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African American Students' Experiences with Teachers' Discriminatory Behavior in the School-to-Prison Pipeline

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Abstract

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by

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MS: Master of Science in Criminal Justice, Purdue Global University, 2014

MS: Master of Philosophy, Walden University, 2020

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

African American students have been affected by the School-to-Prison pipeline detrimentally. The disproportionate expulsions of African American students from schools have resulted in their overrepresentation in prison. Racial inequity has made African American students more prone to suspensions than Caucasian students, resulting in African American students missing classes and falling behind academically. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how minor disciplinary violations may be perceived as a threat to African American students, funneling them into the school-to-prison pipeline. The theoretical framework was based on Bertalanffy's general system theory. Data were collected using open-ended, semi structured interviews with 10 adult students. The research questions were designed to focus on the disparate implementation of the zero tolerance policy. Results from coding analysis revealed eight themes: poor psychological health concerns, impoverished impacts on academic and social well-being, prejudiced behavior of teachers, unjust disciplinary actions, rehabilitative perspectives, negative expectancies from African American students, demeaning communication, and bias in teachers' conduct. Findings may be used to promote positive change by increasing awareness of the need to provide professional training sessions to teachers to improve academic outcomes for African American students and to mitigate the school-to-prison pipeline.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

There is a vast disparity in schools' disciplinary practices based on race, ethnicity, and color (Gopalan & Nelson, 2019; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019; Wegmann & Smith, 2019). The school-to-prison pipeline is a common circumstance in the U.S. Public school system (Wittig, 2017). Activities such as out-of-school suspension, expulsions, and on-campus arrests take students out of their classrooms and funnel them into the juvenile justice system or criminal justice system (Marchbanks & Blakes, 2018). These punitive disciplinary actions are applied more to students of color, especially to African American students (Gopalan & Nelson, 2019). The school-to-prison pipeline predominantly punishes students of color, even for minimal offenses such as being absent from class or disrespecting teachers (McCarter, 2016). These minor infractions make Black students receive more discretionary suspensions than White students, making these students miss classes and fall behind academically (Marchbanks & Blakes, 2018). These students feel threatened as minor offenses push them out of school and lead them to prison, according to the research conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (2014). Black students were more prone to incarceration than White students, regardless of insignificant differences between dangerous behaviors portrayed by African American and White students. Such disparities have created an overall impression within the students of color that the educational process is not working for them and have provided unequal learning opportunities based on race (Loveless, 2017).

The zero tolerance policy was enacted to punish everyone equally who was conducting violent and illegal activities; however, it was more harshly implemented on

Black students while other races were treated differently (Triplett et al., 2014). There was no evidence that this policy played any part in reducing misbehavior or violent activities in schools. Instead, this policy contributed to increasing school dropouts and inflating the student population in prison (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Controlling for factors such as family income, type of offense, and gender, African American students faced 31% more school discretionary action than White students (McCarter, 2016).

The current study focused on exploring whether there was a discriminatory behavior in practice and biased implementation of the school-to-prison pipeline against African American students and the effects caused to their lives due to these unfair and punitive policies. Further, if discriminatory behavior was found, I sought to determine the causes of this discriminatory behavior in implementing a zero-tolerance policy by exploring whether the public school education system in Texas is malfunctioning. Prior research had shown that White students only get punished for committing felonies under the same laws, thereby establishing bias that creates frustration and poor self-esteem among students of color (Skiba et al., 2002). The learning environment gets adversely affected, and the children suffer more when school resource officers overwhelmingly monitor disciplinary practices. Apart from this, the economic cost associated with funneling children to the prison pipeline is in millions of dollars. According to 2008 statistics, the total amount spent by the state of Texas for incarcerating nonviolent juvenile offenders was almost 5 billion dollars (Raufu, 2017). A significant amount was for African American students with no specific charge other than being a student of color, resulting in vulnerability and hopelessness in their lives (Raufu, 2017).

The research topic selected for this study addressed the concerns of African American students due to the application of the zero-tolerance policy, and the adverse effects caused to their lives due to this policy. This study also addressed the gap in research that existed regarding the school-to-prison pipeline in Texas. There is a dropout rate of almost 2% in high schools, and there is racial disparity in the suspension rate (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2019). The current qualitative study was conducted to identify the primary cause of differential treatment by including participants who experienced the issue firsthand. The intention was to have credible research to share with relevant authorities to help them improve policies (see Bouchein, 2015).

Chapter 1 includes background and overview of the research topic related to disparities in school-to-prison pipeline practice for African American students. In this chapter, the problem statement is discussed along with the purpose of this study to answer research questions with the help Bertalanffy's (1968) general system theory as the theoretical framework. Further, the chapter includes the nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance, and a summary.

Background

In 2016, McCarter described school-based offenses as the primary baseline for the school-to-prison pipeline. The zero tolerance policy was implemented in the 1990s in the United States to suspend the students who committed misconduct, making schools free from violent and drug-related activities. These suspensions so far have not proved effective in improving students' behavior, but instead have provided adverse consequences that were not intended originally (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). The zero-

tolerance policies were the primary cause of students dropping out of schools and moving into the juvenile justice system. In 2017, Ellis shared views and claimed that zero-tolerance policies and school resource officer programs are leading causes of an increased number of law enforcement officers present in schools every day.

Consequently, adolescents, particularly African Americans, get punished for misdemeanors under a criminal law that propels them to prison. Based on societal stereotypes, Black students suffer more harshly for infringements than White students and have a higher suspension rate (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014). Students of color are treated disproportionately for similar offenses. Teachers also treat these students differently due to colorblind racism and consider the students of color as older than their age instead of educating them equally like other students (Hinojosa and Moras, 2009). Teachers discriminatory behavior pushes more Black students to prison.

The school-to-prison pipeline has been evidenced by the existing racial disparity in the arrests made. Black students have limited educational opportunities in the United States, and the schools they attend often have scarce resources available (Darling-Hammond, 2000). As a result, Black students achieve at lower rates than their White peers. Strict educational policies under the zero-tolerance plan resulted in more severe consequences for Black students labeling them as criminals and ultimately funneling them to prisons. Discriminating behavior impeded Black students' right to obtain a quality education (Berlowitz et al., 2017). According to the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (2015, as cited in Laird, 2019), Black students were 4 times more

likely to be suspended and twice as likely to be expelled than White students with disabilities.

In 2018, Buchanan revealed that students' misconduct affects some students more adversely than others based on different racial backgrounds. The harsh disciplinary practices for African American students result in them being overrepresented in prisons. Their academic achievements are affected, and their behavior worsens due to the prison environment that leads them to a life of criminal activities. It was not affirmed that a high level of exclusionary discipline made the educational system better. Instead, it diverted African American students from the path of learning to the predatory prison pipeline and victimized the students for offenses that the school's disciplinary committee could have sorted out. Out-of-school suspensions, in-school suspensions, or expulsion of minority students due to misdemeanors cannot make schools a safer place. Limited research on the causes of disproportionalities that exist for African American students in practices and implementation of the school-to-prison pipeline made it difficult for researchers to address the issue and provide guidance to policymakers in designing policies to improve the education system in the United States (Buchanan, 2018). To fill the gap, the current study addressed the causes behind this bias.

Marchbanks and Blake (2018) explained the disproportionalities based on race in the Texas education system; Texas constitutes 10% of the students from public schools in the United States, so the overall impact is based on demographics. African American children are funneled more often to the prison pipeline, the lack of educational achievements influences the behavior of these students, and the outcomes lead them to

criminal activities and increased chances of recidivism (Marchbanks & Blake, 2018). Research on this topic was assessed to explain disproportionate minority contact with the criminal justice system. The theoretical framework in the current study assisted in answering the research questions to achieve the goal of understanding how the exclusionary disciplinary practices of the zero-tolerance policy resulted in more adverse outcomes for African American than White students.

Problem Statement

African American students were affected by the school-to-prison pipeline detrimentally (White, 2018). The disproportionate expulsions of these students from school to the criminal justice system resulted in the overrepresentation of minority populations in prison. The hostile racial environment in schools caused the behavior of African American students to be disruptive, ultimately funneling them from the school to prison. This brutality made African American students antisocial and violent. Unequal sanctions imposed on minority students in the name of zero tolerance policies took the constitutional rights of freedom and equality away (Siman, 2005). The zero-tolerance system was designed to make a society free from unlawful activities. The policy was intended to punish everyone equally, but its disparate implementation undermined the life opportunities of African American students (Raufu, 2017).

