (2018), students need support because students who receive short term suspensions do not better their behaviors or academic performances. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K

to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia. This study was important because African American students need support to reduce short term suspensions. The administrators and teachers must find ways to implement positive interventions to reduce negative behaviors in the classroom. According to Brown (2020), teachers and administrators may implement PBIS to encourage and support students who receive suspensions by thoughtfully implementing practices designed to help students physical learning environment, develop a positive classroom routine, and provide different teaching techniques in and out of the classroom. Chapter 1 also included background information about the short term suspensions of African American students. Chapter 2 provides a detailed review and analysis of relevant academic and professional literature to identify what scholars know about African Americans, short term suspensions, and PBIS, and what future research still needs to address.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The problem investigated was the disproportionate suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia despite implementing PBIS intended to reduce this disparity. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia. According to Blad and Mitchell (2019), schools within the United States suspended 2.7 million students out of school at least once in 2015–2016, and from the students who were suspended, African Americans made up 25%. African American boys received 8% of the school's suspensions, and African American girls received another 14% of the school's suspensions. School suspensions may be reduced by implementing preventive measures, setting school expectations, and providing innovative behavior management practices, which include PBIS (Newman, 2019). Implementing PBIS as a positive, proactive approach may help to lessen suspension rates for these students by addressing discipline and behavioral concerns.

According to Reilly (2016) data collected by the state of Virginia indicated that the student population for African American students was 76% with 93% of African American students receiving some type of disciplinary action within their school system. Leaders within the school system have been looking for ways to reduce the number of suspensions and close the disproportionate gap among African American and White students and suspensions (Hammond, 2019). Many students who receive disciplinary

action in the form of suspension have experienced trauma or traumatic events. According to McInerney and McKlindon (2015), teachers must understand who experiences trauma and why and how it impacts learning and behaviors. By identifying impediments to implementing PBIS as a means to reduce short term suspensions for African American students, it may be possible to better position schools to improve positive behavioral intervention plans. An effective plan has the potential to decrease negative impact, support critical learning, and generate a more positive school setting (McInerney & McKlindon, 2015). Recent literature has revealed that African American students receive more suspensions than White students. According to Belsha (2020), students are under a lot of pressure and need more support from the school and teachers. The literature review in this chapter provides details concerning the framework that guided this study as well as the history of implementing PBIS to support students who have experienced trauma. It also includes research on African Americans and short term suspensions, trauma, and teacher student relationships.

Literature Search Strategy

To gather relevant journal articles on African Americans and suspensions published from 2015 to 2020, I searched the following databases: Walden University, Sage Journals, ERIC, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and EBSCO. The following search terms were used to locate scholarly articles for this research: *trauma*, *teacher–student relationships*, *trauma-informed practices*, *suspension*, *behaviors*, *academics*, *positive behavioral and interventions and support*, *childhood trauma*, *trauma-informed strategies*, *failures*, *positive implementations*, *African American*, *Blacks*, *positive behaviors*,

suspensions, *trauma-informed practices*, *negative behaviors*, *African American communities*, *public schools*, and *short term suspensions*. The research identified through the searches was focused primarily on African American student suspensions, trauma, and PBIS. The Walden University database allowed me to search by topic, which gave me additional resources on African American students, trauma, and PBIS. I completed additional searches using the following terms: *Blacks*, *parents*, *teacher–parent relationship*, *student relationships*, *teacher relationships*, *White students*, *types of trauma*, *misbehave*, *support*, *bias*, *discipline*, *higher rates*, *theorist*, *strategies*, *success*, *family*, *student problems*, *children*, *out-of-school suspensions*, *poverty*, *public schools*, *motivation*, *challenges*, *proactive*, *school support*, *behavioral support*, and *youth*.

Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation

The conceptual framework for this study was Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory, which is recognized for its descriptions of the impact of social environments on human development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory categorizes its framework into five levels of external effect: chronosystem, macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem (as cited in Guy-Evans, 2020). The microsystem is the smallest level and includes the direct environments of the child, such as home, school, daycare, and peers. The mesosystem includes the relationships that occur between the microsystems. The exosystem refers to the external relationships that influence the child indirectly. The macrosystem is the largest level and includes the child's cultural patterns and values, based on the child's cultural beliefs and political and economic structures. Lastly, Bronfenbrenner's chronosystem may include changes that

have been made in the family structure, employment, and society (as cited in Guy-Evans, 2020). Ecological system theory is significant because it supports the notion that the different environments that are experienced through the lifespan can influence behavior. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994), posited that school and family have the deepest effect on a student's life, and that the more parent participation is present, the more the student will achieve (as cited in Firmin et al., 2019). This study was appropriately grounded in this theory because these levels of external effect explain the connection between a student's external influences and behavior.

As applied in recent studies, Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory has allowed teachers to understand the importance of building a positive classroom environment that helps students feel comfortable and be productive (Cowie & Khoo, 2018; Munroe, 2019). Bronfenbrenner's theory of child development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) indicates the need to recognize important characteristics in students, such as their key community relationships, and to main social contexts that contribute to their social, emotional, and physical well-being (Taylor & Gebre, 2016). Recognizing these characteristics may be useful in helping to reduce the short term suspensions of African American students. Additional areas of focus include looking at the school structure to recognize diverse student needs, academic performances, and school requirements for the success and growth of students (Munroe, 2019). When teachers are invested in meeting the developmental needs of students, students may achieve academic gains.

Characteristics and attributes of a student's individual personality, race, class, gender, educational involvement, and social background are significant factors that can

impact the structures of the ecological model (Julienne, 2019). Teachers sometimes find it hard to understand individuals of cultural backgrounds other than their own, as they are not prepared for this task. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory has been used to help increase teachers' knowledge about how to develop positive relationships with diverse students to support their success (Munroe, 2019). Increasing efforts to develop positive relationships may be of key importance in decreasing negative behaviors.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables

Historical Context of Positive Behavioral Intervention Support

PBIS emerged as a direct consequence of the disability civil rights movement because a need was recognized for enhanced selection, implementation, and documentation of operative behavioral involvements for students with behavioral conditions (Alter, 2020). This recognition led researchers from the University of Oregon to begin a series of research studies and project evaluations. In the late 1980s, PBIS emerged from two lines of work. The first and second line of work included positive behavioral support efforts not only to reduce negative behaviors but also to support positive behaviors and work that was being developed by persons who were interested in behavioral support along with work developed by others who were interested in building positive behavioral support (Horner & Stonemeier, 2017). Although initial efforts in these areas seemed promising, they did not lead to any changes, so researchers worked together to develop a better design to support classroom management (Horner & Stonemeier, 2017). The two lines of work guided Horner's development of PBIS (Horner & Stonemeier, 2017).

In the late 1990s, Horner developed effective behavior support, which is now called PBIS. Horner outlined a three-tiered system to support students' behaviors and academic performance (Horner & Stonemeier, 2017). The three tiers within PBIS are (a) primary prevention, referred to as worldwide supports, or Tier I; (b) secondary prevention, referred to as Tier II; and (c) intensive supports, referred to as Tier III (Reno et al., 2017). The U.S. Department of Education referenced the term PBIS in 1996 (as cited in Sugai & Horner, 2020). Sugai and Horner (2020) stated that in 2009, this three-tiered behavioral intervention model had been applied in more than 9,000 schools in at least 44 states across the United States.

In the late 1990s, as part of the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, a grant was approved to create a national center for PBIS, which would offer procedural assistance to schools on evidence-based practices for providing supports for students with behavioral disorders (Alter, 2020). PBIS has been supporting students with behavioral concerns and schools for many years. The U.S. Congress revised the IDEA in 1997 and 2004 to support students with both developmental and emotional difficulties, as the legislation orders schools to use supported techniques to help students with social and academic behaviors (Alter, 2020). The provision of behavioral and academic supports for students can help to deliver positive outcomes.

PBIS is a proactive approach used to improve and promote positive behaviors (Lee, 2020). The proactive approach of PBIS establishes the behavioral support and social culture needed for students in school to improve behaviors and achieve social,

emotional, and academic success (King, 2019). Improving social, emotional, and academic success in school causes students to feel better about themselves and have trustworthy relationships with their teachers (King, 2019). This general approach will also connect the family and community environments to develop strong humble relationships to understand and build on the student's experiences and to reinforce any characteristics of the developmental system where there are challenges to the student's well-being (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). This can help to reduce the presence of negative behaviors. Behavior problems such as anger, noncompliance, intimidations, taunts, theft, social withdrawal, disconnection, and property destruction are barriers to a positive learning environment (Horner & Macaya, 2018). However, many teachers have applauded the choice to use PBIS to address the need for a more reasonable and justifiable discipline program in schools (Baule, 2020).

All students have the right to free and appropriate public education in a safe, supportive, and comprehensive school (Bal, 2018). In most states, local PBIS interactions are recognized to serve as a liaison between districts and schools within their state, and researchers have observed the effects of implementing Tier I PBIS and have found that these practices functionally connected to significant reductions in problem behavior and improvement in social skills (Sugai & Horner. 2020). As a result, schools have reduced negative behaviors and have increased student outcomes.

PBIS is establishing current capability and future growth potential to reach a level of scale that will make a difference in students' academic and behavioral success (Barrett et al., 2020). Today, almost one-fifth of all the schools in the country have some sort of

PBIS in place that focuses on positive functions of academic and behavior goals (Barrett et al., 2020). PBIS is a needed intervention for struggling students. PBIS offers many techniques and strategies for schools to help create a learning environment that is positive, productive, and helpful (Brown, 2020). Effective teachers establish procedures and expectations that decrease wasteful downtime and maximize engaging learning opportunities (Meador, 2019). When implemented correctly, PBIS supports a more positive school climate, safer learning environments, and more trusting and polite student-teacher relationships (Rodriguez, 2020). Fewer classroom disruptions and wasted instructional time will allow students to learn and behave properly.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports Implementation

PBIS is proactive behavioral support that schools use to support all students (Wadsworth, 2021). PBIS seeks to support students with academic and behavioral issues. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) highlighted that educators have exclusive opportunities to propose early intervention, quality instruction, and data-driven decisions for all students (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). According to Paul (2018), the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (ESEA) under George W. Bush known as The No Child Left Behind was reauthorized under Barack Obama on December 10, 2015, which is now known as Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA). The purpose of implementing these supports was to assist with increasing student chances to exhibit positive behavior and achieve academic success. According to Weinstein (2019), more than half of teachers would like to spend less time disciplining students throughout the day because the time spent disciplining student's takes away from the support that

students need to help them learn and succeed. When teachers spend less time on discipline, students have a better chance of learning and succeeding in the classroom.

Students achieve better academically and exhibit less problematic behavior in school settings where there are clear expectations and where they feel associated and cared for (Mallory et al., 2018). Most students want to feel protected and a part of their current environment. It is expected that when implementing PBIS, it should replicate the values and cultural profile of the community (Mallory et al., 2018). It is also expected that those team members involved in the PBIS process should implement and accompany the values and cultures of the students involved.

PBIS is supported by the three-tiered intervention plans. PBIS is a three-tiered system of supports to increase the daily lifestyle of students by reducing the efficiency of challenging behavior and making desired behavior more functional in the classroom and nonclassroom setting (Whitley, 2018). The three tiers are implemented to increase positive success for all students, with additional support for the students who exhibit stronger behavior problems. In Tier I, all students in the building are taught a set of three to five worldwide behavioral expectations and are openly recognized for meeting those expectations, Tier II is targeted at small groups of students displaying similar problems, whereas Tier III is highly personalized and reserved for students with long-lasting and strong behavioral issues (Bruhn et al., 2017).

Universal Prevention (Tier I)

Tier I, or universal prevention, is implemented with all students in a classroom and is deemed as the least serious and most effective (Stanton-Chapman et al., 2016).

Tier I is a positive benefit for all students that may embrace the understanding that students need to be successful in the classroom. Tier I prevention usually includes the features like cautious planning of the classroom environment, schedule, and materials; teaching students about procedures and plans; rules that stipulate predictable behavior across school settings; and the development of approachable and positive relationships with students, such as admiring students for likable behavior (Stanton-Chapman et al., 2016). Providing students with the proper guidance and clear expectations may help reduce negative behaviors. Planning at the Tier I level may include (a) the progress of a behavioral support team and plans for staff professional development; (b) techniques for collecting, monitoring, assessing, using, and recording behavioral data; (c) reliable anticipations and significances and a plan for supporting suitable behavior and discouraging unfitting behavior; and (d) measures to guarantee all staff implement PBIS components with fidelity (Gagnon et al., 2018).

Targeted Prevention (Tier II)

Tier II practices and systems offer targeted support for students who may need additional and specific behavioral support to be productive in the classroom (King, 2019). Students that have been supported with Tier I and lack success usually need additional support. Tier II intervention uses planned teaching strategies to promote student's abilities in detailed social and emotional skills such as emotional learning, anger and impulse control, interactive problem solving, initiating and preserving relations, and relationship skills (Stanton-Chapman et al., 2016). These students usually exhibit similar behaviors may benefit from similar supports. Tier II interventions include certain

ingredients that must be present to accomplish positive behavior modification and teachers must be mindful of the active ingredients that must be in place to make a specific Tier II intervention operational (Cook, 2020). Tier II is predestined to offer a limited but targeted support system for students who struggle to meet grade-level performance standards and the goal of Tier II is to remediate academic skill discrepancies with the impression that in doing so students will be successful in the Tier I program without support (Johnson, 2020). By implementing PBIS in the school community it helps to identify students who require a higher level of intervention and may benefit from support at the Tier II level.

Intensive, Individualized Prevention (Tier III)

When a student requires Tier III behavioral supports this is typically decided in a Response to Intervention or Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting focused on the student's behavior (King, 2019). The IEP meeting is the foundation for a student's education and the parent and teacher are significant members of the team that develops it (Redhorn, 2017). Tier III is at the top of the pyramid and designed for students with serious and chronic needs that will need support from internal and possible external individualized service specialists, such as the school counselor, psychologist, behavioral specialist, and/or instructional specialist (Park, et al., 2020). This also includes students with modest intellectual disabilities because they tend to exhibit challenging behavior such as displaying inappropriate behaviors such as aggression, self-injury, and stereotypy, signifying an incapability to achieve appropriate social behaviors at the

appropriate time, and lacking the skills to form and uphold associations with other peers (Boden et al., 2018).

PBIS is a school-wide discipline system for generating positive school environments for all students in a school to help accomplish community, emotional, and academic success through the use of hands-on approaches that define show, and support suitable behaviors (Orr, 2017). PBIS sets clear expectations for students to assist them with ongoing behavioral support (Lowe, 2019). This proactive method is put in place to help create behavioral supports that school culture requires for all students in a school to accomplish social, emotional, and academic achievement (King, 2019). Social and emotional learning is the process through which students comprehend and manage emotions, set and accomplish positive goals, feel and display empathy for others, establish and uphold positive relationships, and make accountable decisions (Tate, 2019). SEL teaches students how to handle situations while displaying positive goals. SEL has five core competencies that help students become successful. The competencies include the development of emerging self-awareness, self-control, and relational skills that are vigorous for school, work, and life success (Tate, 2019). This development is a guide for student's everyday living whether they are at school or work. SEL is described as the development through which students and teachers obtain and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show understanding for others, create and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Bennett, 2020). When we think about SEL, we talk about how social-emotional competencies highlighting your

capability to learn and your ability to teach (Tate, 2019). Students need SEL to endlessly develop and devote the positive energy that is needed to support the people around them.