The U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection demonstrated that the school-to-prison pipeline was prosecuting minorities, specifically African American Students, in large proportion for many years (Marchbanks & Blake, 2018). During recent years, these students were diverted from preschools to juvenile justice

systems and even to the adult court system. The harsh application of punitive policies affected the lives of Black students (Buchanan, 2018). The problem was exacerbated and the reputation of the Texas educational system was damaged when low-level behavioral issues of minority students were charged as offenses. Studies were conducted in all Texas public schools to monitor the students being troubled by these punitive policies (School-to-Prison Pipeline in Texas, 2012). This research helped to fill the gap that existed in determining the causes behind the disproportionalities affecting African American students' lives in funneling them from school to-prison.

Purpose of the Study

In this qualitative study, I explored whether there was discriminatory behavior in the practical implementation of the zero-tolerance policy at schools. Further, this study was intended to highlight the effects of zero-tolerance policies on the lives of African Americans. Findings may help policymakers, school administrators, and lawmakers assess the impacts caused by such policies on the lives of students of color, prompting these stakeholders to make changes to the school system.

A case study approach was used to explore whether there was discriminatory behavior, and to explore the adverse effects of the zero-tolerance policy on African American students. The research questions were based on the gap in the collected literature. Findings from this study may help policymakers and concerned authorities understand the detrimental effects that African American students have been facing in the educational system after the introduction of the zero-tolerance policy (see Patton, 2015).

Research Questions

1. What concerns do the African American students have regarding the application of zero-tolerance policies in the disciplinary system of public schools?
2. Does discriminatory behavior manifest in the application of zero-tolerance policy when teachers are dealing with African American students?
3. Is there a disparity in the behavior and practice of zero-tolerance policy for African American students?

Theoretical Framework

Bertalanffy's (1968) general system theory was used to provide a framework for this research. Bertalanffy proposed the general system theory in the 1940s; he was considered a primary developer of this theory, while Ashby extended his work in 1964. According to Bertalanffy, a system is defined as an overall complex in which different elements interact with each other and their environment and external factors. While interacting with external factors, the system gains new properties and changes in it, which means that it is a continuous evolution process (Bertalanffy, 1968).

The system theory focuses on every part of the organization where each entity coordinates for efficiency instead of splitting into sections, where there is no link between them. Descartes's scientific method proceeded under assumptions of interlinked concepts. Every component in the system is acknowledged as a self-governing entity and expresses the totality of the system. Bertalanffy (1968, as cited in McNeill & Freiburger, 1993) claimed that the basis for the scientific method was inherently wrong. The general

system theory provided an alternative to traditional hierarchy in an organization. It included transformation, enabling an entity to grow by taking feedback from both inside and outside the boundary. Many systems worked together in an organization to provide innovative structural blocks and increments to growth. For evaluating a subsystem, a holistic or reductionist approach could be used. The general system theory emphasizes holism over reductionism as an approach in which an entire system is examined as a complete function unit (Bertalanffy, 1968). This theory was appropriate for the current study because I attempted to develop valid generalizations based on a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the phenomenon. I also added substantial insights to understand a complex phenomenon.

In this qualitative case study, public schools were considered a system or entity. Their parts or elements were the students who are affected by external factors like over use of zero-tolerance policies and implicit biases that exist for minority students. The goal of the study was to replace the punitive zero-tolerance policies with better policies to favor the educational systems. During the interviews with participants, I gathered information to determine the elements that interact with the affected students and to identify factors related to discriminatory behavior toward the African American students. This theory helped me assess the drawbacks present in the system so I could answer the research questions addressing the zero-tolerance policy enforcement and discrimination behind funneling more African American students to prison from schools.

Nature of the Study

I adopted the qualitative approach and the case study design for this research. This assisted me in determining whether the problem exists and its impact. The qualitative case study design enabled me to interpret the perceptions of participants about the application of the zero-tolerance policy. I interviewed students who claimed to have been subjected to discrimination from the zero-tolerance policy and had to bear its ill effects. The qualitative method enables researchers to involve participants and ask them about their perceptions; basically, it provides detailed insight into other people's knowledge and allows the researcher to understand the case from their perspective (Austin & Sutton, 2014). It provides a framework to study the behavior of people under a social structure. Patton (2015) described interviews as a form of open-ended questions in which participants respond to queries and express their feelings, which helps researchers obtain an in-depth understanding of the situation.

This qualitative study was conducted to answer research questions by engaging with enough participants to obtain reliable results. The interviews included open-ended questions structured in a manner in which my position was an observer to mitigate bias in collected data. These semistructured interviews were conducted online on social media apps like Zoom or Skype, which were accessible for the interviewee. Moreover, the open-ended questions helped me collect data to answer the research questions for this study. 10 participants were interviewed from the state of Texas, and nine interview questions along with a few follow-up questions were asked during the interview to explore the experiences of the participants. Online interviews also enabled me to collect data

regarding participants' expressions. During the interview, I asked the interviewee about the disparities they faced during class activities and the biased response they got from their teachers. African American students who were expelled, transferred to the criminal justice system, and had served their sentences were welcomed to express their thoughts and experiences.

Servoss (2014) described racial disparities in schools that caused African American students to feel inferior during training and academic activities, and traditional stereotyping that resulted in frustration among the African American students. Because of this frustration, many students misbehave in school. The inequitable practice of disciplinary actions on minority students adversely affects them. Consequently, these students fear being caught in school by the school resource officers, making them skip classes or sometimes skip school (Finn & Servoss, 2014).

Punitive disciplinary school policies such as the zero-tolerance policy exacerbate the feelings of anger and disappointment among these students. Security policies such as making African American students pass more often through metal detector security checks to enter school than their White peers show apparent racial profiling in statewide schools. Teachers also perceive these students to be less polite and more violent than their White peers. The school environment, teachers' biases, strict security checks, and peers' behavior toward African American students make them feel like criminals from a young age (Servoss, 2014). The reason behind these unfair policies and practices of exclusionary discipline and corporal punishment was the focus of the current study.

Findings may help policymakers revise policies related to zero-tolerance and its implementation.

Definitions

Color blind racism: Sociological evolution of equality regardless of people's skin color or racial background (Burke, 2017).

Corporal punishment: The use of physical force for punishing students by slapping or spanking ("School Discipline Laws & Regulations by State & Category | Safe Supportive Learning," 2019).

Discretionary suspension: Punishment for offenses in which students are most likely to challenge the school faculty administration system (Nelson & Lind, 2015). Discretionary suspension in the school-to-prison pipeline is primarily for tough-to-define offenses.

Disproportionate minority contact: An uneven proportion of minority contact, specifically of youths within the juvenile justice system (OJJDP | Disproportionate Minority Contact, 2016).

Exclusionary discipline: Any discipline that involves terminating students from educational institutions and practicing to punish those who misbehave. The most common types of exclusionary discipline are expulsion and suspension ("Exclusionary Discipline," 2014).

Expulsion: Eliminating students from schools for at least 1 calendar year (Justice Policy Institute, 2013).

In-school suspension: The practice that keeps a student isolated from the rest of the class, not from the school. The classwork is also assigned under specific school staff supervision (Villalobos & Bohannon, 2017).

Juvenile justice system: An institution that handles youths with more emphasis on rehabilitation than on punishment. Offenders under 18 are sent to this system (Taylor, 2014).

Out-of-school suspension: In this practice, a student is temporarily expelled from school as a punishment for breaching school laws. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights described two types of suspension. One is for those students who are not disabled but violate the school's discipline. The other is for those students who violate discipline and are disabled (Suspension, 2014).

School resource officer: An officer assigned to a job at school as a law enforcement officer to prevent crimes. School resource officers are mainly involved in pushing students through-school-to-prison pipelines (Bell, 2018).

School-to-prison pipeline: The pipeline involves funneling students from schools to prisons. Schools seem like ducts to students, which increase the likelihood of getting arrested and becoming criminals as a result of punitive disciplinary policies (Crawley & Hirschfield, 2018).

Assumptions

Assumptions are claims accepted as true without proof (Simon, 2011). In 1994, federal legislation required states to expel students who brought a firearm, drugs, or alcohol to school (Cauchon, n.d.). If schools did not comply, they would lose all federal

funding. Following the law, many schools have adopted zero-tolerance policies. Many educators questioned this policy's effectiveness, although the idea stemmed from school officials wanting to keep kids safe. The benefits assumed with the zero-tolerance policy included the reduction of favoritism and the aim to keep kids safer, prepare children for the real world, and be required by the law (Morin, 2020).

An underlying assumption was that school violence was on the rise, and to keep students safe, the widespread use of zero-tolerance policies was justified. Arguably, this statement is not accurate and lacked evidence. In addition to the American Psychological Association (APA) Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) findings, several other studies indicated that school violence has declined since the mid-1980s and had been on a downward trend since the mid-1990s (Finkelhor & Jones, 2006; McCord et al., 2001).

In 2008, Skiba et al. posited that the zero-tolerance policies help maintain a disciplined and safer environment by eliminating pupils engaged in disruptive behavior to achieve universal goals of any school discipline approach. Five critical assumptions were made in applying a zero-tolerance approach to maintaining school discipline and order:

- Violence at the school level is gravely rising, thereby necessitating dynamic tactics for violence prevention.
- Zero tolerance emphasizes the constancy of school discipline through the provision of mandated vengeance for certain offenses.
- Eliminating those students who breach school rules will ultimately make the environment more conducive to learning for the other students.

- The presumption of deterring future misbehavior is the core concern of zero tolerance by swift and sure punishments.
- As a concern of school safety, the guardians overwhelmingly support the implementation of zero-tolerance policies, and the students also feel secure with it (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008).

Scope and Delimitations

According to Marchbanks and Blake (2018), racism plays a pivotal role in the school-to-prison pipeline because children belonging to different racial backgrounds are punished more strictly and harshly for their deeds. Marchbanks and Blake investigated the implementation of discriminatory behavior toward African American students, propelling them into the criminal justice system. The criminalization of school behavior by implementing zero-tolerance policies left African American students in a vulnerable position. This resulted in more African Americans in prisons, which was the leading cause of the academic gap between White and Black students. Researchers also disproved that African American students violate school discipline more frequently than White students. Instead, both violate policies in the same proportion, but there is an alarming difference in the prison population of the colored students (Marchbanks & Blake, 2018). These punitive policies affect African Americans' social and economic life through increasing poverty and arousing multifarious threats.

This research included victims who had served their terms in the criminal justice system because of the school-to-prison pipeline. Access to incarcerated African American students for an interview can be an issue because prison access is restricted

under some policies (Prison Access Laws - Society of Professional Journalists, 2019).

Therefore, to conduct interviews, I recruited individuals who had been funneled into the prison system and had served their sentences.

For this study, I designed nine interview questions and a few follow-up questions to obtain an in-depth understanding of this issue. I probed the participants' experiences to identify the adverse impacts of zero-tolerance policies on the lives of African American students. Findings may provide guidelines to policymakers for designing strategies and taking measures based on principles that are free from bias. Findings from the case study may be transferable because participants were from major counties of Texas in which African American students had been susceptible to discrimination in schools, and findings could be applied generally to Texas because other schools face the same issue. Texas has a large population of African American students affected by these practices; therefore, findings from the current study may be transferable.

Limitations

Limitations are the restrictive weaknesses or boundaries that allow only some actions and make others impossible (Simon, 2011). The zero-tolerance policy was intended to create a violence-free school environment. Pursuing a safer school environment is not accomplished by eliminating disruptive students (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). The data indicated the opposite. The schools that frequently practiced zero-tolerance policies had higher suspensions and expulsions, consequently keeping the school management focused on discipline issues contributing to the hostile school climate. More importantly, research findings revealed that suspended students

were more likely to be males who were academically at risk for failure, were likely receiving special education services, and were typically from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Such adolescents were likely to become involved in the criminal justice system (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014).

In 2001, Hodkinson and Hodkinson identified the challenges of a case study strategy. First, in the case study blueprint, analysis of the data is challenging for a simple representation. Also, data collection is time-consuming, and expensive to do on a large scale, and results are hard to generalize. A case study is also strenuous for researchers to cross-check the information. The case study is generally conducted for single or a few cases rather than for an aggregate. Also, the data must contain critical features to add reliability to the results.

In 2016, Skiba and Losen found that disparate school discipline was increasing the risk of students' dropping out of school and getting in contact with the juvenile justice system. Also, research findings have failed to discern whether suspension and expulsion ameliorate school safety or improve students' behavior. Higher suspension rates harm school safety and result in more mediocre school environments, especially for students of color. Rather than reducing the likelihood of a student being suspended, a student's history of suspension appears to predict increased rates of future antisocial behavior and higher rates of future suspensions in the long term (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Such findings suggest that zero tolerance is ineffective in reducing misbehavior or improving school safety.

Significance

I explored the role of racial discrimination in the application of zero-tolerance policies and the consequences on the lives of African American students. I investigated how minor disciplinary violations might cause African American students to be perceived as a threat. It has been a faulty assumption that the zero-tolerance policy improved the discipline and behavior of students. The results were inconsistent, as evidenced by the increased suspension and expulsion rate of African American students. African Americans were more often treated in a disparate manner than their White peers (K. Thompson, 2017). The possible reasons behind the disparate treatment, based on the experiences of the participants, were probed in the current study.

Findings from this study may provide evidence related to the discrimination in the application of zero-tolerance policies on African American students. This study may also provide evidence disproving assumptions that were made when designing these punitive policies, including generating proper discipline and a safe environment in schools. If policymakers obtain enough evidence based on this research, they may realize the need for policy change regarding zero tolerance.

Summary

This chapter provided the background, rationale, and problem addressed in the study. The purpose of the study and the theoretical framework were also presented. In addition, Chapter 1 included the nature of the study, research questions, assumptions, scope, delimitations, limitations, and significance. Primary definitions associated with

this research were also presented. Chapter 2 provides an extensive review of the literature and the gap addressed in this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The upholding bridge between educational barring and youth criminalization is called the school-to-prison pipeline (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014). In 2015, Arellano-Jackson explained that this pipeline plays a leading role in bringing U.S. students out of their classes and into criminal activities. The children's irregular or exclusive violent behavior on school grounds was a by-product of zero-tolerance policies. According to Skiba (2014), the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights reported that the frequency of expulsion increased twofold from 1974 to 2010. The application of the zero-tolerance policy is an essential element in the evolution of the school-to-prison pipeline. This pipeline is not a straightforward course from school to jail but an interconnected chain of punishments, which leads the students to enter the criminal system (Bouchein, 2015).

It is not difficult to predict what educational barring might lead to in a child's future; their incarceration acts as a catalyst for poor life outcomes and adverse circumstances. Suppose the student is not readily able to meet all school-related expectations. Whether the expectations are academic or not, the student's behavior results in an immediate unfavorable reaction by the authorities who are supposed to help them meet those expectations. No student should be targeted in any way to disrupt the environment created to help them, regardless of their color, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status (Smith, 2015). Authorities are to a certain extent complicit in aiding the aggravated situation by indulging students in inefficient strategies and depriving them of education and quite possibly a future. In 2015, Arellano-Jackson reported that about

95% of the dismissed students were punished for unaggressive misdeeds such as paying no heed to the school's dress code and misbehaving with the teachers.

Purpose

The purpose of this literature review was to identify the problem of school disciplinary practices and policies, leading students of certain races to fall victim to the school-to-prison pipeline. In addition to identifying the problem, the review also assesses the effects of this pipeline that require the government, school administrators, policymakers, lawmakers, and educational leaders to make changes to the school systems. Additionally, I describe the quality of the studies reviewed.

Literature Search Strategy

The school-to-prison pipeline is a trend, particularly in urban schools in the United States. The pipeline has been influenced by discriminatory policies causing disproportionate effects on certain adolescent groups and families based on their color. The implementation of zero-tolerance policies has exacerbated the pipeline problem.

Background

The school-to-prison pipeline was an outcome of the many prominent trends adopted by various schools highlighting the importance of disciplinary activities, the zero-tolerance policies and practices, school disturbance laws, and the increasingly high number of police officers present in schools. Research has indicated that implementation of a zero-tolerance policy only produces negative results such as administrative failure of schools, negative impacts of suspensions, and exclusion from school becoming the norm (Harrison et al., 2017). In 2018, Kyere et al. identified the following factors causing an

increase in the school-to-prison pipeline: the school disciplinary practices and zero-tolerance policies. The consequence of violating the policy is either detention or suspension. According to research findings, about 95% of the exclusions result from nonviolent and minimal disturbances such as disrespecting the teacher. Likewise, prior studies also revealed that when a child was suspended, it most likely resulted in dropping out of school.

Zero-Tolerance Policies

Zero tolerance is a stricter and more drastic choice of punishment. It is also said to be the main gateway leading to the school-to-prison pipeline. Educational institutions are more dependent on this tool to constrain misbehaviors. However, because this policy is stern and strict, violence is down by 30% since 1990. Therefore, implementing this policy can be extensive in some instances, enhancing the ratio of the link between the student and future incarcerations (Barnert et al., 2015).

What gets ignored are the antagonistic effects of school discipline policies in the zero-tolerance system. It is mainly African American students who suffer because of this policy. Kyere et al. (2018) elaborated on the changes needed to improve the school's disciplinary system instead of zero tolerance implementation. Kyere et al. considered the critical race theory and linked it to the ingenuity of school discipline based on racial discrimination. According to Kyere et al. (2018), a zero-tolerance policy is deemed an essential instrument to ensure a safe and secure environment in school.