PBIS concentrates on an inclusive system of positive behavior provisions for all students in a school and is applied in all zones of the school, including classroom and non-classroom locations (Whitley, 2018). The principle of PBIS addresses students' inclusive needs through the joint accountability of students, families, schools, and communities to safeguards the health, safety, involvement, support, and challenges that students need (George, 2015). The specific goal of PBIS is to exchange the use of irritable, disciplinary, and exclusionary consequences of suspension actions with proactive, preventative, and educative procedures that will reduce the need for disciplinary actions by using the three-tier systems (Doucet & Eaglin, 2018). PBIS is a proactive tiered system of support that improves everyday lifestyle by reducing the helpfulness of thought-provoking behavior, improving school safety, encouraging confident behaviors, and making wanted behavior more purposeful by paying more attention to the preventions for students instead of punishments (Lee, 2020). Developed as a multi-tiered framework to teach positive social and cognitive behaviors, PBIS offers strategies for students to participate in the classroom by setting behavioral expectations, and clear consequences (Rodriguez, 2018). The tiered system of support for PBIS is the ideal plan that schools need to reduce negative behavior and increase academics success.

A learning environment should be flexible enough to support several classroom activities, provide stress-free movement for the teacher and students, keep materials in a neat and organized manner, and offer supportive resources to students (Brown, 2020).

Research shows that PBIS help generates a positive school climate which is a safe and supportive learning setting that promotes student achievement (King, 2019). The value of a school's social setting has a thoughtful impact on student outcomes such as academic performance, attendance, behavior, and even education achievement rates and by concentrating on PBIS, teachers generate a setting that supports all students reach significant behavior changes (Rodriguez, 2018). Establishing a warm and welcoming learning environment for the school setting is appropriate for students' and teacher's success.

The PBIS framework is grounded in four major elements: Outcomes, Practices, Data, and Systems (Fuglei, 2020). The outcomes from PBIS are what schools accomplish through the data, systems, and practices they put in place with the families, students, and school staff, according to Getting Started. Students achieve their goals through their interventions and strategies that are evidence-based practices such as respectful redirection, using a calm tone with clear and detailed words (Lee, 2020). Schools recognize the goal outcomes of their students, families, and educators and then look for ways to support change evidence-based practices that help influence those goals (Fuglei, 2020). When PBIS is fully implemented, the requirements of students with multifaceted emotional and behavioral difficulties are addressed through student-centered integrated interventions that include community stakeholders, family members, and school staff (Judge, 2020). PBIS offers schools with procedures to use data and formability for refining student behaviors and student learning. Over 25,000 schools across the United States have accepted the universal fundamentals of PBIS, which aims to improve student

social ability and learning through enhanced data collection and use systems to increase school operational and the implementation of evidence-based practices (Pas et al., 2019). Schools that implement PBIS can have a better chance at improving the academic and behavioral success of students.

As a result of the improved responsibility for student academic achievement and positive behavior resulting from legislation such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act known as the Every Student Succeed Act of 1965 (ESSA) (Paul, 2018) and (NCLB, 2002), many school districts and administrators are implementing school-wide prevention behavioral support in a determination to encourage a positive school culture and to reduce discipline problems (Reno et al., 2017). The No Child Left Behind Act known as (ESSA) gives students the ability to grow and improve academically. Yet despite legislation and student behavior management models, when African American students and students from poverty experiences enter school, they are challenged with cultural incoherence due to the lack of congruency among their home cultures and the school culture, including standards, behaviors, and expectations which contribute to underachievement (Reno et al., 2017). African American students face more difficulties because of their culture, as teachers should receive training to learn techniques to deal with these types of students.

Trauma

Trauma is an emotional reaction to a negative experience (Bayes-Fleming et al., 2020). Trauma can cause stress reactions in students including feelings of strong fear, terror, and helplessness (Sacks & Murphey, 2018). Trauma usually occurs during

childhood for students who experience growing up without a parent, violence, neglect, or a parent with mental illness (Bayes-Fleming et al., 2020). Most people react to traumatic events in different ways and frequently there are no visible signs, but people may have stern emotional responses that may affect them differently from others (Cafasso, 2017). A survey performed by the World Health Organization (WHO) revealed that almost a third of more than 125,000 persons surveyed in 26 different countries had experienced trauma (Onderko, 2020). Traumatic events can make you feel powerless and those students need to eat, sleep, and exercise daily to help gain a sense of control over their lives (Pagán, 2018). Trauma can be identified as any substantial negative event or incident that molded us and can develop from any impactful occurrence (Firestone, 2020). According to the Mental Health Resources for the Black Community 2020, although any student can develop a mental health problem, African Americans occasionally experience more severe forms of mental health situations due to unmet needs and other obstacles. Students need to be taught how to cope with their traumatic issues in a healthier way.

Complex Trauma

The term complex trauma refers to multiple traumatic events frequently of an aggressive or prolonged event over a period of time where the events are severe and persistent such as childhood neglect and domestic abuse (Leonard, 2018). This trauma is usually developed in the student's early years and may add to the problems that students develop. Complex trauma occurs consistently such as repeated events which may result in symptoms that are regularly identified as attention-deficit hyperactivity

(ADHD), depression, and anxiety (Stines, 2017), from and after the student experienced a traumatic event (Leonard, 2018). These symptoms are serious and should not be taken lightly because they can make a difference in the upbringing of the student. Students that have experienced complex trauma may have a hard time thinking, learning, and concentrating along with a difficult time with impulse control, control of emotions, and relationships with other students (Pearson, 2019). These complex issues may affect the student's ability to focus as well as prevent them from producing positive emotions.

Students who have experienced complex trauma may develop Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a severe and possibly devastating condition that can occur in students who have experienced or observed a natural disaster, severe accident, terrorist incident, unexpected death of a loved one, fighting, forceful personal assault such as rape, or other life-threatening events (Ehmke, 2019). There are more the 8 million people living with PTSD (Gansl, 2021). Approximately 3% and 15% of girls and 1% to 6% of boys develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following a traumatic occasion (Morin, 2020). After a traumatic experience, it is normal to feel scared, unhappy, nervous, and separated, but if these emotions are consistent and do not subside the student may be suffering from PTSD (Smith et al., 2020). Addressing mental health in the African American community research states that African Americans are 20% more likely to experience severe mental health difficulties than the overall population such as depressive or anxiety disorder (Vance, 2019). This supports the notion that African American children may require additional trauma-related support within the school setting.

Trauma-Informed Practices and PBIS

PBIS interventions offer schools trauma-informed practices that holistically support students that may have behavior issues (Newman, 2019). Encouraging trauma-sensitive school methods have the potential to impact all students (Eilers, 2020). Trauma-informed practices require administrative buy-in and support, trauma-sensitive classroom practices, positive and uplifting replies to behavior, policy and procedure changes, teacher and staff professional development, and strong cross-system teamwork amongst school staff to improve student academics and behaviors (Thomas et al., 2019). These trauma-informed techniques allow students and teachers to be proactive and supportive of one another in the classroom. Schools that train teachers and staff in trauma-informed practices are proficient enough to screen students for signs of trauma and recognize weaknesses to learning before they lead to school failures is a benefit for African American students (Warner, 2017). Teachers and staff that receive proper training can be supportive of students that are struggling with behavioral and academic success.

Trauma-informed practices can help build coping skills and self-efficacy for students. The strategies help aid all students because teachers may not know which student is experiencing some type of trauma (Venet, 2017). This approach in the classroom aims to implement strategies that benefit students with trauma pasts, teachers, and the larger school community as a whole (Cevasco et al., 2019). Trauma-informed practices lead to lesser suspensions, improved behaviors, and better academics (Eilers, 2020). Trauma-informed practices also reflect that the approach to learning is a universal

design that is suitable for African American students regardless of psychosocial stressors or cognitive strengths (Berradi & Morton, 2019). African American students can benefit from trauma-informed practices to be successful in their academic and behavioral achievements.

African Americans and Trauma

According to the National Household Education Survey (NHES) revealed that 72% of African American students will not reside with their biological parents compared to 37% of white students and 26% of Asian students (Zill, 2019). According to Smith, (2017) research stated that students who grow up without a father are five times more likely to be raised in low-income families, participate in a crime, and are nine times more likely to dismiss themselves from schools and 20 times more likely to go to jail. The dismantling of these family structures, cause African American students to have conduct and discipline problems (Zill, 2019) and the negative behaviors tend to manifest themselves in school settings. Many students display signs of trauma through an array of emotions such as showing sadness and anger, but the reaction of traumatic experiences can manifest in many different ways that can affect the student's ability to function in school which include being disruptive or lack of interest in school activities, family relationship (altercations with other family members), nightmares, negative talk, and lack of sleep and uncontrollable eating habits (Cowan & Brock, 2018). The effects and signs of trauma can vary from student to student and may sometimes depend on the individual. Signs that a student has been traumatized can vary from distinctive indications of post-traumatic stress disorder to an unclear sense that a person's feelings of fear or anger seem

overstated (Hilton, 2016). Teachers do not need to know the type of trauma that a student has experienced, but they should be aware of the signs including students that may distance or never feel good about themselves. When teaching trauma-affected students, teachers should be mindful of the impacts of childhood trauma on learning and the impacts on themselves as professionals working within trauma-affected schools (Brunzell et al., 2018). Many students will attend school with the best of intentions, hoping to make friends, feel connected to their teachers, and succeed in their academics, but many of them become defiant, demanding, and disengaged, and unable to learn and build friendships due to previous traumatic situations (Waters & Brunzell, 2018). The impact of traumatic issues can have a negative effect on students that want to excel by getting along with other students and improve with their academics.

Due to the traumatic experiences, African American boys will depend on the fight, flight, or freeze method (El-Mekki, 2018). Morsey & Rothstein (2019) stated that trauma was a cycle for young African Americans in communities where violence is high and they can obtain post-traumatic stress disorder from witnessing or experienced events. These traumatic events can hurt, harm, and determine how an African American male may respond negatively to the situations in or outside of the classroom. When African American boys that have experienced trauma allow the pain and sorrow to develop into behavior issues too often they are encountered with firmness, insensitivity, and disciplinary actions that affect their academic success (El-Mekki, 2018). African American boys face exclusive and systemic challenges that undesirably disturb their own lives as well as the lives of their families and communities (Lebron et al., 2015). These

challenges include negative behaviors and lack of academic success. These challenges require immediate attention and can be maintained using policy changes in the schools to help stop African American boys from repeating grades or dropping out, improving their educational journey, and reducing their criminal justice contacts (Lebron et al., 2015). When African American girls face complexities of trauma, they can sometimes become resilient or misbehave in school (Francois, 2017). Many of these African American girls that misbehave in school will fight or be disruptive in the class while the resilient ones will try and block out the past. African American girls that experience trauma tends to show signs of guilt, shame, helplessness, and present anger (Francois, 2017). African American girls that get distracted in school sometimes have a hard time getting back on track as there are approximately 48% of African American girls who are barred from school in the United States do not receive continued educational services (Warner, 2017). The African American girls that lack getting back on track usually do not succeed and have a productive future. Severe disciplinary guidelines are recognized as a risk factor for dropping out of high school, an incident that may cause students to receive low-wage work, unemployment, and even incarceration (Warner, 2017).

African American youth are three times more likely than White youth to be abused, neglected, or robbed placing them at high risk for complex trauma of poverty, being placed in foster care, and being exposed to domestic violence (Pearson, 2019). The Journal of Epidemiology reported that African American children have doubled the rates of having anxiety, depression, and behavior problems in comparison to white students (Dahlsgaard, 2018). African American students that grow up in poverty can develop

unwanted behavior compared to White students. Embedded and prevalent racial discipline disparities in public schools have come under increasing examination partly in response to amplified national consideration highlighting the unfair and disciplinary treatment of African American students (Gregory et al., 2018). African American students have experienced unfair treatment from disciplinary actions throughout their time in public schools.

Childhood Trauma, Academics, and Behaviors

Childhood trauma includes an unbalanced or dangerous environment; separation from a parent; sexual, physical, emotional, and verbal abuse; sensitive and physical neglect and domestic violence (Suri, 2020). More than half of students have described experiences related to violence or abuse, and by the age of 16, more than two-thirds will have experienced a hypothetically disturbing incident. These incidents can impact a student's mental abilities and delay their development, which delays their academic achievement (Eilers, 2020). Negative outside events or sequences of events can affect a child's coping skills (McInerney & McKlindon, 2015). The sequence of events can range from divorce, the loss of a parent, moving from place to place, or no contact with the biological parents (Pedro-Carroll, 2020). Experiencing traumatic events can influence a young person's brain functions, impacting learning, and cause behavioral problems (Gunn, 2020). These traumatic events can have a negative impact causing students to exhibit negative behaviors ultimately affecting their success. Taking actions to improve academic performance and other issues starts with improving the behavior of students in the classroom (Bohanan et al., 2020). The biggest development and significant progress

in improving the quality of student's education depend on confronting our deepest
educational challenge (Dussault, 2019).

Short Term Suspensions

Short term suspension has been on a rise for African American students. One-third of U.S. students have been suspended during their Kto5 years in school and research acknowledged that a change needs to be made (Krisch, 2019). At a local school in Virginia, African American students represented 60% of the student population but 86% of school suspensions (Gregory, 2019). Students should not be set back in their education for something as minor as chewing gum or talking in the class said Angela McNair Turner, staff attorney at Public Counsel (Agrawal, 2019). However, defiance can range from eating in class to cursing at school representatives and teachers (Jones, 2019). As reported by the Public Policy Research Institute and the Council of State Government's Justice Center students that receive suspensions will eventually fall behind in their academics (Jones, 2019). Despite the huge body of work demonstrating the harmful effects of school suspension, there are prominent gaps in the research regarding predictors of this form of discipline in early elementary school and mostly in how these predictors may vary by gender (Yang et al., 2018). It is difficult to reduce school suspensions without understanding factors that contribute to the behaviors that lead to this form of disciplinary action.

Using federal data analysis of over 32 million students at nearly 96,000 schools across the country research reveals that the disciplinary disparity between African American and white students the disciplinary actions are connected with county-level

rates of cultural unfairness (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). Over a period of 18 years' African American student suspensions increased by more than 30% as compared to White students and there is little research that explains why African American students receive multiple suspensions (Davis, 2017). African American students in public schools are labeled as disruptive, impolite, and overwhelming with expected suspensions (Shaw, 2015). This perception cannot be ignored however, there is not enough research on the experiences of individual students that received suspensions (Mendez, 2017).

According to Hatter (2018), there is an overrepresentation of African American students who are suspended from school because of zero-tolerance rules. This trend is prevalent in many states across the country. During the 2017-18 school years approximately 14% of Norfolk students received a short-term out-of-school suspension (Gregory et al., 2018). In addition, African American students make up 25% of student enrollment in a North Carolina public school with 55.2% of short-term suspensions, however, 47.3% of students enrolled are white and only 25.8% received short-term suspensions (Childress, 2020). The suspension rates for African American students seem to be high because of the increased rates compared to white students.

African Americans and Suspensions

There is an achievement gap that is recognized between African American and White students (Kremer et al., 2016). Educators need to support and make changes to help African American students become successful adults in regards to their educational gap and disparities. School performances hinder future opportunities of many African Americans students because there is a gap in their educational achievements (Bowman et

al., 2018). African American students continue to be omitted from school through suspension and expulsion at much higher rates than White students (Kremer et al., 2016). The Government Accountability Office (GAO) revealed that African American students are expected to get in trouble and receive suspension compared to White students (Zill, 2019). A General Accountability Office report established that African American students made up 15% of students in public schools but accounted for 39% of suspensions (Hinnefeld, 2018). Many teachers agree that a suspension is a poor approach to school discipline (Layton, 2017). To decrease the number and rate of African American children being suspended in schools, officials, teachers, civic leaders, and parents must go above and beyond to improve the school climate and find ways to strengthen and stabilize African American families (Zill, 2019). According to the data collected by the state and school division in 2018, 70% of African American students of the 6,000 Newport News Schools students received some form of disciplinary action (Hammond, 2019). There have to be positive interventions implemented that are designed to address the needs of African American students to minimize disciplinary actions.

Angela Ciolfi, an author of the school suspension report in Virginia and legal director of the Just Children Program stated that most schools issue short term suspensions for simple infractions causing these students to receive academic failures (Balingit, 2016). Balingit presented that Virginia schools issued more than 126,000 school suspensions to more than 70,000 students in the 2014-2015 school year with 12.4% of the students being African American in comparison to 3.4% being white students. In the school year of 2018-19 in Albermarle County, the African American

student population was 11% with 27% of the suspensions (Knott, 2019). Research

showed that in 132 Southern school districts African American student suspension rates

were five times higher than the representation in the student population, in 84 districts

African Americans were 100% of students suspended from public schools, in 346

districts 75%, 743 districts 50% and in Mississippi school districts 74% (Smith & Harper,

2015). Students of African American decedent are known for receiving higher suspension

rates compared to any other culture.

In a multilevel study of approximately 7,000 students in 381 classrooms in 21

elementary schools, African American students were found to have excessively higher

disciplinary recommendations compared with White students even after supervisory for

teacher-rated behavioral difficulties, teacher culture, and other classroom influences

(Huang, 2018). To bridge the gap, it may be necessary to have a diverse staff that's

trained to support African American students with unique experiences. School

suspensions are frequently used and are a form of discipline that forbids a student from

entering school grounds or participating in school activities for one or more days as a

consequence of a disciplinary infraction (Huang, 2018). These suspensions cause students

to lose instructional time affecting their academic performance. Although suspensions are

proposed to discourage future occurrences and create a safer learning atmosphere for all

students the efficiency is unclear (Cholewa et al., 2018). Huang (2018) asserted that the

use of school disciplinary practices such as school suspensions have revealed that

students who receive a school suspension on average have a higher probability of

dropping out of school, failing their current grade, or becoming involved with the justice

system. Teachers need alternate discipline strategies that meet the needs of African American students that can help reduce school dropouts, failures, and falling into the system of law.

Teacher and Student Relationships

Positive teacher-student relationships provide students with the desire to learn because they build trust in the teacher causing them to be more engaged, have better days in class, and look to improve their academics (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2021). Students spend approximately 1,000 hours with their teacher each school year and that is enough time for them to build positive relationships that could provide them with a lifetime of learning (Sparks, 2020). The most powerful weapon accessible to teachers who want to foster a favorable learning climate is a positive relationship with students (Boynton & Boynton, 2020). Research states that students who have close positive and supportive relationships with their teacher's academic success will increase compared to the students who lack those relationships (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2021). Teachers' relationships is the foundation in students success and therefore, teachers can set the atmosphere in their classrooms (Gonzalez, 2016). The physical atmosphere of the classroom can help reduce behavior problems as well as encourage and improve learning performances (Cox, 2020). If teachers build a positive relationship with their students and have high expectations more than likely the teacher's classroom will become a positive environment with students that are willing to learn (Farmer, 2018). Research has found that a positive school climate increases academic achievement and lessens the negative effects of poverty on achievement and improving grades (Darling-Hammond & Cook-

Harvey, 2018). When students are in a productive environment they are capable of achieving academic success.

Teachers can build positive relationships with students by simply listening and responding (Woodard, 2019a). Teachers who display a welcoming relationship with their students tend to improve a positive sense of community in the classroom, as well as to encourage teamwork among students by supporting their sharing of skills and ideas with other students (Longobardi et al., 2016). Teacher and student relationships build resilience when the student knows that the teacher cares about them and they are safe (Venet, 2017). Building a supportive learning environment gives students a more comfortable feeling when they are in the classroom.

Teachers have the power to have a positive impact on student's achievements. When a student feels a sense of belonging in the classroom, their participation increases and they perform better academically (Vargas, 2017). Also, students that experience positive relationships among their teachers seem to find interest in other school activities and are inspired and willing to achieve (Longobardi et al., 2016). The confidence that students develop through their relationships with teachers allows them to be independent learners and achieve academic success (Sheasley, 2019). Student's emotional support is vital for their development and school success (Longobardi et al., 2016). Creating a learning environment and praising students for making great success is an increasing sense of self-efficacy that promotes academic achievement (Lynch, 2019). Achievement goals and emotions are critical elements of students' learning processes and have an

impact on academic success (Lüftenegger et al., 2016). There is a positive connection between great success and student achievement goals.

Although it can appear challenging, teachers play a big part in nurturing student's sense of belonging and supporting their academic and learning performances (Pedler, 2019). Teachers agree that what students experience at home will impact their ability to learn (Chen, 2019). The quality of teacher support makes students feel good about school and learning (Tucker & Stronge, 2021). Teachers can achieve astonishing achievements when the proper strategies are implemented to improve the behavior in the classroom (Bohanan et al., 2020). There are many reasons why students need academic and behavioral supports. Classroom emotional support for students reflects the overall level of care, respect, and compassion that symbolizes the teacher-student relationship in the classroom, as well as the expressive tone and efficiency of the teacher's behavior approaches toward the student (Lee & Bierman, 2015). The teacher-student relationship is a supportive connection that clears the path that will allow students to reach their full potential academically, socially, and emotionally.

Summary and Conclusions

Chapter 2 included a comprehensive research of literature search strategy, conceptual framework, and literature reviews that support elementary student's behavior and academic problems. The conceptual framework includes Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory, which supports the impact of social environments on human development for students. The focus of Chapter 2 provides detailed information on previous literature research of students and the support of PBIS. PBIS is a framework or

method for providing proactive support for students behavioral and social-emotional learning that launch clear expectation for the student to inspire them to follow certain behavioral policies and procedures (Garbacz et al., 2016). Participants in this qualitative study answered the interview questions by sharing their personal experiences with students, PBIS, and short term suspension in a local elementary school in Virginia. Chapter 3 offered the foundation needed to begin the inclusive process of gathering and analyzing data from an administrator and teachers that have experience working with students in an elementary school.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia. African American students in the United States receive disciplinary action at much higher rates than their White peers (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). An analysis of student development highlighted outcomes that when students interrupt class, the school can disturb that student's educational rights, causing problems for their entire life (Kamenetz, 2018). According to Green (2018), in 2017, districtwide, African American students were 41% of the general student population but made up 76% of the suspensions, and such statistics provoked the Obama administration in 2014 to draft strong new policies to try to address racial inequalities in school discipline across the country.

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology used to explore the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the implementation of PBIS used to attempt to reduce short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia. There is a detailed description of the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, and methodology. The methodology section includes a description of the participant selection, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and data analysis plan. Chapter 3 also provides guidelines on the issues of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

This basic qualitative study provided insight into the implementation of PBIS. Qualitative research approaches are a key element of field epidemiologic investigations because they can offer understanding of the observations, standards, opinions, and community customs where investigations are being conducted (Wolff et al., 2018). Qualitative research can support researchers to access the thoughts and feelings of research participants, which can assist the development of an understanding of the meaning that people assign to their experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Therefore, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate to allow the participants involved to provide a clear understanding of the support needed to help reduce short term suspensions of African American students.

Quantitative or mixed-methods research was not an appropriate option because the two approaches differ in design from the qualitative approach and did not align with the research questions involved in the study. The quantitative method, which has its origin in the scientific method, depends on statistical measures for data analysis, whereas a mixed-methods approach has recently emerged, which combines quantitative and qualitative methods into a new methodology (Gunnell, 2016). However, in this qualitative study, I explored the perceptions that influence the proper implementation of PBIS while providing useful information to the elementary school leaders that may improve their understanding of the implementation of PBIS that may decrease the short term suspensions of African American students and lead to the development of resources that support proper implementation. A basic qualitative study design was chosen to

explore the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of implementing PBIS that

attempted to reduce short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to

5 in an elementary school in Virginia. Qualitative research is the act of collecting data,

and, therefore, is recommended because it is used to expand an understanding of

fundamental reasons and opinions that has an approach to solve a problem or make and

affect change (Gough, 2021). Qualitative research is used to increase knowledge when

the participants involved express their opinions, motives, and thoughts about the study.

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory, which focuses on the impact of

social environments on human development, was the basis for this study.

The following research questions were developed to increase understanding of the

implementation of PBIS to decrease short term suspensions of African American

students:

RQ1-Qualitative: What are teachers' perceptions of why implementing PBIS was

not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in

Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia?

RQ2-Qualitative: What are administrators' perceptions of why implementing

PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American

students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia?

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher includes the stages of interview investigations,

thematizing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting (Brinkmann

& Kvale, 2018). During the interviews, I did not share my personal feelings with the

participants. As a researcher, I nurtured a trust-filled atmosphere, which is the key to getting participants to be forthcoming with information. According to Anderson and Gibson (2020), providing a moment of social discussion helps to develop a relationship before the interviewer asks more complicated questions. The participants in the research study were from an elementary school in Virginia. I had no personal or professional relations with any of the teachers or the administrator from the elementary school, so there were no conflicts of interest. Because there were no prior relations, there was little chance of demonstrating the *unhelpfulness effect*, which is defined as the propensity to reply more powerfully to negative actions and emotions than to those that are positive (Tierney & Baumeister, 2020).

Methodology

A basic qualitative approach was chosen for this study because it was appropriate for exploring the perceptions of teachers and administrators on the implementation of PBIS. The rates of African American students who receive short term suspensions were high at the local study site. The qualitative approach and the use of interviews for data collection provided in-depth information that helped to gain an increased understanding.

Participant Selection

Population

The population for this study was K to 5 elementary school teachers and an administrator who was responsible for the implementation of PBIS at the local site. The local site was an elementary school located in an urban school district that comprises 34 elementary schools. This population was appropriate to describe their experiences and

perceptions at the local site of the implementation of PBIS to reduce short term suspensions of African American students at an elementary school in Virginia.

Setting

The elementary school where I conducted this study had a population of approximately 614 students, ranging in age from 4 to 12 years old. The majority of the student population was African American, and the other cultures consisted of White, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, Multiple Races, and Native Hawaiian. At the time of this study, 48 teachers were employed at the local site. The educational attainment of teachers was that 28% had bachelor's degrees and 62% had master's degrees. The student–teacher ratio was 14:1. The school had two administrators: a principal and an assistant principal. The principal held a doctorate degree, and the assistant principal held a master's degree. Interviews were conducted with teachers who had been employed at the local site for at least 5 years. The goal was to interview a minimum of seven to 10 participants who were employed with the local site who had experience with implementing PBIS during the years of 2015 to 2020.

Sampling Strategy

I used purposeful sampling methods to select participants for this study. Purposeful sampling is a nonprobability sampling in which participants are selected based on the characteristics of a population and the objective of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). This sampling method relied on choosing information-rich cases for in-depth study, which are individuals from whom one can acquire a great impact about matters of essential importance to the purpose of the review, thus the term purposeful sampling

(Benoot et al., 2016). For this reason, teachers and two administrators had been identified as participants for this study because they could provide in-depth information on the implementation of PBIS. By targeting participants who had at least 5 years' experience ensured that those who participated possessed a level of knowledge about the implementation of PBIS that resulted in obtaining in-depth data. Purposeful sampling assisted with identifying and selecting individuals who were knowledgeable or experienced with a phenomenon of interest in this qualitative study (see Palinkas et al., 2015). The main goal of purposeful sampling was to focus on the characteristics of a population of interest, which would best enable me to answer the research questions. This sampling method was used to explore teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the implementation of PBIS used to reduce short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia.

Selection Criteria

The criteria for participant selection were as follows: Participants must have been employed at the local site for at least 5 years. Selecting these teachers allowed the saturation of information needed to support the research questions. For this study, I aimed to obtain seven to 10 participants, including teachers, and at least one administrator. Shetty (2018) recommended that a sample size be large enough to appropriately define the phenomenon of interest and discourse the research question at hand. A flyer was submitted to several teachers and an administrator requesting their participation in the study (see Appendix A). Upon volunteer participation and an email from teachers and an administrator who meet the selection criteria, the invitation to participate was sent to the

participants (see Appendix B) and those who agree to participate were sent an informed consent.

Relationship Between Saturation and Sample Size

The goal for a qualitative research sample size is to have a large enough sample size that can support a range of thoughts and not exceed the sample size, causing repetitive data. Data saturation is the point in the research process when no new information is exposed in data analysis, and there is enough information (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017). Researchers should have enough data to support the research purpose without using repetitive data. Saturation is thoroughly connected to the idea of theoretical sampling, the knowledge that sampling is directed by the needed similarities and contrasts required by the emerging theory and what causes the researcher to combine sampling, data collection, and data analysis, rather than treating them as distinct phases in a linear procedure (Saunders et al., 2018). Saturation means that a researcher can be sensibly confident that further data collection would yield comparable results and help to confirm emerging themes and conclusions (Faulkner &Trotter, 2017). To attain data saturation, every effort was made to obtain a significant number of participants; however, due to difficulty with recruitment resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to obtain enough administrators to achieve saturation.

Instrumentation

The instrument used to collect data for this qualitative study was semistructured interviews, which consist of a conversation between the researcher and the participant using the research and interview questions (see Quad, 2016). I took notes during the

interview process. The interview protocol was customized based on the conceptual framework and literature on the phenomenon to be studied. There were 21 research open-ended questions for the interview (see Appendix C. An open-ended question is a question that permits the participant to express themselves spontaneously on a given subject (Fauvelle, 2019). Qualitative interviews give researchers the chance to discover, in an in-depth manner, matters that are exclusive to the experiences of the interviewees, permitting understandings into how diverse phenomena of interest are experienced and perceived (McGrath et al., 2018). The relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is important because they provide the necessary information needed to support the collected data during the interview process. It was essential to check the trustworthiness in the research study. Trustworthiness in qualitative research has four components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Qualitative researchers preserve the honesty of their work by different means, including trustworthiness, credibility, applicability, and consistency, which are the evaluative standards (Hammarberg et al., 2016). An in-person interview is extensively recognized as a suitable method for qualitative inquiry to seek understandings of those who have experienced or are experiencing the phenomenon, and field testing for interviews is vital to test the questions and to advance some preparation in interviewing (Majid et al., 2017). In this study, the interview questions were reviewed by a panel of educators from an elementary school in Virginia to assess how well they answered the research questions. According to Britton (2016), field testing contributes to defining if there are errors, limitations, or other dimness within the interview protocols as field

testing provides the opportunity to make the required adjustments before the study process takes place. Field testing strengthens the modification of the research questions. Depending on how the participants respond, the research method is assessed, enhanced, and then tested, and researchers repeat this procedure until the research plan shows success. There are changed criteria that can be used to test the research method, but the emphasis should be on testing three main areas, including simplicity of directions, participant responsibilities and questions, and the research effectiveness (Wright, 2019). To ensure the credibility of the research questions, I allowed experienced participants to review my research questions. The participants who had experience working with students who had received short term suspensions provided feedback on how the questions supported the study. Such preparation gave me a better understanding of what would take place during the study, providing me a chance to reword or make changes.

The interviews were conducted using a semistructured approach. Semistructured interviews allowed two-way communication between me and the participant, allowing the participant to also ask questions while sharing their personal experiences with implementing PBIS. Open-ended questions were used in this qualitative study to get the most value out of the study. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. During the interview process, personal biases and opinions were not revealed. According to Probst (2015), reflexivity assumes that there is an awareness of the effect the researcher has on the individuals or topic being studied; therefore, during the interview process, personal thoughts or feelings were not revealed, and participants were reminded

that participation was voluntary, that their identity would remain anonymous, and that their responses would be kept confidential.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Data collection did not begin until written approval was obtained from both the Walden Instructional Review Board (IRB) and the school district of the local site. I ensured that all research standards were met in accordance with the local site and Walden's IRB requirements. A flyer was disseminated at the local site to recruit participants who met the criteria (see Appendix A). An invitation to participate was sent to teachers and administrators who expressed interest (see Appendix B). The invitation to participate outlined the purpose of the study, a timeline for the study, and the incentive for their participation in the study. Interested participants were asked to email their willingness to participate to my Walden email address. Upon receipt of an email from the interested participant, the informed consent was forwarded. For those who consented to participate, a pseudonym was assigned and was used in the interview recording, audio recordings, transcriptions, and reflective log. The names of the participants remained anonymous, and an electronic file with the assigned pseudonyms was saved on a flash drive. Upon review of several types of inquiry, it was decided that semistructured interviews would be the most suitable method of inquiry. Participants were allowed to discuss their experiences and perceptions of the implementation of PBIS. Conducting these interviews assisted with providing information about the reasons that implementing PBIS may be challenging in schools.