Discrimination Against African American Boys and Its Effects

The discriminatory practice has resulted in a higher rate of incarcerations among African American students. Statistics have shown that the number of African American students in juvenile detention centers, prisons, and streets has increased rapidly as opposed to the number of White students affected by this practice (Rosich, 2007). There was an increase of 12% in the suspension of African American students between 1999 and 2007 compared to the decline seen in the removal of White students after the implementation of strict policies and practices (Arellano-Jackson, 2015).

Even at the pre-K level, African American children were not free from the illegitimate exercise of racism. This discriminatory attitude pushed students out of schools and eventually made them part of the criminal justice system. Afterward, there was a greater possibility of students indulging in criminal activities (Skiba, 2014).

When the African American boys failed to graduate due to suspension, a lasting crushing effect impacted their lives. Without a high school diploma, about two thirds of African American men have known to end up in prison at some point in their life. According to the 2012 Report on Civil Rights Data Collection completed by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights , above 7,000 student expulsions were reported in 2014–2015. Although African American students make up only 19% of the preschool population, they receive 47% of the recorded suspensions and expulsions (Murtha, 2017). Expelling students is more likely to expose them to illicit activities (Raufu, 2017).

Discrimination Against African American Girls and Its Effects

The school-to-prison pipeline poses the same threats to African American girls (White, 2018). From 2006 to 2007, there was an increased suspension rate of African American girls from middle schools (McClain, 2015). From 1996 to 2011, the rate of first-offender cases was reduced but the rate of Black girls' first-offender cases rose from 28% to 33%. Comparatively, White girls' total cases showed a decrease from 68% to 64% (Fader & Lockwood, 2012). These data indicated that colored girls were not arrested for felonies or for being violent, but instead they were arrested, confined, and charged because of misdemeanors that do not apply to other girls.

When the justice system provides the appropriate conditions, the school escalates to take necessary measures by the suspension. According to (Gopalan, 2019; Riddle, 2019), African American girls have experienced a higher rate of suspension and expulsion in the last decade. These girls were suspended 6 times more often than White girls. The zero-tolerance policies were the leading cause of African American girls and boys being pushed out of schools and getting incarcerated (McClain, 2015).

Effects of School Discipline on African American Students

The school-to-prison pipeline seems to put pressure on how schools favor criminalization. Many parts of this subject include the disproportionality of school punishments and how it influences children of color and those who are disabled and shoves them into the school-to-prison pipeline. Data supported the correlation between the severity of discipline and the increasing rate of students involved in criminal justice.

However, the first offenders' criminal offenses have been decreasing in recent years (OJJDP, 2016).

The school discipline policy has been violated in almost the same proportion regardless of racial background (Wallace, 2008). The overall result of the school-to-prison pipeline supersedes the problem of representing African American children in the first offender's justice system. Difficulties in practicing discipline constitute a significant risk to the academic qualities, intellectual qualities and momentous achievements between White and Black students (Robers et al., 2015).

Effects Caused by Increased Security Surveillance in Schools

The adverse effects can be seen due to increased security measures on school grounds, such as controlling access and checking ID badges, the introduction of surveillance systems all over the school, the presence of armed police officers on the doors, professionally trained dogs to sniff drugs and other illegal substances, drug tests, and the random searches for drugs during or after school hours (Raufu, 2017). Data collected from 1999 to 2012 showed extensive use of complicated and high-profile procedures (Robers et al., 2014). Research suggested that these measures have made the situation worse rather than better (Skiba, 2014). Students still find gaps between these extraordinary measures and perform unethical actions.

Theoretical Foundation

Bertalanffy's (1968) general system theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. Chapter 1 included the theoretical propositions of this theory and its application in previous research. This section of the literature review includes an

overview of Bertalanffy's theory that was used to identify the causes behind discriminatory actions in the application of zero-tolerance policies in U.S. public schools.

Overview

Ludwig von Bertalanffy proposed a general system theory in the 1940s. However, it was furthered by Ross Ashby in 1964. Bertalanffy had opposing views regarding reductionism and attempted to revive the unity of science. He was generally considered the primary author and the founder of the general system theory. Its subject matter is the derivation and formulation of those principles valid for 'system' in general. This theory is a valuable tool as it provides models that can be adopted in various fields, simultaneously safeguarding the models from vague analogies that have often marred the development in these fields.

Origin

Despite Alexander Bogdanov contributing the conceptual part of the theory, Bertalanffy believed to be one of the principal founders and primary authors of the general system theory (GST). This theory functions as an interdisciplinary study that illustrates systems inhibiting components having interactive qualities, suitable and relevant to many other fields. Bertalanffy was acknowledged universally for his benefactions to science for the advancement of this theory. Bertalanffy (1968) outlined a system as a complex mix that consists of elements with interactive qualities and insinuated their openness to interact with the aspects of the environment surrounding them. Furthermore, they can collect qualitatively innovative and unique characteristics through emergence thus existing in a perpetual cycle of evolution (Bertalanffy, 1968).

Major Theoretical Propositions and Hypotheses

Ever since Descartes, the “scientific method” had proceeded under the assumption of two interlinked concepts. The system can split into its distinct segments for being analyzed so that every particular component is acknowledged as a self-governing entity. The elements are subjected to linear summation to express the system’s totality adequately. Bertalanffy asserted that the basis on which scientific method was structured, were inherently wrong (McNeill & Freiburger, 1993).

The general system theory strived to accommodate alternative options to traditional and standard models of organizations. It outlined original and innovative structural blocks to increase in growth. As a generalized theory of systems with applicability and importance in numerous areas of study, it emphasizes holism over reductionism, similarly organism over mechanism (Bertalanffy, 1968).

This theory is, in postulate, proficient in concluding accurate and apt descriptions for concepts and, if the situation requires embedding them into the quantitative interpretation. Bertalanffy’s theory can be implemented in this qualitative case investigation as zero-tolerance policies contribute to Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) in the criminal justice system.

Application in Previous Ways Relevant to Current Study

Systems theory contributes a stable internal consistent framework that is valuable for evaluating and classifying the elements and concepts of the world. There is a multitude of practical explanations and ideas in general system theory. In prior

researches, it was a structural base for a scholarly approach for a thorough evaluation of the situation.

Also, the most vital feature, however, remains that it rendered a universal and comprehensive approach to all legal frameworks and every theoretical concept. As Von Bertalanffy (1968, p. 33) elaborated, “there are many instances where identical principles were discovered several times because the workers in one field were unaware that the theoretical structure required was already well developed in some other field. General systems theory will go a long way towards avoiding such unnecessary duplication of labor.” (Bertalanffy, 1968). The concepts of general system theory were implicitly implied so that elements got highlighted, and the interactive procedure tracked to the coherent conclusions (Crawley and Hirschfield, 2018; Gordon, 2018; White, 2018).

Rationale for the Choice of Theory

This theory proved to be the most appropriate in carrying out an extensive qualitative analysis of the interviews conducted by prior researchers regarding the experiences of victims and existential issues of the disciplinary system (Harrison et al., 2017). Furthermore, the information gathered through a focus group functions on the structural block provided by Bertalanffy. He outlined the affected students and the forces contributing to the disproportionate application of zero-tolerance as part of the interactive environment. He also suggested the substitution of a zero-tolerance strategy with better disciplinary procedures (Bertalanffy, 1968).

This practice has seen more incarceration of young African American men. The statistics over the years, as per studies, have shown that the number of African American

students in juvenile, prisons, and streets has increased rapidly as opposed to the number of Caucasian students affected by this practice. After implementing strict policies and practices, there has been an increase of 12% in the suspension of Black students from 1999 – 2007 in contrast to the White students (Marchbanks & Blake, 2018).

It has duly noted that not only African American men were targeted at the inequalities and affected by the school-to-prison pipeline, but also African American women and disabled students under this influence. According to a study, one of four disabled students present in a classroom were suspended at least once in their academic life compared to the one in 11 White students (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). Moreover, the conclusion is that Black students have more chances to be sent to a law enforcement organization and authorities over school disciplinary matters (Thompson et al., 2000).

A total of about 70% of arrests of students that have taken place during school hours by law enforcement are either African American or Latinos (Dahlberg, 2012). According to all the collected data through research and studies, it can be argued that Black students show more violent behavior and commit more disciplinary infractions than White students (Alnaim, 2018). Their engagement in violent behavior constitutes higher incarceration rates, but the Education Department's Civil Rights Office (OCR) showed a different picture according to the federal research compiled by them. The findings have shown that the African American students suffer harsher penalties for committing a similar offense than those not belonging to the same racial category and expelled out of the classrooms for disrespectful behavior towards teachers and other students (Arellano-Jackson, 2015).