Data were collected for this study by conducting interviews using Zoom. The purpose of the interviews was to discover the opinions, experiences, beliefs, and/or inspirations of the participants on precise matters, and these qualitative methods, such as interviews, are thought to offer a profound understanding of social phenomena that supports the selected data (Gill et al., 2020). The collected data was used to prove evidence that is credible when answering the research questions. The protocol for the interview included the date, time, and location, subject of interview questions to be asked, the length of the interview, the foundation of participant selection, and the objective for the interview. The allocated time for the interview was approximately 45-60 minutes and if additional time is needed, it would be followed by 30 extra minutes to prepare for the interview process. A comfortable setting to conduct the Zoom interview was chosen with an appropriate background. Before the interview participants received details of the study, provide confidentiality, explain the format and length of the interview, allow the participants to clarify questions concerning the interview, and set up recording equipment (Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2020). Participants were reminded that the study is voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. The interview question was used to explore the implementation of positive behavioral interventions that attempt to reduce short-term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia. The interview responses were used to answer the research questions.

To maintain credibility and integrity the interviews were recorded. Before the interviews start, the Zoom recording equipment was displayed and the participants

received details of the study, and a copy of the informed consent to participate. The participants were reminded that the interview is being recorded using Zoom. The participants were provided the opportunity to ask questions before beginning the interview. At the end of each interview, the participants were asked if further clarification is needed. All interviews were recorded, dated, and transcribed.

To help improve the accuracy and credibility of the data collected in this study member checking was utilized. Member checking offered a method for researchers to confirm the specific representation of the participant's expressions by allowing participants to authorize or reject the accuracy and understandings of data that add credibility to the study (Candela, 2019). To this end, each participant received their transcribed interview and was asked to review their responses to ensure that it is a true representation of their perceptions. The participants read the transcribed data and made written changes if any discrepancies are revealed. The interview process lasted approximately four weeks or until saturation is reached. The information shared by the participants remained anonymous throughout the study. The collected data for this study were stored in a private computer secured with a password. The collected data remained confidential with a password attached for a minimum of five years. After which the stored data will be destroyed to uphold the confidentiality right with this study.

Data Analysis Plan

To safeguard the participant's responses, the interviews were conducted and recorded using Zoom. The interviews were transcribed immediately following the interview to ensure accuracy by an external transcription agency. Qualitative data is

defined as the data that approaches and symbolizes, which can be experimental or recorded (Surendran, 2020). For this study, data was analyzed using responses from the interview and field notes. The data analysis plan summarizes the structure of the data, affirms the objectives of the study, defines the data foundations, and classifies the procedures used to conduct the study (Hanks, 2017). Analyzing the data included preparation, organization, reviewing and exploring data, creating codes, reviewing the codes, and presenting the themes. According to Hank (2019), the plan document becomes a vigorous part of the study, because it demonstrates the approaches and purpose of the study.

The concepts and themes were identified after the interviews had taken place. The analysis process of the interview data is not only vigorous to purify useful research understandings but also important to building credibility as a responsible qualitative researcher (Yi, 2018). Analysis of qualitative interview data naturally starts with a set of transcripts of the interviews conducted. Transcribing interviews is the first step to analyzing qualitative interview data. Transcribing interviews is a document of the written text in a verified auditory used in a qualitative research interview that provides you additional selections for examining, keeping, and obtaining data (Jacobs, 2019). Content analysis were used to regulate the occurrence of certain words, themes, or concepts within qualitative data (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Content analysis was conducted using the qualitative analysis tool called NVivo. NVivo had features such as character-based coding, rich manuscript abilities, and program functions that are vital for qualitative data managing and also in-built services that permit persons from diverse

geographical places to work on the same data files at the same time through a system (Zamawe, 2015). The NVivo software was used to code the participant responses and categorize and organize data to identify themes. The words and phrases from the transcribed interviews were highlighted to identify similarities and differences among one another. Coding continued until all data and initial coding is completed. To ensure the integrity of the data, initial codes and emergent codes were examined separately. These codes were cross-checked for similarities. The goal of this study was to understand the perceptions of the implementation of PBIS to reduce short suspensions of African Americans in an elementary school in Virginia. Unexpected findings, if any, were included in data analysis which could ultimately strengthen the research.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in data, understanding, and procedures used to guarantee the eminence of a study. Researchers should form the procedures and measures needed for a study to be measured worthy of consideration by readers because researchers agree that trustworthiness is essential (Connelly, 2016). Subjectivity guides everything from the choice of subject that one will study, to choosing the methodologies, and understanding the data as this encourages the researcher to reflect on the standards and purposes that are brought to the research (Ratner, 2020). Qualitative researchers concurred that accuracy and trustworthiness are more pertinent to the impulsive and subjective nature of qualitative research (Galdas, 2017). To ensure trustworthiness qualitative researchers use member checking. Member checking is a qualitative procedure used to develop the view of credibility in trustworthiness (Vamshi,

2020). Member checking provided participant or respondent confirmation, which is a procedure for ensuring the credibility of research results. Collected data are giving to the participants involved in the study to check the accuracy of their responses from the interviews. Member checking is revealed as one of the justification practices for trustworthiness (Birt et al., 2016). Along with member checking trustworthiness included establishing credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability.

Credibility

Credibility is the confidence that can be used in the truth of research study findings. Credibility developed when the research findings signify plausible information drawn from the participant's unique data and is a correct explanation of the participant's original opinions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure credibility in this qualitative study participant interviews were audio recorded. I defined my role as the researcher with each participant. While acknowledging my role, I establish trust and built a rapport with the participants by asking open-ended questions. Guillemin et al., (2018) identified that relationships of trust between the participants and study researcher are considered supreme to the success of qualitative research. I used member checking to ensure the accuracy of the participant's data collection. According to Jackson (2021), member checking supports participants' accuracy in research studies. The participants provided vital information about the implementation of PBIS and students that receive short-term suspension. I allowed each participant to review their transcripts and provide additional feedback to validate the accuracy of using member checking. I allowed Temi.com to transcribe the transcription to ensure that the participant's responses were accurately

included in the process. The final transcripts from the participant interviews were emailed

to each participant for accuracy and the field notes were also used to support participant

responses. The individuals involved in the interview process shared their experiences

with the implementation of PBIS and African American students that received short-term

suspensions.

Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which the outcomes of qualitative research can be

transferred to other situations or surroundings with other participants. In qualitative

research, transferability can be accomplished by doing a thorough job of labeling the

research setting and the expectations that were central to the research (Trochim,

2020). The purposeful participant selection process l provided multiple viewpoints and

perspectives specific to the implementation of PBIS to reduce short-term suspensions of

African American students in an elementary school in Virginia.

Dependability

Dependability is the stability of results over time. Dependability included

participant's assessment of the findings, clarification, and approvals of the study such that

all are reinforced by the data as established from participants of the study (Korstjens &

Moser, 2018). The choice of a qualitative research design was carefully considered and it

was decided that this was most appropriate for answering the research questions.

Reflexivity is a self-assessment of subjectivity that can reduce bias when necessary and

surge dependability by increasing transparency of the research development (Moon et al.,

2016). To this end, the participants that volunteered for the study were told that they could withdraw or stop the interview at any time.

Dependability was ensured by coding the data consistently and acknowledged all the changes and amendments to the research protocol and keeping a trackable record of when and how changes were applied (Forero et al., 2018). Using a transcription agency reduced bias in that they have no interest or connection to the research. NVivo is one of the most recent widespread qualitative data management programs used in research (Zamawe, 2015). NVivo was used to analyze qualitative interview transcripts for management and coding. The software is not methodologically specific however it works well with qualitative research projects and data analysis methods such as a dissertation study (Zamawe, 2015). NVivo has been widely used to provide qualitative analysis for various research studies.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree to which the outcomes of the research study could be established by other researchers. Confirmability is the phase of detachment needed to protect the inter-subjectivity of the collected data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The understanding should not be based on your specific likings and views but needs to be grounded in the data. The participants in this study were allowed to check their responses for accuracy and clarification. To accomplish confirmability, the researchers validated that the results are connected to the assumptions in a way that can be monitored and as a process, simulated (Moon et al., 2016). There were discussions with the dissertation chair to review common themes and relevant theories. This helped to guide the research and to

reduce any biases that may exist. The discussions also allowed me to check and recheck the data throughout the study, increasing confirmability.

Ethical Procedures

It was important to maintain ethical practices when conducting research. When conducted research it was important to ensure that participants' privacy and confidentiality are protected. Participants must also be protected from unjustifiable deception, any physical or psychological harm, and they must be provided an informed consent that provides voluntary consent to the participant (Siegle, 2015). Participation in this study was voluntary and no participant was penalized for not answering all of the questions or stopping the interview early. Voluntary informed consent implied that participants have the legal ability to give consent, exercise free power of choice without the involvement of any portion of force, deception, dishonesty, pressure, overreaching, or other hidden forms of limitations or intimidation, and should have satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the elements of the subject matter involved as to allow him or her to make a considerate and rational decision to participate in the study (Siegle, 2015). For this study, participants were provided with an informed consent that includes the purpose of the study, risks, benefits, voluntary participation, and contacts. The participants were also informed that their responses to the research questions would be kept in a safe place for approximately five years. The IRB was responsible for confirming that all Walden University research conforms to the university's ethical standards as well as U.S. federal regulations. The goal of IRB review was to guarantee that the rights and welfare of contributing research topics will be sufficiently protected in the search of the planned

research study (Grady, 2015). After receiving approval from Walden University IRB, data collection begins.

To further increase the protection of participants and confidentiality all forms, transcripts, and field notes was stored on a flash drive. This study utilized pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants. This was stored on my personal computer which is password protected and the electronic files was saved on a flash drive and was kept in a locked cabinet in my home office. The data was analyzed by an external transcription agency and once the transcriptions are completed, I begin analyzing the information. The data will be destroyed after 5 years of being safely secured.

Summary

In Chapter 3, methodology, research design and rationale, instrumentation, data collection, and analysis, the role of the researcher, and ethical procedures for this study were discussed. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore why implementing positive behavioral interventions and supports was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia. The participants in the study was nine teachers and at least one administrator from an elementary school in Virginia. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews and transcription of the interviews was completed by an external transcription agency. The data were analyzed using NVivo software to identify common themes. Chapter 4 explained the analysis and findings from this qualitative study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia. The objectives were to develop positive ways to support African American students who have experienced trauma issues and who need additional help to succeed in school. In Chapter 4, I discussed the data collected from teachers and an administrator from an elementary school in Virginia. The research questions were developed and grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory because it describes the impact of social environments on human development. In this chapter, I presented the setting and demographics of the participants in the study and detail information derived from the collected data and the procedures used to address the research questions for the study. The data analysis section addresses the research questions, trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

RQ1-Qualitative: What are teachers' perceptions of why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia?

RQ2-Qualitative: What are administrators' perceptions of why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia?

Setting

The participant search began after approval from Walden University's IRB committee. The flyer was distributed to approximately 60 teachers and administrators from a local elementary school in Virginia. The study site was identified through online data, and flyers were distributed by an employee at the local elementary school. The participants who met the criteria of the study sent an email of interest to participate in the study. Because I did not get any responses from administrators, the flyer was sent out a second time to two administrators. I recruited 10 participants from a local elementary school in Virginia to participate in one-on-one interviews. The participants had previous history and experience with African American students who had received multiple short term suspensions. In addition, participants had 5 or more years of experience with African American students who had received multiple short term suspensions. The elementary school where participants were employed implemented PBIS in their school. The elementary school worked with African American students to help them find alternative ways to address negative behaviors, issues, and concerns. Selective participants are individuals who meet the required criteria to support a research study (Martinez-Mesa et al., 2016); therefore, I used selective participants to help gain a better understanding concerning the short term suspensions for African American students.

The selected participants received a flyer with detailed information about the research study (see Appendix A). The interested participants emailed their contact information to inquire about the study. After receiving their contact information, an informed consent letter was emailed, requesting the participants to participate in the study

voluntarily. The participants acknowledged their voluntary participation by emailing "I consent." Following the "I consent," I emailed the demographic questions and information on scheduling the interview. The participants received a follow-up phone call to schedule the interviews at their convenience. The pandemic altered the ability to conduct in-person interviews followed up with a Zoom meeting. A Zoom meeting was scheduled instead, and the link was emailed to each participant. Each participant received a $10.00 Chick-Fil-A gift card upon completion of the interview for their participation. The data were collected during an interview with each participant using Zoom in a private setting. To prepare for the interview, I explained the purpose of the study and reviewed the informed consent. I reminded the participant that the study was voluntary and that they could opt out of the study at any time, followed by open-ended questions to build a relationship with the participants. The participants used an alias/participation number to protect their identity. All interviews were recorded using the voice recording on Zoom. Although the interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes, some were as short as 25 to 45 minutes. Some of the interviews required a follow-up session to support, add, and clarify unclear responses. The follow-up responses took an additional 15 to 30 minutes. After the interview, voice recordings were transcribed, reviewed, and emailed to participants to review and check for the accuracy of their responses. After the participant reviewed their responses, they emailed me confirming that the recordings were accurate or with the appropriate changes.

This qualitative study was conducted using 10 participants from a local elementary school in Virginia. The participants included nine teachers and one

administrator. Each participant was assigned a participation number to protect their

identity. The participants were from a local elementary school in Virginia with 5 or more

years of experience working with African American students who received multiple short

term suspensions. The participants also worked at the same elementary school for 5 or

more years. Table 1 provides the participants' demographics from the questionnaire,

which describes the participant's alias/participation number, race, position, highest

degree, gender, years of teaching, and grade level. The participation numbers were used

to mask the identity of the participant and ensure confidentiality.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant Number	Grade Level	Race	Position	Highest degree	Gender	Years Teaching
P1	4th	AA	T	MD	F	12
P2	2nd	AA	T	BD	F	10
P3	K-5	NH	T	MD	F	15
P4	5th	W	T	MD	F	12
P5	K-5	AA	T	MD	F	28
P6 2nd	2nd	AA	T	DR	F	28
P7	3rd	AA	T	MD	F	17
P8	5th	AA	T	MD	F	44
P9	5th	AA	T	BD	M	8
P10	K-5	AA	AD	MD	F	26

Note. Participant Number = P, Non-Hispanic = NH, African American = AA, White = W,

Teacher = T, Administrator = AD, Master's = MD, Bachelor's = BD, Doctorate = DR,

Female = F, Male = M

The demographics in Table 1 provided a breakdown of the participant's race, position, highest degree, and gender. The selected participants included one non-Hispanic, one White, and eight African American participants. There were nine female and one male participant. All of the participants were teachers, except one who was an administrator. The highest level of education varied from bachelor's to doctoral degree.

Data Collection

Qualitative data were collected from nine teachers and one administrator from a local elementary school in Virginia. The participants' interviews were voice recorded during a private Zoom session. Several open-ended questions were asked, requiring them to reflect on their experiences concerning African American students and short term suspensions. Participants were interviewed between March 2, 2021 and March 25, 2021. An extra week was added to provide participants reasonable time to review and check their responses for accuracy. The duration of the interviews was 25 to 45 minutes, followed by 15- to 30-minute follow-up interviews to clarify the participants' responses. The interview questions allowed the participants to express their opinions and feelings about the African American students who receive multiple short term suspensions.

According to McGrath et al. (2018), it is generally good to start the interview with a few informal questions to create a warm atmosphere. The informal questions help participants feels more relaxed, while the researcher explains the study with the topic of the interview. The interview questions were approved through the IRB process. Teachers and the administrator were asked the same interview questions. Before beginning the interview, detailed information about the study was explained to each participant. I

reviewed the informed consent and reminded participants that participation was voluntary. Each participant was asked the same interview questions from the interview protocol list (see Appendix C). During the interviews, I took notes and observed the behaviors of the participants. The participants voluntarily participated in the study without hesitation, pressure, or signs of withdrawal during the interview process. Upon completion of the interview, each participant was provided a $10.00 Chick-Fil-A gift card.