Relation to Existing Theory and Study

This theory operated on the system structures rather than system functions which was the required perspective for this particular study. This theory had proven to be one of the most relevant and suitable conjectures to discuss and strategically approach the systematic drawbacks. It assisted and proved to be a great aid in elucidating and elaborating research questions of the zero-tolerance policy enforcement. Furthermore, this theory could aptly utilize to evaluate a qualitative research method to sort out the reasons for the discriminatory actions while applying the zero-tolerance policy within the public school systems. Thus, as a researcher, systems theory integrated the qualitative method to answer research questions and reached a helpful conclusion that provided a platform for future research.

U.S. Department of Education

A briefing given by the U.S. Department of Education - OCR (2016) stated that the expenditures of the state and the government have increased three times in correctional facilities, jails and prisons as much as the spending increases on elementary and secondary education. The U.S. Department of Education - OCR (2016) survey has shown that two-thirds of the state prison inmates do not have a high school diploma. The African American men in the age group of 20 to 24 years have not completed high school. They either dropped out or expelled; therefore, they have a higher probability of either incarceration or face any other law enforcement procedure rather than being employed. Much needed are reforms within the disciplinary system of schools because the existing zero-tolerance policy and its implementation only seemed to speed up the

chances of students' dropout rate (Smith, 2015). The survey conducted by the Vera Institute reported that the state of California spent roughly \$8,000 per student. In contrast, it spent a staggering amount of \$46,000 per inmate (U.S. Census, 2017).

All the data acquired from several years through various platforms was evident that society determines how to treat the child in the future; there is a likelihood of the child being another victim of the school-to-prison pipeline from early education. People over the years have come to voice their opinions against such treatment, participating in movements and protesting against lawmakers and policymakers to favor changes in the present educational system. Along with many skeptics, these people have come to argue that upon promoting new positive procedures, practices, and policies, there will be an immediate change in result, in the form of a decline in overall suspension rates. These policies and practices may include positive behavioral interventions and restorative practices, which are implemented effectively in positive and accepting behavior, both at school and home. Students who face strict disciplinary measures than the rest, face trauma and adverse reaction, both at home and in the community, which has also had an enormous impact on their ability to perform at school (U.S. Department of Education - OCR, 2016). Presented data were explored to see why this trend was occurring, the adverse effects on its victims, and recommendations were suggested to decrease the overall percentage of students ending up or being the victim to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Literature Review Related to Key Constructs

Current research has shown the best possible way to research with reverence to this particular qualitative approach. Over 50 research pieces of literature had referenced to back this dissertation. Thus, it could be said, the “Qualitative Research Method” was the most consistent and suitable methodology for this study as it had been reported in over half of the relevant researches.

Consistent Methodology and Methods

The disproportionate implementation of the school-to-prison pipeline can be best assessed in depth by a qualitative approach and yield better results. The landmark researches of Crawley and Hirschfield (2018), Wright et al. (2014), Fahey (2016), and Heitzeg (2017) illustrated efficiently, through the use of qualitative approach, proper evaluation of racial gap and adverse effects of the zero-tolerance policy. It plays a crucial role in future research by heavily contributing to creating new ideas for the process of transformation and potential implementation of discipline models, wiping out zero-tolerance policy’s detrimental effects.

On the other hand, a mixed approach has also gained sufficient support for evidence collection. In 2016, Thompson elucidated the apparent gap of treatment among African-American students with Native American students. It played a vital role in decreasing school-related arrests, suspensions, and expulsions. Moreno and Scaletta (2018) adopted a mixed approach that highlighted the importance of educator perceptions of behavior and the root cause of discrimination. However, a recent wave of research has primarily been opting qualitative approach. Heitzeg (2017), Gordon (2018), White

(2018), Barnes (2018), and Alnaim (2018), to name a few, have been crucial to the development and all made use of the qualitative methodology.

Most of the researchers have attempted to incorporate a legal framework in their methods to accurately assess the situations that surround the discriminatory practices against African Americans. The tested philosophies were legal concepts and psychologically based theories. Researchers such as Barnert et al. (2015) structured their argument on the detrimental effects of incarceration on students' lives. Similarly, Moreno and Scaletta (2015) structured their findings on qualitatively approached interviews. Berlowitz et al. carried out interviews in 2017 to form the basis of research titled "Bullying and Zero-Tolerance Policies: The School to Prison Pipeline." The majority of the studies focused on legal concepts and the implementation of policies. Researchers acknowledge that frequent application of suspension is not educationally justifiable and unavoidable. Zero tolerance policies unsympathetically affect African American pupils in school environments.

Key Concepts Related to Contributors to Disparities Among Students of Color

Copious studies have examined the consequence of zero-tolerance policies on minority youth, specifically African-Americans (Alnaim, 2018; Busby et al., 2013; Finn & Servos, 2014). According to these studies, discriminatory and inequitable policies and practices in schools have contributed to racial inequalities in regulation. Public schools are more likely to have School Resource Officers, more jarring discipline practices, and more referrals to law enforcement concerning the U.S. The integral phenomenon discussed is the zero-tolerance policy's toxic application, exclusionary punishment, the

school-to-prison pipeline, and the impact of discriminatory policies in education and the criminal justice system.

The literature survey boiled down key concepts to implicit bias and social dominance. These concepts have been used in sociological research to elaborate on how stereotypes influence different people when interacting. Hutchinson (2015) examined Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) from a public policy perspective. The study concentrated on felonious statutes that disparately affect people of color. He also elaborated on how racial bias and stereotypes influence and limit lawmakers.

Theories such as social dominance, implicit bias, critical race theory, and racial threat approach distinctive viewpoints of the school-to-prison pipeline research and assist the argument that implicit prejudice and stereotypes have profoundly contributed to the marginalization of African Americans.

Relation and Meaningful Aspect of Approach

As previously stated, nearly 50% of the research implied qualitative research to be the best possible approach as it yielded better results compared to those of other criteria. Multiple analyses such as that of Barnert et al. (2015), , Berlowitz et al. (2017), Dunning-Lozano (2018), and Moreno and Scaletta (2018) made use of interviews to carry out in-depth research. They tried to figure out the perspective of African American students regarding the zero-tolerance policy to get helpful insight into how to pinpoint such discriminatory policies.

Impact of School Discipline Policies and Punishments on Youths

In 2015, Smith elaborated on the impact of the zero-tolerance policy on the United States' educational system. It highlighted the increased dropout rate due to the application of the zero-tolerance program, elucidating the connection of punishment policies and adverse impact on the academic perspective of youth. Furthermore, Holly (2016) determined the negative impact of ZTP (Zero Tolerance Policy) procedures such as administrative failure of schools, suspension, and exclusion increasingly becoming a norm, proving it to be an entirely unfair disciplinary policy. Much of the research carried out was on the implicit basis of general system theory and the integration of the qualitative approach, incorporating the legal aspect to create a rich picture for a much more comprehensive and accurate analysis of the given situation. The research has contributed meaningful data to the pool of information, creating an apt platform for future studies and this research.

Prior research has shown diverse racial discrimination in how punitive school policies were applied and the punishments to the African American students contrary to Caucasian students. Despite the vast difference found between these two links, no particular variable could be responsible for this difference; therefore, leading a person to obvious reasoning of racial bias. According to Curtis (2014), racial inequality disclosed that all students are not treated equally during the practice of zero-tolerance policy in the schools. Results of detailed research revealed that students face tough decisions made by the school's administrative authorities, such as school suspension and juvenile detention because of their violent and illegal acts in schools (Curtis, 2014).

The link between these two factors was investigated using the data taken from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study; Kindergarten Class (ECLS-K), finding the notion that differential behavior might be playing a role that needs to be overseen (White, 2018). The data achieved from this particular group of Kindergarten Class include the most prominent sample ever taken in the U.S. of school-aged children. The second model used controls for prior problematic behavior (Curtis, 2014).

The study results showed an evident gap due to racial inequality seen among students of color that were suspended and expelled. Nevertheless, these suspensions and expulsions were made on the previous problematic behavior of the student. However, to conclude, teachers and school management's use of these policies and practices might not always be as racially biased as some people tend to believe so strongly (White, 2018).

Summary and Conclusions

Racial inequalities are a deep-rooted problem, not only in the U.S. but also in various other countries. This problem has overtaken educational institutes as well. To lessen the impact of it on the young generation and future generations, educational institutions and organizations will need to change their ways and bring forward a movement lead by highly authorized and influential people to bring a change in the entire educational system. It starts with teachers and gets passed on to every other person running and working in the management; this requires an effort by all and not just a few selected people.

The responsibility of educational institutions is clear, maintain the nobility and well-being of the school's environment. Also, introduce practices by the community to

allow better learning experiences for students from all kinds of racial backgrounds, creating an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding. The school is entitled to learners' unique and socializing talent, aiding them to survive in society and become successful. It also encourages a very productive, positive, and knowledgeable environment that minimizes the chances of any disarray in the future. Many researchers have shed light on the inadequacy of this mentioned practice. They have also highlighted its failures as a system for effective discipline in schools. Safety concerns of the students and the teachers were pressed upon and mentioned. The administrators and teachers also need to fulfill individual cases and not lay stress on a compatible disciplinary action (Cowan, 2016).

The purpose of the zero-tolerance policy primarily focused on eliminating the disruptive and ill-mannered students and pushing them into the "unsafe" mode of the school-to-prison pipeline. The overuse of this zero-tolerance policy to discipline the students initially to upgrade their performance in society is troublesome and pessimistic. Therefore, the school administration should not only be looking after disciplinary issues. Instead, develop more practical and adaptable policies that should be considered when dealing with multiracial students, with or without disabilities, regardless of their gender (Bertalanffy, 1968).

Chapter 3: Research Method

This study was designed to explore the existence of disparity in practices and behaviors for implementing a school-to-prison pipeline against African American students and its impact on their lives. Racial disparity in schools was a primary reason for the students' misbehavior (Gordon, 2018). The harsh implementation of the zero-tolerance policy was elevating frustration in African American students. Frequent on-campus arrests discouraged students from pursuing academics. Instead of focusing on studies, more of their time was utilized in investigations and answering accusations of the police and school administration. The current study was conducted to explore how the school-to-prison pipeline was a contributing factor in the continuous failure of the education system. Berlowitz et al., (2017) pointed out that the school-to-prison pipeline encourages more interaction with law enforcement agencies than inspiring a learning atmosphere. The students of color are disciplined more harshly and at times have to suffer, thereby leading them to drop out of school and in most cases into the juvenile justice system and later in prisons (Finn & Servoss, 2014).

Qualitative research empowers the researcher to probe the core information, remove the bias, and sort out the unknown variables affecting participants' behaviors and experiences (Belotto, 2018). I utilized a qualitative approach to explore the existence of discrimination in the policy that made African American students vulnerable to arrest and channelized to the juvenile justice system. The population sample included African Americans subjected to the zero-tolerance policy who served their terms. I used the case

study design to understand the basis of biased implementation of the zero-tolerance policy.

Qualitative methods provide deep insight into the realities of the participants. This method allows the participants to express themselves by using their own words. In this chapter, I describe the research design and include the research questions. I also present the researcher's role, methodology, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical issues, and a summary.

Research Questions

1. What concerns do African American students have regarding the application of zero-tolerance policy in the disciplinary system of public schools?
2. Does discriminatory behavior manifest in the application of zero-tolerance policy when teachers are dealing with African American students?
3. Is there a disparity in the behavior and practice of zero-tolerance policy for African American students?

Research Rationale

I chose a qualitative research method to conduct one-on-one interviews and meet individually with the formerly incarcerated victims to evaluate the severity of implementing the zero-tolerance policy. I distributed flyers in areas where most African American populations resided. I found flyer distribution an effective way to approach victims. Information from the Texas Education scorecard also facilitated locating prospective participants.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher plays the role of a crucial instrument in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). Being the research instrument, the researcher accumulates data by going through documents, interviewing candidates, and conducting face-to-face interviews (Creswell, 2013). My role was consistent with these principles; it included recruiting potential candidates, checking them for eligibility, arranging and conducting face-to-face interviews with them, and observing during the interviews. These interviews generated enough data to attain saturation. The interview population included African Americans victims who had been part of the school-to-prison pipeline due to the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy. I asked them about their experiences and disparities faced during different scenarios in school, including responses they received during class from their teachers. I targeted a population who had already served their sentences in Texas. Because I lived in the same state, I tried to stay as neutral as possible during this study. To avoid the existence of cultural biases while interviewing African American students and to ensure smooth data collection, I remained neutral and recorded my observations.

Participant Selection

According to a Texas Appleseed and Texans Care for Children report (2013, as cited in J. Thompson, 2016), the rate of juvenile probation for black students was 2.86 times higher than their White classmates. I selected participants in this study who had faced criminal offenses for low-level misbehavior issues, received multiple tickets, and got suspended from schools or pushed into the criminal justice system and served their sentences. Participants were invited by notice in a local newspaper to become a part of

this study. An invitation was also sent using social media, and the invitation ad was only viewable to people living in the selected county. Those students who got expelled or suspended and who completed the punitive punishments under the criminal justice system for minor misdemeanors were welcomed to share their experiences. 10 participants were selected for an in-depth interview. The convenience sampling method was employed to obtain data from in-depth interviews because interviews were designed according to the research questions.

Interviewing is one of the most popular approaches to data collection in qualitative studies. Interviews can be designed following the research questions. All of the subjects and issues must be reviewed before data collection to perform in-depth analysis (Barrett & Twycross, 2018).

Ethical Considerations and Procedures

Ethical considerations are mandatory when dealing with participants during the interview. Ethical issues must be taken into account to protect the interviewee's privacy. As an experienced researcher, I followed qualitative guidelines for conducting interviews to meet all ethical procedures. If the participants are relaxed and trust the interviewer, they will answer with honesty and in detail. This will help to elicit meaningful data from the interview. For data analysis, qualitative research must be credible (Mooney-Somers & Olsen, 2016). Being a researcher, I addressed the issue of my research. To protect the rights of the participants, I kept the personal details highly confidential, such as participants' contact information and names. This was achieved by storing their records digitally and on a safe server. Google Sheets were used to enter data and were then stored

in a password-protected Google Drive. If the respondent wanted to withdraw from the process at any stage, they were allowed to do so (see Alshenqeeti, 2014). Participants' identities were kept confidential. The data collected in the form of recordings, transcripts, and notes will be destroyed after 5 years to ensure confidentiality.

The U.S. Department of Education-Texas data were used during the study to find the target population and identify the statistics of students based on race and their relevant success rate and dropout percentage. A letter from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University (11-25-20-0742681) was also obtained, which aided in ensuring the safety of all the research participants. No remuneration was offered to the participants as a bonus to take part in the interview process. Participation was strictly voluntary; participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. Once the interview sessions and the transcriptions were complete, the one-page summarized interview reports were shared with the participants to review. To prevent biases, I bracketed my perceptions and drew conclusions based on the experiences of participants. I played the role of researcher, not mentor.

Data Collection

Data collection is collecting information from relevant sources to provide answers to the research questions (Kabir, 2016). Two methods of data collection include primary and secondary data collection. In the secondary mode, data to be collected are already present in books, journals, and other scholarly resources. Primary data collection comprises two subdivisions that are qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative process of data collection involves data in figures and numbers. This method

is highly standardized and calculation-based, and researchers find the results in less time. The qualitative approach includes data from participants based on their stories, experiences, and emotions (Salkind, 2010). I used the qualitative method in the current study.

Interviews

Data collection for this study was primarily done from scheduled interviews. The interaction during these meetings occurred via online platforms while considering the safety protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic. Standardized open-ended interviews were conducted with the participants. All of the participants were asked the same questions during the interview (see Patton, 2015). Open-ended questions allowed the participants to provide answers in detail rather than just giving “yes” or “no” answers. This helps researchers to discover new perspectives that they were previously not focusing on (Patton, 2015). Creswell (2014) explained that to improve qualitative research reliability, the researcher needs to set aside personal opinions, assumptions, and biases at the data collection stage. Considering the research reliability, I started interviews with semi-structured questions each time. This was followed by open-ended questions structured in a manner to encourage detailed responses from the participants.

The interviews were semi-structured to encourage participants to share more details. My role was to ask questions, take notes, and observe participants’ behaviors. The interview commenced with a greeting and a general question. Multiple open-ended questions and follow-up questions then followed this. The interviews consisted of the central questions and follow-up questions. The main questions were asked of all

participants (see Kallio et al., 2016), whereas follow-up questions varied according to responses. These main questions helped participants feel comfortable. These questions directly addressed the issues faced by the participants, and at the same time these questions were central to the study (see Kallio et al., 2016). The aim was to generate maximum information, so I sometimes said “please elaborate,” “can you share more insight,” “I would like to know more about it,” and other similar words. The interview questions followed the main research question (see Appendix).

Data were collected using multiple tools. Interviews were recorded using an audio recorder and the backup in a mobile phone’s audio recorder. I was making notes during the interview using a pen and a paper and digitally, using a smartpen. Later on, I transformed all written notes to digital notes by writing them on Microsoft Word. All the audio recordings were also moved to Google drive. My Gmail account was secured by a strong password and a two-step verification code. This aimed to maintain confidentiality.