The recording of each interview was saved on a private protected computer that only I have access to with a unique username and password. The recording was transcribed using Temi.com within 24 hours. To increase the trustworthiness of the data collected, I engaged in the member checking process by sending the interview transcript to each participant to check for accuracy. Participants generally appreciate the member checking process because it allows them to confirm their responses and make changes to clear up any mishaps (Devault, 2019). Each participant was given 1 week to review their transcript and check for accuracy. Interviewees responded within 5 days, and revisions were made if requested. Two of the participants made corrections to the transcript, and one of the participants added additional information that they wanted to include with the interview responses. These minor adjustments were added as an addendum to the transcripts.

After the participants finalized the transcriptions, I uploaded the collected data into the NVivo system. NVivo is software used to analyze data collected for a qualitative study (McNiff, 2016). NVivo codes, organizes, and manages the collected data.

Participant data were uploaded on my password-protected computer and were saved on a

flash drive secured in a locked cabinet to ensure confidentiality. The information will be

kept for approximately 5 years.

Data Analysis

In preparation for data analysis, I transcribed the interviews using Temi.com

Recordings, and notes were used as a guide in the inductive coding process, which

identified common and repeated words and select patterns that led to creating emerging

themes for the research study. Inductive coding is used when the researcher does not use

a codebook to collect data (Yi, 2018). I organized the questions and responses that were

transcribed from Temi.com into a Microsoft Excel document. The transcripts were then

uploaded into NVivo to be analyzed, and I developed the findings of keywords, patterns,

and themes that supported the required results. During the analysis process, I used

bracketing to clear any biases as I did not express my opinions, make any decisions, nor

respond with any personal gestures. Bracketing means holding back from decisions and

refraining from the routine way of seeing things (Weatherford & Maitra, 2019). The data

collected from the participants during the interviews and transcribed by the outside

agency were inserted into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, giving detailed information of

the interview questions and the participants' responses and notes. I took notes during the

interview to highlight repeated words, and I used my interview notes to help support any

discrepancies in the participants' responses. Although the participants responded to the

same interview questions, the teachers' responses were separated from the one

administrator. I highlighted short phrases and repeated words throughout the process and

connected the emerging ideas under the proper theme. NVivo then connected similar phrases and words into different categories. After identifying the common words, patterns, and themes, four themes emerged from the analysis and the similarity of familiar words.

Table 2 provided the categories and themes that emerged from the data. The keywords were placed into four themes to include (a) student behaviors issues, (b) relationship building issues, (c) lack of professional development, and (d) PBIS implementation challenges. This process allowed me to respond to the research questions accurately.

Table 2

Categories and Themes Emergent From the Data

Categories	Themes
Rewarding good behaviors	Student behaviors issues
Negative behaviors	
Acceptable behaviors	
Specific behaviors	
Modification behaviors	
Eliminating racial disparities	
Lack of teacher-student relationship	Relationship building issues
Lack of parent/teacher relationship	
Positive teacher-student relationships	
Negative teacher-student relationships	
Lack of interest in student's progress	
Weekly PBIS lesson plans	
Flyers sent home	
Class Dojo	
Teacher consistency	
Teachers and the administrator receive professional development training school and district-wide	Lack of professional development
Student adjustment from the previous school	PBIS implementation challenges
Lack of training	
Lack of positive school climate/culture	
Classroom rules	
PBIS Rules school-wide	

Results

The results of this study were controlled in connection to the themes that emerged from the data collected from the ten participants who had experience with African American students and short-term suspensions. The proposed research questions were addressed using the interview questions. Nine teachers and one administrator participated in the interview process and responded to familiar questions without any hesitation. The participant's responses provided insight that would comprehensively answer the research questions

Research Question 1

RQ1 read as follows: What are teacher's perceptions of why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia? The four themes that emerged from participant's responses were (a) student behaviors issues, (b) relationship building issues, (c) lack of professional development and (d) PBIS implementation challenges.

Theme 1: Student Behaviors Issues

Student behavior issues were the first theme to emerge from the data analysis. The participants expressed their feelings and opinions about students with behavior issues. Several of the local elementary school teachers stated that African American students exhibited negative behaviors such as fighting, talking back, and being disrespectful. According to several participants, the most common behavior that leads to suspension is fighting. Participant 2 stated, "The students fight a lot, so it is usually fighting that causes them to receive suspensions, and some of the same ones will get suspended again."

Students need additional support to help them reduce some of the disruptive behaviors that they present. Another participant, Participant 3, stated,

> I think the biggest behavior problem at the school is fighting. There is quite a bit of disrespect between students and teachers, but the disrespect does not usually require a suspension. Unfortunately, we have quite a bit of fighting, which is the one thing that causes the most suspensions.

According to Gordon (2020), students can be influenced by their peers because they are disrespectful. When things do not go their way, the student becomes aggressive, meaning that students become mean, call names, and break out in fights. Students get into fights because they are sometimes teased, disliked, or retaliated. Many school districts now have a zero-tolerance policy, so when students are disciplined for fighting, they will automatically be disciplined, including suspensions.

Fighting tends to occur when students are in areas where they can socialize with students on a larger scale. Participant 9 stated,

> Students get into fights during P.E., lunch, and areas where students can socialize more. Although there are many fights, I can usually resolve some conflicts with students when they are in my classroom. It is the interaction that they have with other students when they are not in my classroom that causes them to fight. However, every student in the local elementary school is not fighting, but there is a large number of students that have behavior issues. In return, these students need a support system to help reduce some of the disruptive behaviors that cause them to receive short–term suspensions.

Lack of supervision involving students increases the risk of behavior problems in school (Kubetin, 2017). These students display negative behaviors for many reasons; however, it is more frequent during unsupervised activities; therefore, supervision is required at all times to help lessen some of the school fights and negative behaviors.

As a result of these behaviors, they receive suspensions which affect their academic performance in school. Participant 6 stated "that the negative actions from students cause them to demonstrate progress in their academic performances because they cannot learn if they are not in school." Students that receive multiple suspensions do not perform well in school due to their inconsistent attendance. It causes them to fall behind in their classwork, lack understanding of the material being taught, and make it difficult to catch up on the assignments they have missed while on suspension (Jones, 2019). These students need support in decreasing negative behaviors to stay in school, learn, and improve their academic performance.

Theme 2: Relationship Building Issues

Teacher-student relationship issues were the second theme that emerged from the data analysis. Relationships are significant for many different reasons, such as growing the emotional well-being, producing stability that helps students learn and grow, and building a connection with someone that the student can trust and express their feelings (Benamati, 2017a). Therefore, the teacher-student relationship is vital because having a positive relationship between students and teachers can support students academically and emotionally. The participants expressed their feelings and opinions associated with the relationships amongst the teacher, students, and parents. Relationships refer to the

level of engagement, support, and attitude amongst the teacher, students, and parents involved with one another.

Participants discussed issues with a lack of relationship support between teachers and students. The lack of relationship building, encouragement, and positive interactions negatively affected students' success. Participant 5 stated,

Teacher and student relationships are important. The teacher-student relationship is something that needs to start at the beginning of the school year. Students need the opportunity to create the classroom rules, the consequences for misbehaving, and rewards when they behave positively because this helps students understand the expectations. To strengthen the teacher-student relationship, it is important that when students engage in negative interactions, teachers make every effort to deescalate situations as well as not do anything to provoke the behaviors.

Many students experience various mental illnesses, trauma, anxiety disorders, family issues, and depression. Therefore, when students return to school from being suspended, it is vital not to discuss why the student was suspended. It is also important to have a behavior intervention plan to support the student (Shakill & Desroches, 2019). To strengthen the teacher-student relationship, it is important that when students engage in negative interactions, teachers make every effort to deescalate situations and not do anything to provoke the behaviors.

Trust

Trust is an essential part of the teacher-student relationship, and one of the biggest challenges teachers face with their students. It is difficult for students to have a good

relationship with a teacher if they cannot trust them. Trust can be built between the teachers and students when there is consistency, collaboration, and communication. Teachers that implement the three Cs with students have a better chance of gaining trust (Ludvik, 2020). These evidence-based practices are needed to build trust between the teacher and student. Building a positive rapport with the student is an excellent way to develop trust. Students who have issues will open up to the teacher more once they develop a certain level of trust. Teachers that build trust with their students have better connections when the teacher has to discipline them. Participant 2 explained,

The teacher-student relationship is very important because it helps the student build trust with the teacher. The relationship should be built at the beginning of the school year so that when negative behaviors exist, the student will feel comfortable talking with the teacher. For some students, demonstrating empathy and speaking to them with a calm voice would offset negative interactions they may be experiencing at home".

Participant 4 explained,

I think building a relationship is super important. It is the most important thing you are going to do in your classroom. One way to build a good relationship is to never speak down to the student, yell at the student, or say something that could be perceived as belittling, but you want to give them some praise and make sure the student feels that you like them. If they see you as someone who truly cares about them, then trust can be built.

Consistency

Consistency is critical for building teacher-student relationships because it creates an effective learning environment for students who need support with behavior issues and academic performances. Teachers must develop and present classroom expectations that are reasonable and consistent so that students that display negative behaviors feel as though the teacher is fair (Newman, 2021). Students want to know that they are being treated fairly regardless of the teacher or class. In addition, when the teachers and the environment are consistent, students have a better chance of behaving and being productive academically. Participant 8 explained,

> Relationships are extremely important. You have to show students that you are being fair with each student. Some students are usually disrespectful because they see that teachers are not being fair. For example, I had a student tell me that another student did not obey the rule and the teacher allowed him to slide. All teachers must apply the same rules so that they can build a level of trust with each student.

The relationship between a teacher and student is necessary because when students trust a teacher, they may be more cooperative and willing to adhere to the school rules.

Teacher-Student Interactions

Teachers who seek to have good relationships with students must ensure they channel positive energy to students and within the classroom environment. As participant 1 explained,

The teacher interactions and the behaviors are directly proportional because students feed off of our energy. When I show excitement about my class, my kids respond the same, but when teachers are negative, students respond the same way, so it is directly proportional.

Many of these students have displayed problem behaviors in the classroom; however, most of them need a teacher that is calm, reliable and caring. As Participant 6 stated, "Some of those kids probably need a teacher that is very understanding. So we must have teachers that are compassionate, very understanding, and try to meet the needs of all students in the classroom." When teachers show students that they are compassionate and understanding, the teacher and student will have a positive balance in the classroom.

Many of the teachers felt the need to build positive relationships with the students and parents. A teacher stated that

giving the students praise, reporting good behaviors to the parents along with the negative ones, calling them on their birthday, or even just telling them that they look nice today could provide a rewarding atmosphere for the teachers, students, and parents.

Multiple participants explained the key to success for the students was to bring out the best while creating a warm, respectful, and welcoming relationship with the parents. Participant 6 explained, "I consider the teacher and student relationship number one. I establish personal relationships with my students during the first week of school. I give my students a chance to tell me about themselves." Participant 7 stated,

The teacher and student relationship is vital for a successful school year. I try to find out what the students like. At the beginning of the school year, I have the students fill out a form about the things they like, and it sometimes helps if you know some of the activities that the students enjoy. For example, the students that play sports or have any outside extracurricular activities.

Theme 3: Lack of Professional Development

Lack of professional development was the third theme that emerged from the data analysis. Although the demands of educating teachers and providing them with professional development training are not implemented enough (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019), teachers need continual support to adapt their knowledge and practice to assist students with the necessary techniques needed to lessen the negative behavior issues and increase academic performances. When schools fail to provide teachers with broad access to professional development trainings, the teachers lack the knowledge needed to support the misbehaving students (García & Weiss, 2019). Professional development is used to strengthen and support teachers who need to provide support to students that display unwanted and negative behaviors.

Frequency of Training

Although teachers received training at the beginning of the school year, it was not enough to address the challenges that are faced throughout the school year. Some of the participants expressed the need to receive additional trainings throughout the school year to help them provide positive support to students. Participant 2 noted we have school-wide professional development trainings on positive behavior intervention support at the

beginning of the school year. Participant 3 explained, "I went to a 3-day positive behavior intervention support training years ago, but now we only receive trainings at the beginning of the school year. There is a need for additional trainings." To support teachers there must be an improvement in the school systems that provide professional development trainings that are useful and supportive to students that need a positive level of enhancement and ensure that teachers have the resources required to support the opportunities. Although teachers may not receive PBIS trainings throughout the school year, King (2019), stated that building a year-long plan of trainings for teachers to implement PBIS will support the teachers with practices that are sufficiently enough to implement to the students. PBIS trainings also lack in other school areas. There are many other school areas that have some of the same training problems. The effectiveness of PBIS trainings is beneficial for all schools, however: rural school districts are often underrepresented in research and the data connected with implementing PBIS in schools (McDaniel & Bloomfield, 2020). Although rural areas are diverse the merging obstacles include problems with retrieving resources due to limited funding, and distance from receiving training.

To develop and strengthen teacher's support additional professional development training need to be implemented because this improves the teacher's skills, knowledge, techniques, and in return supports the students that need guidance and growth (Kampen, 2019). Professional development trainings are needed to close the skill gaps that exist in implementing strategies and techniques to reduce behavior issues and increase academic performance. Participant 1 explained,

We have a PBIS committee here at school that works to develop the best

practices, but most of my experiences have come from just taking an active

interest in being an advocate for my students and knowing how our students

should be treated.

Although the school has developed a PBIS committee the frequency of PBIS trainings

has not increased.

Culturally Responsive Training

Along with the PBIS annual training, teachers need additional training and

support with implementation during the year to culturally diverse students that display

negative behaviors. Teachers cannot help students be successful in school when they are

not properly trained to evaluate behaviors support children with different cultural

backgrounds. P7 stated,

A lot of it depends on the teacher and sometimes it is a cultural difference. Like I

have had a teacher to tell me that she felt like a child was being disrespectful by

calling her a name, but the name that the student actually called her was from a

rap song. It was actually a positive name, but because she was unaware of the rap

song she perceived it as negative.

The teacher must be willing to support the school's student population and community

and have a positive attitude toward students that are culturally different from them.

Participant 5 stated,

Teachers need some culturally responsive training, so that if they are in school

with students that have high levels of infractions the teachers will know how to

work, deal with, talk, and communicate with the students. The school must be

aware that teachers need more training on how to work with a culturally diverse

population of students.

Although schools provide PBIS training to ensure proper implementation, it does not

always align with the school's population. Participant 4 stated,

The training did not always match our student considered we are an inner-city

urban school, and not only did the posters that were displayed not look like them,

but sometimes the goals weren't realistic for them. When a teacher is addressing a

student, the teacher does not expect the student to respond back which usually

may cause a confrontation. For example, many teachers think that when a student

talks back it is disrespectful, but you have to be ready for an African American

student to talk back because they feel the need to defend themselves and that does

not mean they are being disrespectful.

Schools must design a fit that is culturally conclusive to the population that is being

served therefore teachers may have to change the way they think about certain students so

that they can address the students with behavior issues properly and fairly (Leverson et

al., 2016). The alignment with the population is an important part of implementing PBIS

correctly.

Instead of supporting students, many teachers felt that teachers lack cultural

differences that could help students with behavior issues. Participant 7 explained,

A lot of the behaviors depend on the teacher and sometimes it is a cultural

difference. I had a teacher to tell me that she felt like the child was disrespectful

because the student called her a name, but the name he actually called her was from a rap song. It was actually a positive name, but she perceived it as negative because she was not familiar with the rap song.

Participant 1 explained,

Some students may have to be defensive at home. I see these students fighting because they emulate what they see and that's the first thing they want to do. A lot of teachers need to learn the culture of African American students. The realization is that all the teachers need to know where we are, what type of culture we have, the demographic area, poverty levels because some kids are deprived and some of these kids are angry and they bring it to school. This will help teachers understand that some things are not considered disrespectful.

Wright (2019) stated that African American students are more likely to be seen as problem students and that teachers expect them to misbehave versus a White student. Proactive and culturally knowledgeable teachers can work to change these misconceptions and create classroom environments where African American students can learn, dream, and feel accepted when they misbehave. African American students that are raised in dysfunctional homes, along with being poor present a high level of behavior problems and are at greater risk of disrupted academic achievement (Morsey & Rothstein, 2019).

Theme 4: PBIS Implementation Challenges

PBIS implementation challenges were the fourth theme that emerged from the data analysis. The lack of professional development trainings for teachers includes the

lack of preparation for implementing positive behavior intervention support for students that exhibit negative behaviors with fidelity. The strategies that are to be implemented are used as a guide to attempt to reduce the negative behaviors displayed while in school. Several teachers expressed the need to teach students the expectations of PBIS and how it can support them in the beginning of the school year, so that all of the students have something positive to work towards. However, Participant 3 explained I feel that there is not enough time to teach the PBIS content material throughout the day, so it is a big challenge to make the students understand that PBIS was important as the teacher had to make time to teach the lesson.

It can be very difficult for the teacher when students transfer from other schools because they implement different school and PBIS rules. The school rules must be consistent for all students. Several participants expressed when students transfer from other schools it can sometimes be hard for them to adjust and it is very important to share some of the information that they have provided with the current students in the beginning of the school year. Participant 2 stated,

> A lot of challenges come from students that come from other schools or other school districts. It takes them a while to understand and adjust to the PBIS rule. We teach kids basically how they are supposed to act, be respectful, responsible, and ready to learn and when they get caught doing these things then they are given an award like the opportunity to use class dojo.

Although things can be difficult when students transfer from other schools, the teacher must reward them when they see them engaging in positive ways.

Consistency is important when implementing interventions that are designed to reduce negative behaviors. While several teachers expressed the need to focus on concern areas, they also acknowledged that when teachers focus on too many areas it can be a barrier to proper implementation. Participant 5 stated,

Some teachers have too many focus areas. They should limit some of the things that they focus on. For example, if a student received a disciplinary action the day before they would focus on that instead of giving the student a new start. We must ensure that the strategies we are using work for all of the students and if they do not we must look for ways to gain their attention positively. Teachers have to be consistent in whatever strategies they are using because students need that.

Participant 7 stated,

Like anything new, the students have to adjust and it takes sometimes 21 to 30 days of the teacher being consistent. You cannot do it for a couple of days and then stop. So once the teachers are consistent, then the students become consistent. If you are teaching art and someone else is teaching science, we all have to implement the same procedures, so that the students will know this is consistent in every class even in the media center.

Success between students that have behavior issues relies on the consistency of the teacher when they are implementation interventions and strategies to help lessen some of the behavior concerns.

Several participants explained the reasons for establishing school rules and why they are important. The rules should be talked about daily and not when someone is

participating with negative behaviors. One teacher stated, "The students should be made aware of the rules whether they are in class, lunch, media center, or hallway." The PBIS rules and regulations should be posted for students to read and be reminded of how they should behave as well as enforced. P6 also stated,

> When rules are in place and explained to the students at the beginning of the school year they can help reduce some of the infractions that students receive. They can get all students on board with collective decision making will discussion the same rules and expected guidelines.

Although there are many challenges with the implementation of PBIS, the benefits of implementing PBIS are a great tool for schools to attempt to reduce some of the short-term suspensions (McDaniels et al., 2017). The challenges that these students face require intervention support for the students that misbehave and are unable to stay in school and learn. The intervention strategies are needed to overcome some of the distractions that cause African American students to receive short-term suspensions. The implementation of PBIS is associated with the three tiers to help support students with their academics and behavior performances.

Several of the participants acknowledge the challenges of implementing positive behavior intervention support. Participant 2 expressed, "A lot of the challenges come from students that transfer over from other schools or school districts. It takes the students awhile to adjust to the rules of positive behavior intervention support". Participant 3 noted,

The biggest challenges that we face honestly is with teachers. They feel like they

do not have enough time to teach the PBIS content material throughout the day,

so it is a big challenge to make them understand the importance of teaching and

implementing positive behavior intervention support lesson.

Although there are many challenges, Participant 6 explained, "I do not have too many

challenges because I have learned to speak with the students one-on-one. You get a

whole different outcome when you can take the student through a calming moment."

Participant 7 noted,

Well like anything new the students have to get adjusted and it sometimes can

take 21 to 30 of the teacher being consistent. You cannot do it for a couple of days

and think that the students are going to cooperate. You have to be consistent

doing the same thing every day for the 21 to 30 day before you actually see a big

progress.

Research Question 2

The second research question that guided this study was as follows: What are

administrator's perceptions of why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing

short term suspensions of African American students in grades K to 5 in an elementary

school in Virginia? Due to the pandemic, it was difficult to recruit administrators to

participate in the study. The recruitment efforts resulted in one eligible participant. The

participating administrator was an African American female with a Master's degree who

has been in the field of education for 26 years. Of the three themes (a) inconsistent

disciplinary actions (b) relationship building issues, (c) student behavior issues, two themes were identical to those that emerged from the teacher responses.

Inconsistent Disciplinary Actions

When students misbehave they have to report to the administrator for disciplinary actions and those actions must be consistent. According to P10 elementary school student infractions regardless of ethnicity include bringing marijuana to school, fighting, and stealing and this includes black and White children. It is expected at a minimum that teachers and administrators refer to their code of conduct to evaluate infractions. The administrator stated, "You can't give one student a consequence for one behavior and a severe consequence for the same behavior. And then a black student gets a different consequence, or a white student gets a consequence". According to Riddle and Sinclair (2019a), there is an increased focus on the varying disciplinary consequences between African American and White students because African American students are viewed as problematic and more likely to be suspended before White students for the same behavior infraction. To avoid inconsistencies, the administrator states "If you're following the district's code of conduct with respect to the disciplinary procedures, then everybody gets the same thing". The school administrator needs to let the teachers and other staff know the school's expectations pertaining to classroom management and student discipline. The expectations of classroom management and student discipline must be clear and consistent (Meador, 2019). When the administrator presents clear and consistent disciplinary actions, it demonstrates to other students that display the same negative behavior that they are subject to the same consequences regardless of their culture.

Relationship Building Issues

When administrators build relationships with students on a personal level, the administrators are more understanding and knowledgeable concerning how their decisions of discipline might impact certain students (Kudlats, 2019). The school's administrator's relationship with the students is very important. Therefore, many school administrators will stand in the halls and welcome students (Boyd, 2018). When the school administrator dedicates time to build positive relationships with students learning the student's name and making a connection is a great way to start. Administrators sometimes will ask the student about their weekend, ask them if they need anything, check on their academics, and ensure them that can stop by the office anytime they need to talk demonstrating to the student that they are interested in their day (Woodard, 2019). Many administrators feel the need to build positive relationships with students because they do not just want to see them when they misbehave. When administrators develop positive relationships with their students it can make disciplinary situations much more effective (Kudlats, 2019). Creating a positive relationship among the teacher and student encourages a student to feel more contented and safe in the classroom (Gonzalez, 2016). Participant 10 stated "students do not care what you know, until they know that you care." Students know when they are in a positive learning environment and the teachers are caring and supportive which is predominantly important for students who have challenging life and behavior issues (Nishioka, 2019). The administrator stated, "even if teachers ignore the behavior that sometimes tends to escalate it is because with younger kids ignoring the behavior is telling them that you don't care that I'm acting this

way". Many times the negative behaviors that are displayed by students stem from the connection to seek attention, and when students misbehave they can see if the teacher care or not (Schwartz, 2016). Therefore, ignoring students is not always beneficial so teachers may want to engage with these students at the beginning of class with something as small as acknowledging that they are sitting happily and patiently in their seats. Teachers do not want to reward negative behaviors and the common thing to do is ignore the student (Schwartz, 2016). It is not always a great idea to ignore students because ignoring the student can sometimes cause the situation or students behavior to escalate.

According to Harmon (2017), allowing students to take responsibility and ownership of generating classroom rules demonstrates to the student that the teacher values their thoughts. Teachers strengthen their relationships with their students when they allow the students to help make some of the classroom rules. These rules go along with the school-wide rules. Students are more likely to react positively to the classroom and school-wide rules when they have input in creating them (Shalaway, 2021). It is important that teachers make students feel welcome and wanted in the classroom. Participant 10 states "in order for you not to feel disrespected, you have to establish a relationship with a student whereby you are comfortable with saying, listen, that behavior is inappropriate. Let's not do that. Let's talk about what, what you're doing and how it's impacting. Not only you, but everybody else in the classroom. So I think establishing relationships with kids is a big one". A student that has a strong connection with the teacher they will openly talk with the teacher and the students also receive more helpful guidance and praise rather than just condemnation from the teacher (Rimm-Kaufman &

Sandilos, 2021). Having a positive and productive relationship with student's requires getting to know the student's strengths, interests, desires, frustrations, backgrounds, and areas for growth to have a better understanding when having to discipline a student.

Lack of Professional Development

The lack of on-going professional development on the implementation of PBIS was an emerging theme among the teachers and was further supported by the responses from the administrator. Participant 10 stated "they had trainings and modules that we had to complete as administrators and as a PBIS team. But within the past year, there has not been any training for PBIS". It is also important that training is engaging and not repetitive. The administrator further explained that although repetition is good for students, receiving the same training annually is not engaging for the teachers. Training should be focused on the introduction of new strategies to reduce the negative behaviors in the school.

The administrator also discussed the importance of visiting other communities as part of training. Children come from varying communities and PBIS implementation should be geared toward learning how to support children from varying communities. P10 stated "we have our suburban schools, even our rural schools, we could benefit from them because we get kids coming from everywhere. I think teachers would benefit from seeing how the program is effectively implemented in different areas across the country". In addition, when teachers do not receive the proper professional development training they cannot provide the best strategies needed to support students. The content of professional development for teachers should be intentionally geared toward filling

teacher's skills gaps because the practices and techniques that are taught can essentially make a positive difference for students that exhibit negative behaviors and need support with learning (Gordon, 2017). Teachers that do not receive adequate professional development training are unable to apply skills to address specific behavior issues and implement learning practices needed to reduce negative behaviors in the classroom (Porter & Desimone, 2021). Professional development trainings should be focused on providing support to teachers that have encountered students that display negative behaviors.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In chapter 3, I discussed that the evidence of trustworthiness depended on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To apply quality and trustworthiness in this study, I considered the true values, basic details, and allowed the participants to share their experiences without penalty to find the results for this study. This allowed the data collection to support the results and conclusion of the study.

Credibility

Credibility is the first characteristic or criterion to be recognized in a study as being the most essential part of creating trustworthiness (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure creditability one validation strategy was used. Member checking is known as a validation method. Member checking is a procedure for discovering the credibility of results when the data is giving to participants to check for accuracy and echo with their understandings (Birt et al., 2016). The interviews were transcribed and reviewed by the participants to confirm the accuracy of their responses. Conducting the Zoom interviews

provided me with insight that may assist with answering the research questions.

Therefore, using Zooms and allowing an outside agency to produce the transcripts

minimized any unwanted biases because I was able to compare the recordings and

transcriptions for accuracy. The confidentiality and the participant's participation

granted credibility and support for the research study without any giving and unwanted

biases.

Transferability

Transferability is reasonable if followed by rich comprehensive descriptions. I

used semi-structured interviews that can combine both the structured and unstructured

interview styles, while also providing a chance to impulsively discover themes applicable

to that specific participant (Pollock, 2019). These interviews, recordings, and notes may

provide readers with indications that the research study's findings could be valid to other

contexts and circumstances. The collected data were transcribed through Temi.com a

professional outside agency to reduce biases and ensure the accuracy of the Zoom

recordings. The purposeful sampling consisted of nine teachers and one administrator

from an elementary school in Virginia.

Dependability

Dependability included the aspect of consistency and as the researcher, I provided

a comprehensive set of transcripts on decisions made during the research process,

interviews with participants, insightful thoughts, sampling, research materials adopted,

emergence of the findings and information about the data organization (Korstjens &

Moser, 2018). The participants involved in the study were consistently reminded that the

study was voluntary and they could withdraw anytime without penalization from the study and interview. The findings of this study emerged from the voluntary semi-structured interviews, note-taking, and recording conducted with the participants selected for this study. The collected data and current literature were reviewed to see if the results aligned with the research questions that guided this research study.

Confirmability

Confirmability is based on how the research question is supported by the collected data (Trochim, 2020). It gives the researcher a better understanding as to whether the results of the study were built on the data collected during the interviews or a part of the actual researcher's statements. During the member checking process the participants were given a transcript to verify the accuracy of their responses and to address any additional concerns that they may have concerning the collected data and analysis. As the researcher, I reviewed my thoughts and theories because I was responsible for the data collection. I did not allow my personal thoughts and feeling to get involved with the data collection. I used Temi.com an outside agency to transcribe the collected data to omit any biases. The collected data was coded using NVivo and manually coded.

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Summary

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore why implementing positive behavioral interventions and supports was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia. The purposeful sampling of participants gave detailed information including their feelings, opinions, and understandings to explore positive implementation and

develop positive ways to support African American students who have experienced

trauma issues that need additional help to be successful in school. Semi-structured open-

ended questions were used to gain a better understanding of ways to reduce short-term

suspensions for African American students. After uploading the interview responses into

NVivo and themes were developed to address the research questions.

In chapter 4, I provided detailed results that emerged from the Zoom interview

responses from the 10 participants. The four themes that emerged from the teachers

interview responses were: (a) student behaviors issues (b) relationship building issues (c)

lack of professional development and (d) PBIS implementation challenges. The three

themes that emerged from the administrator interview responses were: (a) inconsistent

disciplinary actions, (b) relationship building issues, and (c) student behavior issues.

Chapter 5 discussed the interpretations of the findings, limitations, recommendations, and

the conclusion of the entire study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia. This study was conducted to explore a gap in knowledge regarding exploring the implementation of PBIS and to develop positive ways to support African American students who have experienced trauma. This study used a basic qualitative research design to gain a rich understanding of how implementing PBIS may reduce the short term suspensions that African American students receive due to exhibiting negative behaviors. The rich and detailed responses from the participants' interviews were used to create eight emerging themes that support the need to implement PBIS for African American students who receive short term suspensions from negative behaviors, causing them to lack in their academic.

I conducted an exhaustive literature review on the implementation of PBIS for African American students who received multiple short term suspensions. The research was conducted on the reasons African American students receive suspensions. However, disparity exists between African American and White students who receive short term suspensions and support from the implementation of PBIS. In Chapter 3, I outlined the methodology, data collection, and data analysis process for the study. In Chapter 4, I provided the results from nine teachers and one administrator after conducting one-on-one interviews. The interviews provided an in-depth understanding of implementing PBIS for African American students who received multiple short term suspensions. This

study contributes to the gap in knowledge and literature and has probable positive social change benefits in that the proper implementation of PBIS may reduce short term suspensions for African American students, possibly leading to higher academic achievement. Chapter 5 provided the interpretation of the findings in connection with the literature and conceptual framework. I also discuss the limitations of the study along with recommendations for future studies and implications of social change, and I end the study with a conclusion.

In this study, I focused on the implementation of PBIS to help reduce short term suspensions for African American students with nine teachers and one administrator from a local elementary school in Virginia. Many of the African American students received multiple suspensions for fighting, talking back, and being disrespectful to staff. Therefore, schools should consider implementing PBIS because of its focus on an inclusive system of PBIS for all students in school that is applied both in the classroom and in nonclassroom areas (Whitley, 2018). African American students who receive short term suspensions need support with their academic performances and behaviors in the classroom to eliminate the educational gaps involving the students' academic success. Camera (2020) explained that the educational gap will not be closed as long as a gap in discipline exists. PBIS is a framework designed for students who exhibit behavioral issues that affect their academic performance and can be a support to closing the educational and discipline gap.

The essential research questions that directed this research were the following:

RQ1-Qualitative: What are teachers' perceptions of why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia?