Document Examination

Documents are supreme affirmations for inquiry in a case study (Yin, 2003). In this research, a case study method from data collection methods was used; related written and electronic resources were collected, analyzed, and interpreted according to the research purpose. Literature reviews of social advocates, journalists, and scholars reveal that zero-tolerance policies (ZTP) tend to push students out of public schools and into the criminal justice system in a pattern of institutional racism. This phenomenon has come to be labeled as the ‘school-to-prison pipeline.’ The use of school exclusion, suspension, and expulsion, might be regarded as the central feature of zero tolerance policy.

Expulsions appear to be reserved for incidents of moderate to high severity, although not always for those students who are more troublesome. Suspension, in contrast, was among the most widely used disciplinary techniques (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Zero-tolerance policies assumed that removing students engaged in disruptive behavior will deter others from disruption and create an improved climate for those students who remain (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). The ‘school-to-prison pipeline’ can only be ameliorated by a program of radical reform (Berlowitz et al., 2017).

Zero-tolerance policy has become ubiquitous disciplinary practice across most schools in the U.S. to stem incidents of campus-based violence. It collectively refers to school policies that mandate the immediate delivery of exclusionary discipline to any student possessing contraband, regardless of circumstances. The issue of school safety has been an ongoing discussion amongst educators and communities for several decades. Zero-tolerance policy preceded the vast majority of events by several years, originating in the Gun-Free School Act (GFSA) of 1994. Zero tolerance resulting from GFSA provided schools the necessary authority to police campuses and swiftly remove offending students.

Adams and Erevelles (2016) described the school-to-prison pipeline as a complex network of relations that naturalize the movement of students of color from schools into the juvenile justice system through short-term detention and ending with possible long-term incarceration. Decades of evidence have demonstrated that punitive policies like zero tolerance does not improve school safety and exacerbates the phenomenon known as the school-to-prison pipeline (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). Interviews with teachers and

administrators revealed that they see no alternative to their implementation of zero-tolerance policies because they believe that violent behaviors manifested by racial minority students are grounded in cultural norms beyond the control of public educators.

Analytical Notes

Interviewing participants enable the researchers more access to data than using any other tool. Researchers must be wary of using secondary data because they may be too many to sort and may not be relevant to the questions in focus by the study (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Research portrays collaborative analytic inquiry in practice. In qualitative research, writing or notes often precede parallel to an iterative interpretation. The standard way to do this is either through a research journal or through analytic memos. Memos create a necessary extra level of narrative, an interface between the participant's data, the researcher's interpretation, and a broader theory (Rodgers and Cowles, 1993). Thus, we also studied the extant literature to learn about analytic inquiry since our work followed some tenets of this research method.

Notes can be a very flexible tool. It will make writing up at the end a lot easier (Rodgers and Cowles, 1993). My general practice was to place observations within the text as I transcribe interviews. An analyst must ensure that the data are appropriate for the research questions and that recording and analyzing the data have not been careless and slipshod. To stay research-focused, analysts bring their theoretical concepts, beliefs, and assumptions to the evaluation. Relevant data from the sources mentioned above were collected and noted to the maximum possible extent of any analytical use. To avoid perplexity in the making of subsequent analytic notes, I also recorded portions of the

interview that appeared to be irrelevant. I tried to complete the write-up of these notes as soon as the interviews were completed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis can be defined as a process of arranging data systematically, which includes merging, editing, and interpreting what interviews have said and what the interviewer has heard and observed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interview transcripts, notes, and all other material gathered to search through the collected data are reduced by developing and extracting critical information. Generally, interviews were the key method of collecting data for qualitative case studies, but a significant issue is interpreting the resulting data in a meaningful manner (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), qualitative analysis was not a mechanical process. Instead, it was a creative one, and it involves a continuous interaction of collected data with the data analysis. The purpose of qualitative data analysis was to communicate the learnings of the research and present it in a manner where administrators could use it to make more efficient decisions (Stake, 2000).

The research in this dissertation followed the data analysis and coding approach suggested by Creswell (2009) and Esterberg (2002). Creswell agreed to the traditional approach when applying the open coding process as by doing this, the codes emerged while data was being collected and analyzed. Esterberg's definition of an open coding process is that it's a process where "you work intensively with your data, line by line, identifying themes and categories that seem of interest" (p. 158). For this case study approach, there were three sources of data collection – interviews, documents, and

analytic notes. To make sense of the collected data, the analysis was following a six-step process as suggested by Creswell. During the analysis, all three sources of data collection were used, and there might be moments where all three data sources were involved in a back-and-forth relation. The steps were set in sequential order, so data analysis efficiency increases when the data collection process began.

1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis (p. 185). I started the process by reviewing all the audio recordings of interviews conducted and used them to write the transcripts on Microsoft Word files.
2. Read through the data (p. 185). As soon as I started conducting interviews and transcribing them, I had gone through the data repeatedly to familiarize myself with it and increase awareness of patterns emerging from future interviews. It was precisely as Esterberg said, “Get to know your data.”
3. Began a detailed analysis of the coding process (p. 186). Once I got familiarized with the written data and could see patterns developing, the next step was to organize that data into categories and added labels to those categories based on what the participants said. While coding data, interview questions, and their answers were compared to the study’s research questions to remind me of what exactly was I looking for? Coding can be performed by using software such as NVivo or CAQDAS, which are computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software.
4. Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people and categories for analysis. (p. 189). By the time I reach this step, I labeled the

categories. This helped in having enough information to generate the codes.

The coding process led to the formation of more categories, and more themes emerged.

5. Advance how the description of the themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative (p. 189). The themes already developed (by the time step 5 is reached) were added to the narrative passages so clear and logical findings could be traced from the interviewees' answers.
6. Interpret the meaning of the data (p. 189). During the interpretation process, my background and experiences as a teacher helped me make informed decisions on interpreting the data. To remove any element of bias, the focus was on the participants' exact words and tried to convey their intentions behind the story rather than building up their versions of it.

During these steps, all three research sources were used and helped form patterns that gave this research a logical meaning. The next part was to write a report whose purpose was to transform data and interpret it, thus giving it a direction. If successfully implemented, this report should help in establishing a credible answer to the research questions of this study. The open coding process is useful when it comes to analyzing data for qualitative case study research. Due to this reason and the flexibility in the process, I was using this method for my research.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers adopted different methods to collect and analyze the data. Still, they usually did not provide sufficient description of the techniques used in data

analysis, which creates a barrier and may be viewed by a reader as a cause of bias. If the reader judge research based on clarity and description provided could count for trustworthiness (Gunawan, 2015). Lincoln and Guba's framework described trustworthiness as how much truth value has paced in data. The criteria that define the trustworthiness included credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Credibility is an essential criterion in trustworthiness. It helps in determining whether the conclusions drawn from participants' information are accurate or not. Member checking work for the credibility of this research. Member checks are the main component of credibility strategy as it remove internal conflicts and an element of bias during the study (Anney, 2014). It counts on the participants' reviews. The interpretations were cross-checked to gain the credibility of the research. The researcher generated the final document after the approval from the interviewee. This strategy also furnishes the researcher's internal biases as it purely based on the participants' experiences. The following strategy also makes research credible, prolonged experience in the research field, time sampling, triangulation, and peer-reviewing.

Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which the findings of the research are generalized to other groups. A thick description is necessary to perform transferability; since this research included 10 participants belonging to the major cities of Texas, their feedback helped in generalizing whether there existed discrimination in the implementation of the School-to-Prison pipeline policy. This qualitative study aimed to provide external validity

to other readers and generalize the results obtained for students of color (Nowell et al., 2017).

Dependability

Researchers should not read and transcribe the ideas from their conscious views. Instead, they must read and re-read the entire manuscript and raw data before finalizing the document. Dependability primarily uses the audit trail strategy. Complete notes, recordings, raw data, and codes provided to members. A member checking strategy preferred to consider the ethical norms by making a recheck from the participants (Birt et al., 2016). Peers and other researchers also go through the whole report to proof check. This helps the auditor to find traceability in a series of steps during the qualitative research. The audited report was then shared with the researcher (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

To ensure the dependability of the research, I documented all the collected data at regular intervals and saved in Microsoft Word or Excel documents. As the collected research grows, I carried out audits to ascertain its dependability. I transcribed the interviews accurately and also constructed the flow charts to understand the data division better. Apart from that, all the literature used in the data collection process was saved on Google Drive to keep a complete record.