RQ2-Qualitative: What are administrators' perceptions of why implementing PBIS was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia?

Research Question 1

The significant findings were as follows:

In terms of RQ1, the teachers who participated in the study provided detailed information on their experiences with implementing PBIS at the local site. The themes that emerged from the participant responses included (a) student behaviors issues, (b) relationship building issues, (c) lack of professional development, and (d) PBIS implementation challenges. Many of the African American students who attend the local elementary school have received some disciplinary action up to and including suspensions. African American students are disciplined an average of 20% more harshly for their first offense and 29% more harshly for the second offense than White students for the same behaviors (Arends, 2019). African American students are punished more harshly because they tend to be stereotyped as troublemakers and exhibit more severe behaviors versus their White counterparts. Several of these punishments or disciplinary action results from students display unwanted behaviors. Some of the students fight, talk back, or act out for varies of different reasons. The participants expressed the importance of building relationships with the students and parents. One of the participants shared

"that if you show up for the student's games, acknowledge their birthdays, and attend any outside extracurricular activity involving the student [it] is a great way to build positive relationships with the students." The participants expressed the need to receive more training in order to support the African American students who receive short term suspensions. Participants explained that they receive training during professional development at the beginning of school, but that there is no additional training to rebuild the teachers throughout the school year. The effectiveness of PBIS is used in schools to improve the school climate, academics, and reduce suspensions, so teachers must receive additional training with cultural openness to address the gap in research (McDaniels et al., 2017). Cultural openness is necessary when there is a diverse student population. When teachers lack professional development trainings, the teacher cannot support students with the implementation of PBIS or support a diverse student population. When teachers are aware of and understand their students' strengths and weaknesses concerning their academic and behavioral performances, teachers are better prepared to work with a diverse student population (Kampen, 2019). When students exhibit negative behaviors, teachers need to implement positive strategies to help students improve the negative behaviors. According to Bennett (2020), some of the positive strategies used to support students with negative behaviors include setting strong and clear routines for the classroom, using silent signals for interventions to help students stay on track, avoid embarrassing the student, and providing the student with a classroom task to help them reset. Additional strategies may include a warning, timeout, or giving the students a chance to calm down. There may be different challenges faced when teachers are trying

to help students exhibit positive behaviors, and students are sometimes challenged when they are receiving them. School policies are developed to help guide students in and out of the classroom. Participants identified that school rules and PBIS rules were important and helped support the students when they are consistently used. Bennett (2018) stated that PBIS classroom management is preeminently reinforced when the school-wide PBIS rules are implemented and teachers and students collectively create school rules that guide students with the expectations that are required to be successful. PBIS is a proactive framework used to guide and support students before the negative behaviors take place. Although African American students at the study site receive short term suspensions, the school's goal is to create a positive climate where all students may be successful and the suspensions can decrease.

The participants revealed the challenges of implementing PBIS to attempt to reduce short term suspensions. The challenges included the lack of teacher-student relationships and professional development trainings focused on identifying strategies needed to implement PBIS. Professional development trainings are vital for teachers because they increase the teacher's knowledge and build confidence so that teachers are better prepared when working with students who have behavioral challenges. According to Kampen (2019), professional development trainings can help teachers improve the skills they need to feel confident when supporting students. One participant stated "that teachers need more PBIS training throughout the school year to better help students that have negative behaviors." Teachers improve the strategies that are used to implement PBIS while becoming proficient when they attend professional development trainings (King,

2018). Teachers cannot support students who consistently display negative behaviors when there are not intentional efforts made to develop these skills through professional development trainings.

Another challenge is the lack of teacher-student relationships. Student/teacher relationships are an important part of their success because students who have experienced poverty are at risk of having productive relationships with teachers (McKinnon et al., 2018). One participant stated "that teachers lack positive relationships with students because they are not culturally diverse or supportive toward the students." According to Sparks (2020), students fail to progress when teachers do not recognize the significance of their relationships because the teacher's/student relationship will support the student in and out of the classroom.

Research Question 2

In terms of RQ2, an administrator provided detailed information on their experiences with implementing PBIS at the local site. The significant themes that emerged from the administrator included (a) inconsistent discipline, (b) relationship building issues, and (c) student behavior issues. The administrator acknowledged the high suspension rates for African American students due to fighting and disrespectful behavior. Student and teacher relationships are a very important part of school success. The administrator stated, "You get the best out of students when students know that teachers care about them." Schools are more productive when the teachers receive current training in implementing PBIS. The administrator addressed the need to have training with other school districts because many students transfer from other school districts.

Sometimes students face challenges because they come from other school districts and the district does not have the same rules as their current school. The lack of district training has hindered some of the students and the administrator felt the need for additional training. The administrator discussed the need to create a positive social climate for the students. Developing open lines of communication and making the students feel comfortable when the students are asked to share their feeling on why they did what they did can create a warm environment for the students. Students need to feel wanted and safe. It is ideal to have a positive school atmosphere because it can help students feel safe and wanted and succeed in school.

The administrator acknowledged many challenges, such as the lack of professional development trainings. The administrator expressed the need to implement more training throughout the school year. These professional development training can help teachers have better control of students and their classrooms. The training can give them a better understanding of how to handle students who have problems in school. Kampen (2019) stated that teachers need professional development training to build confident and positive school culture. Schools must support their teachers with professional development training because it can make a difference.

The nine teachers and one administrator shared two of the same themes. The data revealed that the administrator had the same perceptions and feelings as some of the teachers. I assumed the administrator's responses would be different because the administrator engages with the students after the negative behaviors have been reported. All of the participants were able to identify the behavior issues and concerns that have

caused many of the suspensions for African American students. Moreover, participants expressed the importance and positive outcomes of implementing PBIS. When teachers can focus on PBIS, they build an atmosphere that helps all students accomplish significant behavior changes (Rodriguez, 2018). The teacher population for the school was diverse, and it was revealed that many of the teachers lack cultural awareness because they had limited knowledge of the student population. After interviewing the participants, the emerging themes were developed from the participant's responses. Although it may seem challenging to support students who have behavior issues, teachers can implement PBIS strategies to avoid negative behaviors and inspire positive behaviors (Brown, 2020). The participants expressed that supporting students with behavior issues and concerns can be challenging; however, if teachers are using PBIS, students are more likely to be successful. In this study, I explored the importance of implementing PBIS for African American students who received multiple short term suspensions.

Interpretation of the Findings

My interpretation of the findings for this basic qualitative study were within the guidelines of confirming and linking the required information concerning the implementation of PBIS needed to help aid African American students with behavior issues. My interpretation of the findings involves the literature and the conceptual framework included in the research study.

Findings and the Literature

The findings were linked with the information recognized in the literature addressing the participants' experiences of implementing PBIS for African American

students who received multiple short term suspensions in an elementary school. I explained the four themes of student behaviors issues, relationship building issues, lack of professional development , and PBIS implementation challenges from nine teachers and one administrator with experience working with African American students who received short term suspensions. Specifics on the four themes were discussed in Chapter 4. This section included the interpretation of the findings along with confirming the need to implement PBIS that will supplement the literature.

Confirmed Research

When the teachers were asked their perceptions of implementing PBIS designed to reduce short term suspensions of African American students in Grades K to 5 in an elementary school in Virginia (RQ1), the responses from the nine teachers developed four themes. The themes that aligned with the literature included behaviors, building relationships. professional development trainings, strategies implemented, challenges, rules, suspensions, and PBIS benefits. For example, the participants revealed that African American students receive multiple short term suspensions for fighting, talking back, and being disrespectful. According to Zill and Wilcox (2019), African American students are more likely to get disciplined and suspended from school for displaying negative behaviors. In addition to the suspensions, the participants explained the need to build positive relationships with the students and the lack of support from the relationships. Sparks (2020) asserted that teachers should connect with students, confirming the need for success and understanding their values to be successful with behaviors and academics while in school. Students' academics usually decrease by as much as two letter grades

due to suspensions (Bell, 2020). Participants in this study also described the importance of professional development trainings. The goal of professional development trainings for teachers is to find supportive techniques to improve teaching and learning strategies to build sustainability and proficient endurance to support students who may have behavior concerns (Washington, 2020).

As teachers continue to find positive ways to reduce the short-term suspensions, it is important that they use appropriate strategies. Several participants expressed the need to implement strategies to support African American students that receive short-term suspensions. PBIS offers an alternative to everyday discipline approaches because the path of discipline desires a selected process to more positive, proactive, and preventative methods to encourage and support students that have behavior problems (Schmitz, 2019). The participants expressed several challenges when implementing PBIS. One participant stated that many school districts lack consistency with the implementation of PBIS rules and guidelines because when students transfer to other school districts they are sometimes unaware of the PBIS rules.

As described by Newman (2021), a classroom without consistent rules is usually unsuccessful, but a classroom that creates an atmosphere that have expected rules and guidelines will ensure that students are successful. Being consistent will help students promote positive behaviors and increase academics. According to Whitley (2018), schools need to improve the social culture needs for students in different school districts to accomplish behavior and academic achievements. Improving social culture can help decrease challenging behaviors causing students to increase their academic success. The

participants expressed the need to discuss classroom rules along with implementing the rules for PBIS.

Successful classroom management can help teachers teach students that have behavior concerns as well as provide a positive reinforcement that can support and encourage positive student behavior (Rodriguez, 2018). One participant stated that African American students are suspended from school when they do not follow the school rules. Another participant discussed having an alternative disciplinary action for the students that display negative behaviors. An alternative to the suspension may include in-school suspension because the student could continue to learn, receive academic support, talk with other students that display negative behaviors as well as receive support from a teacher (Jones, 2019). (PBIS) is the submission of evidence-based avoidance strategies with the use of covered rules, procedures, and outcomes that support student academic and behavioral requirements (Henderson & Bourgeois, 2021).

When the administrator was asked the perceptions of implementing (PBIS) designed to reduce short-term suspensions of African American students in Grades K-5 in an elementary school in Virginia (RQ2), the response from the administrator developed eight themes. The themes that aligned with the literature included behaviors issues, building relationships issues. Lack of professional development trainings, Strategies implemented, teacher-student challenges, implementing rules, suspensions issues, and PBIS benefits. For example, the administrator revealed that African American students receive short-term suspensions for fighting and being disrespectful. African American

students, especially African American boys are more likely to be disciplined and penalized for negative behaviors (Arends, 2019).

The participant noted that it is critical for teacher-student relationships because students want to know that the teachers care about them. The teacher-student relationship has vital, encouraging, and long-lasting effects on the students' academic and behavior development (Rimm-Kaufmann & Sandilos, 2021a). The participant noted that although the teachers and administrators had to attend PBIS model trainings there is a need to receive additional professional development training. Professional development training for (PBIS) helps teachers generate a positive school climate that involves a safe place for students and encouraging a learning atmosphere that promotes student success (King, 2019).

Participant 10 mentioned that the administrators have a lot of empowering conversations encouraging, and highlighting the positive behaviors that students have displayed, so that students can appreciate doing good things in the school. Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilo (2021), expressed when students experience nurturing care from teachers, the student feels a solid personal connection, often communicates and is open to receiving more positive direction and praise versus everyday criticism from the teacher. Nurturing students can support students by allowing the students to voice their opinions, attain better behavior and academic achievements, and supporting students when they need to build trust in difficult situations (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilo, 2021). The participant expressed that the pandemic presented challenges for the students that were virtual and to keep the students connected and informed using PBIS, the teachers created

an activity identified as class houses. A class house was an activity used to monitor and support student's behaviors, so the teachers split the students up into houses during the Zoom sessions. Another challenge was that the teachers had to create a different plan for the students when they returned to school.

Teaching can be challenging for teachers, but as long as the teacher cares about the students and have a desire to help them, both with the academics in the class and the behavior issues outside the class, teachers, and students can have a successful and rewarding year (Doskocil, 2016). The participant noted that PBIS had rules that were designed to support students and provide them with behavior interventions to help reduce suspensions. An understandable set of classroom rules has the power to make any classroom great because schools provide students with rules to help encourage them to do great things, so it is important that the school provide logical and straightforward rules that students can understand (Cox, 2020). The administrator explained that African American students get suspended more than any other culture.

According to Riddle & Sinclair (2019), African American students in the United States have a higher suspension rate than White students causing them to have an even higher risk of negative academic success. The benefits of implementing PBIS is that the entire school operates on one accord, so the students that attend the same elementary school will have an understanding and know what is expected for positive behaviors, interventions, and structures because they are hearing it throughout the entire school and school year. PBIS is a set of tools and strategies created to provide basic techniques that help support students with challenging behaviors. Instead of punishing students for their

behaviors, teachers must identify the importance of classroom management by implementing productive school discipline to reduce suspensions for all students (Rodriguez, 2018). Classroom management creates a positive, productive, and conducive learning environment for students that need support.

This study supported the literature in highlighting the importance of implementing PBIS. PBIS was created to provide students with a positive learning environment, so that they can learn, make better decisions, and increase their academics (Wickham, 2020). PBIS foundational structures involve a three-tiered system that is used to help support students with behavior problems (Franchino, 2020).

Franchino (2020) found that students receive clear teaching, modeling, and training of behavior expectations and dependable positive reinforcement in Tier 1. Students who display difficult challenging behaviors receive behavior support from interventions in Tier 2 that may include small group lessons, implements for self-management, and everyday check-ins with teachers. When students do not respond to tiers I and II the students will be directed with more inclusive supports using Tier 3, such as personalized behavior support plans and all-day services (Franchino, 2020). The tiers are divided into three categories which are used to respond and provide support to students based on their behavioral needs.

The study also confirmed the literature involving the benefits of building relationships with students and professional development trainings for teachers. Additionally, participants expressed the need to build positive student/teacher relationships to help students lessen their behavior problems and increase academics. Lei

et al. (2018) noted that as students devote much of their time with the teachers in school, teacher support is important to students' academic and behavior success. When there is a positive teacher-student relationship the teacher develops an environment that is welcoming and the environment becomes more conducive in meeting the needs of the students' academic and behavior needs.

When teachers attend PBIS trainings the teachers learn strategies to help support students that display negative behaviors. PBIS is a tool used to decrease the negative behaviors that students display so that the student can be successful in their academics. Schools can ensure success for the students by providing teachers with acceptable professional development trainings to assure that PBIS systems succeed in schools (King, 2021). Professional development trainings for teachers provide a stronger school climate.

Findings from this basic qualitative study also support literature regarding the need to confidently support the implementation of PBIS in schools. The participants expressed their perception of implementing PBIS to help support African American students that receive short-term suspensions. Although the suspension rates are high for African American students, the school implemented PBIS to help decrease some of the negative behaviors and improve the student's academic performances.

Contributions to the Literature

Findings from this study added knowledge to the literature by acknowledging the themes that would support the implementation of PBIS and African American students that receive short-term suspensions. The students could benefit from using PBIS as a proactive approach to stop negative behaviors before they cause the student to react

negatively. Encouraging the positive behaviors the school expects will ensure that the students will be successful in their academic performances and behaviors. The participants involved in the study identified that the implementation of PBIS could be a benefit to help student's behavioral and academic performances. The participants expressed the need to implement the rules and guidelines of PBIS at the beginning of the school year to support students that display negative behaviors. Although many students receive short-term suspensions, PBIS provides a framework that could help lessen some of the short-term suspensions. Whereas when teachers do not receive the proper professional development training, they lack student support finding it difficult to provide the necessary techniques and strategies that could better the student's behavioral and academic performances. The schools lack of professional development trainings, and teacher-student relationships were identified as areas of improvement that impacted student behavioral and academic performances. As teachers continue to promote and use preventive strategies as a result of PBIS, rather than endorsing school punishments students may have better behavioral and academic performances. The issues that affect students behavioral and academic performances is complicated.

Conceptual Framework

I viewed the implementation of PBIS with the participants through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory which is recognized for its descriptions of the impact of social environments on human development. The conceptual framework provided the primary basis for understanding the determination of the participants in the study. The theoretical perspective acknowledged in the literature

pertains to Bronfenbrenner (1994) ecological system theory that views child development as a complex system of relationships affected by different surroundings focus on five systems to include: (a) microsystems, (b) mesosystems, (c) exosystem, (d) macrosystems, and (e) chronosystems. The ecological systems theory has five systems that are used to support teachers and administrators concerning students that display negative behaviors. The school used the content from the ecological systems theory to develop a warm environment for the students to increase academic performances and lessen negative behaviors (Alam, 2021). The nine teachers and one administrator that participated in this study who provided their perceptions of implementing PBIS for African American students that received multiple short-term suspensions in an elementary school in Virginia identified behaviors, relationship building, professional development trainings, strategies implemented, challenges, rules, suspensions, and PBIS benefits as positive influences to help support students. Bronfenbrenner developed five system levels to support the impact of in the classroom and getting to the core of the behavior social environments on human development. Participants acknowledged the need to implement (PBIS) to encourage and motivate African American students with behavior issues with a positive plan used to lessen short-term suspensions and increase academics.

Several of the participants expressed that multiple students receive short-term suspensions for fighting, talking back, and being disrespectful. Anslinger (2020), concluded that instead of suspending students from the classroom PBIS alter the motivation to supporting the student problem. PBIS are designed to decrease behavior problems, as these results are accomplished through teaching, trainings, and making sure

that the students understand the guideline and rules to make the required changes. The lack of professional development trainings, building relationships, and the challenges that the teachers and African American students faced were all stated as contributing factors.

The evidence from the participant's responses supports Bronfenbrenner's theory which explains the direct contact among the students, teachers, their surroundings, and the environment of the students in the elementary school (Guy-Evans, 2020). Students have a better chance of being successful in school when they build positive relationships with their teachers. According to Guy-Evans (2020), a study conducted by Lippard, LA Paro, Rouse, and Crosby (2017), discovered that relationships between the student and teacher had a significant outcome with the students' academic performances and behaviors, recommending that the relationships supports the student's development and the Ecological Systems Theory. The Ecological Systems Theory guidelines influence the success of students' academic performances and behavioral issues.

Limitations of the Study

The main goal of this study was to explore the implementations of positive behavior intervention support for African American students. The findings of this study contributed to the existing knowledge related to implementing PBIS. The local elementary school should continue to implement PBIS as a validated source to support students that have behavior issues and lack academics. I was interested in finding out how PBIS could help African American students receive lesser suspensions and better academics in an elementary school. Although the research study supported and provided detailed information to explore the implementation of PBIS for African American

students that receive multiple short-term suspensions, the study encountered many limitations. Limitations in a research study signify weaknesses within the study that may impact the outcomes and decisions of the research (Ross and Zaidi, 2019). Limitations in a research study may include the sample size, reliable data, location, and research bias. The first limitation is the data collection was from one school district in Virginia. I recruited nine teachers and one administrator from the same local elementary school in Virginia. The teachers included eight females and one male. The study could have used more males to provide a diverse perspective of implementing PBIS in the local elementary school. Additional research from other school districts could have provided a better understanding of African American suspensions and implementing PBIS.

The second limitation in the research study was using a small sample size. I distributed 40-60 flyers, while only recruiting nine teachers and one administrator that worked at the local elementary school in Virginia. Using a larger sample size would provide an in-depth understanding of exploring the implementation of PBIS and African American students that receive suspensions.

The third limitation of this study was researcher bias. Researcher bias was necessary to address due to my own experiences with African American students who have received short term suspensions. The methods used to decrease researcher bias comprised the use of note-taking throughout the process, using Zoom to audio record the interview, and the use of an outside transcription agency to maintain an arms-length relationship with the data. I also engaged in member checking, which is the process in which participants review a copy of their transcribed interview for accuracy. The

aforementioned methods were used to provide little opportunity for my biases to be integrated in the data collection process.

Recommendations

The findings from this research study produced several recommendations. The recommendations for this study are listed into two categories to include: Recommendations for Future Studies and Recommendations for Practice.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Recommendation 1: Explore With Other School Districts

The participants explored the implementation of PBIS in an elementary school with African American students who receive multiple short-term suspensions. Some of the participants indicated the importance of implementing PBIS in elementary schools. This study should be conducted in other school districts that have high rates of short-term suspensions among African Americans and experience with implementing PBIS to gain a deeper understanding of how African American students can be best supported and in turn reduce the short-term suspensions.

Recommendation 2: Sample Size

This study took place at a local elementary school; a larger sample size could be used to conduct a new research study. Shetty (2018) recommended sample size of at least 20-30 participants and Vasileiou et al. (2018), recommend that qualitative sample sizes are sufficient to develop a rich understanding, but small enough that the collected data is not prohibited. I recommend using a larger sample size with other school districts to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges of implementing PBIS.

Recommendation 3: Interview Students Who Have Received Short Term Suspensions

To gain a deeper understanding of the behaviors that have resulted in short-term suspensions, interviewing students that received short-term suspensions is recommended. Interviewing these students will provide teachers and administrators with insight from the student's perspectives. It may also provide contextual information about the reasons for the negative behaviors and their perceptions of short-term suspensions.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Recommendation 1: Provide an Alternative for Short Term Suspensions

Students that receive short-term suspensions spend a significant amount of time out of school. The participants suggested that an alternative disciplinary plan be developed that supports student's success. Research has shown that student's academic success is linked to how often they attend school. One alternative is to eliminate suspension to the home and transition to in school suspension. This alternative will ensure that students remain within the learning environment.

Recommendation 2: Provide a Mentor for Students Who Have Received Short Term Suspensions

Building positive relationships with teachers is vital to academic success. By providing students who exhibit behaviors that lead to short-term suspensions with a mentor this may provide them with the social emotional support needed that may not only decrease negative behaviors but increase their academic performance. This additional resource has the potential to strengthen a teacher-student relationship.

In this study, I explored the implementation of PBIS for African American students in an elementary school that receive multiple short-term suspensions. Upon completion of this study, I recognized that my research provides the opportunity to explore additional research concerning African American students and suspensions. This study should be simulated with other elementary schools in other districts with teachers that have experience working with African American students that have received multiple short-term suspensions. The data was collected from nine teachers and one administrator. Conducting a study with other elementary schools in other districts could provide a deeper understanding of why African American students receive multiple short-term suspensions and how PBIS can help reduce some of those suspensions.

African American students receive suspensions at higher rates than White students (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). The recommendation for additional research may have positive, lengthy, long-lasting impacts that will add to the present literature on short-term suspensions and PBIS. Teachers and administrators from other school districts can share their thoughts and opinions on strategies that may help reduce short-term suspensions. When students transfer to schools in other districts it would be ideal to be consistent with suspensions along with the rules and guidelines of positive behavior intervention support.

Implications

This study presented several implications for positive social change. This study contributed to the literature by providing insight into the challenges of implementing PBIS and its use to reduce the number of short-term suspensions that African American students. Teachers and administrators must recognize the need to continue targeting the

students that exhibit negative behaviors and are at high risk by supporting them with PBIS plans. The implications for this basic qualitative study are shown below.

Positive Social Change

This study explored teachers' and administrator's perceptions of the challenges of implementing PBIS to reduce multiple short-term suspensions of African Americans. In the context of social change, this study seeks to increase awareness and understanding of the challenges of implementing PBIS. The study provided data on the implementation of PBIS that teachers may use to decrease negative behaviors with African American students who receive short-term suspensions in an elementary school in Virginia. In the context of social change, this study contributes to the literature related to the implementation of PBIS, a framework that contributes to improving behavior and academic performance. The school should implement the strategies and techniques of PBIS to increase the success rate of students. If teachers are properly trained on the implementation of PBIS instead of punishing African American students their behavioral and academic performances will increase (Bennett, 2018), which is a positive social change for the entire school. Implementing PBIS and building better teacher-student relationships may increase the success rate for students that receive short-term suspensions allowing them to be better students in the community. The school can create a positive social change by implementing PBIS strategies allowing students to learn different techniques to deescalate some of the behavior concerns. By supporting and encouraging students to improve their behavior and make better decisions students can bring positive social change and become effective citizens in the community.

Within the context of positive social change, this study provides teachers and administrators with perceptions that may help to improve the implementation of PBIS which may reduce multiple short-term suspensions of African American students. The research findings revealed the need to implement PBIS and build positive relationships with African American students to help reduce some of the short-term suspensions that may increase the student's behavioral and academic performance. The local elementary school can bring positive social change by creating additional professional development trainings for staff, building teacher-student relationships, implementing PBIS strategies. During the 2018-19 school year African American students had a 9% suspension rate compared to 4% for White students, according to Education Department data national African American students are suspended at a higher rate than White students (Taketa, 2021). The findings from this research provided perceptions on the importance of implementing PBIS to support African American students exhibiting negative behaviors.

The results of this study encouraged the use of implementing PBIS and the opportunity to understand and increase academic performances among African American students that receive multiple suspensions. Conducting the interviews allowed teachers and the administrator to share their experiences with implementing PBIS. Finally, my study revealed the importance of using PBIS to teach African American students how to avoid negative behaviors and educate teachers and administrators with the practices needed to decrease unwanted behaviors and increase student performances. The goals of implementing PBIS were to develop and provide students with clear expectation, so that they can attend school in a safe learning environment. One of the participants expressed

the need for a positive school climate, additional positive behavior interventions, and support training. Teachers who are employed in schools with a diverse population of students may need to increase their understanding of the perspectives of students who have different backgrounds and develop strategies to support them.

One potential solution is that schools should eliminate suspensions for minor infractions as this would keep students in school and inhibit them from failing or falling behind academically (Pope, 2018). Students may be more successful when the teachers and administrator implement positive strategies, receive more training, provide an improving school climate, make sure that the students are aware of the school rules, and tackle the challenges that may cause these students to misbehave resulting in short-term suspensions. The content of professional development trainings should be focused on improving the strategies that teachers are utilizing to decrease negative behaviors along with additional training on other cultures to assist teachers with developing a deeper understanding of how to handle culturally diverse students. The professional development trainings focused on PBIS should also include learning best practices along with ways to implement positive rewards in the school's environment. The school's environment should be warm and welcoming, as students should come to school feeling safe and accepted.

Reflections

I am an educator and parent who have seen many African American students receive multiple short-term suspensions. I am extremely enthused about this study, which presents the need to implement PBIS for the student that receives short-term

suspensions. I did not include my opinion in this study nor did I advise the participants that were a part of the interview process. I interviewed each participant, took notes, and analyzed the collected data without sharing my feelings.

This study provided me with a better understanding of the implementation of PBIS. The participants explained their experiences with African American students, therefore I understand the need to build relationships, have more professional development trainings, and implement strategies to help support students that receive short-term suspensions. The participants expressed several challenges of implementing PBIS. The participants felt the need to receive additional professional development training needed to help students make better and proactive decisions. Another participant experienced the challenge that some students were not aware of the PBIS rules because they transfer from other schools or school districts. The participant's responses and willingness to share their experience identified the need to support students with PBIS. PBIS will contribute to student success concerning their behavior and academic accomplishments.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore why implementing positive behavioral interventions and supports was not successful in reducing short term suspensions of African American students in grades K – 5 in an elementary school in Virginia. I conducted one-on-one interviews with nine teachers and one administrator from a local elementary school in Virginia to provide details on the challenges of implementing PBIS. The participants provided in-depth information on PBIS strategies

and challenges implemented for students that exhibited negative behaviors in and out of the classroom. The teachers expressed the benefits of having additional professional development training on PBIS, so that they can support students throughout the school year. Effectively implementing PBIS may help African Americans students that receive short-term suspensions increase their academic performances. When teachers and administrators are encouraging and supportive the students have a better chance of exhibiting positive behaviors and increasing their academic performance.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Volunteers Needed for a Research Study on Implementing Positive Behavior Interventions to reduce Short-term Suspensions of African American K-5 Students

Who do we Need?

Do you work in an elementary school? Do you have experience working with PBIS? Do you hold a bachelor's degree? If so, we are looking for volunteers to participate in a research study.

Participation criteria:
- **employed at the local site for at least 5 years.**
- **experience with implementing PBIS during the years of 2015-2020.**
- **have a bachelor degree.**

For the participants that meet the above criteria please email the following:
- **Name**
- **School**
- **Phone number**
- **Grade Level**

Dates and times for the study will be flexible
Incentive for participation: A $10 gift card to Chick-Fil-A

For more information, please contact Monisha Bynum at XXX-XXX-XXXX or email XXX@waldenu.edu. Thank you in advance for your consideration to participate in this research study.

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

Dear _____:

This letter is written in regards to a qualitative study that I will be conducting to explore the implementation of positive behavioral interventions that reduce short-term suspensions. of African American students in grades K– 5 in an elementary school in Virginia. I received your name from your school administrator who informed me that you have five years or more experience in the same elementary school with African American student who have traumatic issues that receive multiple suspension. The purpose of this study is to explore the implementation of positive behavioral interventions that reduce short-term suspensions of African American students in grades K – 5 in an elementary school in Virginia. I will conduct personal interviews to gather the appropriate information needed to obtain this qualitative study. The goal of this study is to understand teachers and administrator's perceptions of implementing positive behavior interventions that may help reduce multiple short-term suspensions.

If you would like to participate in this qualitative study please respond to me by email at XXX@waldenu.edu no later than-------- confirming your interest. Upon receipt of your interest to participate you will receive the informed consent. Once the informed consent is completed you will be contacted to schedule an interview. The interview process will last approximately 60 minutes with an additional 30 minutes if it becomes necessary. A ten-dollar gift card from Chick-fil-A will be provided for participating in this research study. Please remember that this is a volunteer study and you do not have to respond if you will not participant. Your response to participate will be kept confidential. You will not be penalized in any way for not participating in this research study.

Thank you in advance for your quality time in reading my letter and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Monisha Bynum
Doctorate Student at Walden University

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

1. What grade do you currently teach?

2. How many years of experience do you have working with students in grades K-5?

3. How many years experience you have with implementing PBIS?

4. What experiences do you have with implementing PBIS and how have you implemented it in your school?

5. What do you see as the benefits of implementing PBIS in your school?

6. What are challenges you have faced in implementing PBIS in your school?

7. How can PBIS support African American students that receive multiple suspensions?

8. What training have you received related to the implementation of PBIS?

9. What additional training do you believe teachers need to be successful with the implementation of PBIS?

10. How do African American students respond to interactions they perceive as negative?

11. How do White students respond to interactions they perceive as negative?

12. Tell me ways that you have created a positive environment for the students that have displayed negative behaviors?

13. How can the school create a positive social environment that will support students who exhibit negative behaviors?

14. What strategies do you use when students exhibit negative behaviors?

15. Tell me about your experiences with African American students that have behavior concerns and how do you support them?

16. What behaviors do African American students exhibit that result in short-term suspensions?

17. What behaviors do White students exhibit that result in short-term suspensions?

18. How can teachers support African American students that receive short-term suspensions? How are African American students that receive multiple short-term suspensions supported by the teachers?

19. How important is the teacher/student relationship and what techniques do you use to develop them?

20. How do teacher interactions influence the negative behaviors that children display?

21. Are there any other comments you would like to share related to implementing positive behavior interventions and short-terms suspensions?

<div align="center">Demographic Questions</div>

1. Place an X on the line to specify your identity:

    _____White
    _____Hispanic or Latino
    _____Black or African American
    _____Native American or American Indian
    _____Asian / Pacific Islander
    _____Other

2. What is your current position?

    _____Teacher

    _____Administrator

3. What is the highest degree you have completed?

_____Bachelor's degree

_____Master's degree

_____Doctorate degree

4. Gender

_____Male

_____Female

5. Gender: How do you Identify

_____Man

_____Non-binary

_____Woman

_____Prefer to self-describe

Appendix D: Field Notes Documentation Form

Date: _____

Time: _____

Interviewee (Participant): _____

Email Address (Participant): _____

Place of Interview: _____

Device used to record interview: _____

Field Notes from the interview: (Listed below is personal notes and observations from the interview)