Confirmability

The more the researchers, the more will be the confirmability. Objectivity is the underlying theme of confirmability. If only one person concludes the data, then there might be chances that neutrality would not exist in the ideas and findings of the study

(Given, 2008). Reflexivity is an essential criterion for the confirmability of research. Reflexive notes made during an interview allow the researchers to be critical about what they are writing and drawing from the conversation of the interviewee by putting their beliefs and ideologies aside. Reflexive journals were used for this purpose to record their views. These journals were made during the second stage of the data analysis when the collected data encoded. Confirmability could be achieved after credibility, transferability, and dependability (Nowell et al., 2017). I employed confirmability by thoroughly checking my written notes, double-checking transcriptions, and coding to analyze the data. Also, I conducted a member check to ascertain the communication of the interviewee's viewpoint.

Summary

In this chapter, I explained the research method used in an attempt to establish if there existed discriminatory behavior with the implementation of the school-to-prison pipeline for African American students. This research aimed to provide (in further chapters) evidence by noting the personal experiences of the victims under punitive discriminatory policies in school, specifically for African American students. The major sections of this chapter were the research rationale, the role of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, ethical consideration, and issues of trustworthiness. The data collection method for this study primarily included the interviews. Supporting documents included observations, written notes, and journal articles collected while carrying out this research. The interpreted data provided meaningful conclusions. Ethical procedures that were to be followed during the entire study had been explored. The research alignment

with the IRB standards of Walden University had been studied, which included safeguarding the rights of participants. Open-ended questions were asked to prevent biases. This allowed the participants to discuss the experiences in detail. Similarly, researcher bias was also prevented by deploying a member-check methodology.

Chapter 4: Results

This qualitative study was conducted to explore students' experiences with disparate treatment of teachers in educational settings. The criminal justice system's punitive and overzealous approaches seeped into schools and eliminated children from mainstream educational environments, funneling them onto a one-way path toward prison. Such policies pushed children out of school and hastened their entry into the juvenile and criminal justice system, where the prison was the end of the road. Historical inequities, such as segregated education and racial disparities, feed the pipeline. The school-to-prison pipeline is the most urgent challenge in education (Skiba & Losen, 2016).

This case study was designed to determine whether there was discrimination in the practical implementation of the zero-tolerance policy at schools and to explore the punitive effects of such policies on African Americans' lives. The central research questions were the following: (a) What concerns do the African American students have regarding the application of zero-tolerance policies in public schools' disciplinary system? (b) Does discriminatory behavior manifest in the application of zero-tolerance policy when teachers are dealing with African American students? (c) Is there a disparity in the practice of zero-tolerance policy for African American students?

Students from different ethnic origins revealed participants' personal experiences and observations with discipline in terms of their race. I collected and analyzed the data in the current study. The gathered information contributed to determining the elements and factors responsible for discriminatory behavior. The data analysis included analyzing

the following data sources: semi-structured/open-ended interviews, documents, and researcher notes.

This chapter presents the participants' demographics, number of participants, and the data collection procedure adopted to collect the data. I also discuss data analysis and coding. Also, I review the emerging themes in response to the research questions supported by direct quotes from interviews with participants. As part of data analysis, I also discuss the steps taken to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Research Setting

Each participant was an enrolled student at the time of the study. Due to the pandemic conditions, I conducted all interviews online via video conference platforms over Zoom, Google Meet, or Skype. I shared invitations on the social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram, mentioning all of the eligibility details. Then, I emailed the consent forms to the participants who met the selection criteria and were interested in participating. I used my university email account and not my personal account. I clearly mentioned that participation was voluntary and no gifts or remunerations would be offered.

Furthermore, all participants were informed that the information they provided would be kept confidential. No one had access to the data except me. All of the data will be deleted 5 years after the study's publication. After receiving an indication of interest from potential participants via social media platforms, I contacted them and invited them to participate in an interview. Appointments were made with each participant on the

online forum (Skype/Zoom/Google Meet), per their convenience. The online interviews were scheduled considering the safety protocols necessary to protect the participants from the COVID-19 pandemic. All participants were from the same ethnic background (African American) and the same county (United States). Each participant ensured their consent by replying with the words “I consent” to the email containing the consent form. The interviews were conducted in a private place with no public interference, noise, or stressful atmosphere. Every participant was permitted to speak freely. Due to the convenience setting, no factor of the location impacted the quality of research results.

Demographics

A convenience (nonprobability) sampling strategy was used to select participants representing the targeted population. The participants included adult students who endured discriminatory experiences resulting in either suspension or expulsion. 10 participants were interviewed. All were African American. Another essential piece of demographic information included the gender of the participants: 40% of the participants were female, and 60% were male. The students were interviewed based on their experiences with the teachers. Interviewees contributed different amounts of knowledge. All participants’ voices and views were represented in this study. Table 1 portrays the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Gender
1	Male
2	Male
3	Female
4	Female
5	Male
6	Male
7	Male
8	Male
9	Female
10	Female

Note. All participants were African American adult students.

Data Collection

After coordinating an appointed time, I emailed each participant a consent form indicating the study's details. I used a self-designed interview protocol that took approximately 35–40 minutes for a single interview. All interviews were recorded digitally. All collected data were stored safely, as specified in the IRB application. There were no unusual circumstances encountered during the data collection.

I followed a semi-structured open-ended interview protocol (see Appendix), but the follow-up questions slightly varied according to each interview. The follow-up questions were formulated according to the participants' responses. I also made detailed notes that could be used for further analysis. During each interview, I asked additional questions when confirmation was needed from participants on something unclear was communicated during the interview session (see Patton, 2015).

The following data were collected for this study: interviews, document analysis, and analytic notes. Semistructured open-ended interview questions were designed for collecting the data. I asked the same interview questions for each participant, making slight variations in follow-up questions. Participants were allowed to elaborate and provide more detailed insight. The open-ended questions were designed to ensure that the interviews would yield reliable and comparable qualitative data. According to Castillo-Montoya (2016), conducting interviews provides valuable information to the researcher because the participants share their experiences that illustrate their perceptions and the effects on their lives. Each interview lasted about 35–40 minutes. I used a paper interview guide and recorded conversations for transcription. I also shared a summary of the transcript for each interview for member checking. The participants verified their responses to questions and informed me if the transcript did not reflect their responses. By the end of the interview, some participants continued to share their thoughts and other experiences related to the study.

Overarching Themes

As I examined the participants' responses, documented interview notes, and personal journal notes, I found emerging themes. In response to the research question of perceived disparities in the educational system, teachers' prejudiced behavior emerged as a theme. Bensel and Craw (2018) noted that prejudiced attitudes resulting in suspension or expulsion may have adverse socio-psychological consequences. Also, integrating the categories made from the codes into the interview responses, notes from the interview,

and research questions yielded themes. This process continued until the completion of the study. Table 2 presents the codebook with themes.

Table 2

Codebook With Themes

Theory	Code	Category	Theme
Von Bertalanffy's general system theory	Bullying	Disparities	Prejudiced behavior of teachers
	Discriminating attitude	Intolerance	Poor psychological health concerns
	Disparate suspension	Rehabilitation	Impoverished impacts on academic and social well-being
	Maltreatment	Teachers' Bias Behavioral change	Rehabilitative perspective
	Unfair expulsion		Unjust disciplinary actions
	Punishment	Psychological change	Negative expectancies from African American students
	No leniency	Academic progress	Demeaning communication
	Devastating psychological impacts		Bias in teachers' conduct
	Antisocial		
	Need for alternative approaches		
Need for training sessions			
Behavioral issues			
Worse academic progress			

Data Analysis

All the interviews were transcribed verbatim following the data collection. I developed a preliminary coding framework based on research questions and the responses. I reviewed each transcript and began coding. While coding, I looked for emerging patterns and themes relevant to the research questions, reflecting on the study's purpose. In the second round of coding, I began identifying categories while also looking for emerging themes. During this iterative process, several codes were dropped, while some codes were combined with others to generate new ones. As themes formed, some codes were also recorded. Incorporating the categories into interview responses, research questions, and notes from the interview resulted in the emergence of themes. This process of analysis continued till the end of the study. Table 3 presents the codebook with categories, codes, and the number of participants discussing the specific matter of concern.

Table 3*Repetition of Each Code in Participants' Responses*

Category	Code	Number of participants
Disparities	Bullying, discriminate attitude, disparate suspension, maltreatment, unfair expulsion, no leniency, punishments	10
Intolerance	Devastating impacts, no leniency, maltreatment, punishments, antisocial	9
Rehabilitation	Need for alternate approaches, need for training sessions	7
Teachers' bias	Devastating impacts, unfair expulsion, no leniency, maltreatment, punishments	9
Behavioral change	Behavioral issues, devastating impacts, negative impact on health, punishments, antisocial	8
Psychological change	Negative response of students, devastating impacts, maltreatment, adverse effects on health	7
Academic progress	Negative response of students, devastating impacts, unfair expulsion, worse academic progress	6

Table 4 presents the emerged themes identified from participant data in response to the respective research questions.

Table 4*Themes and Frequencies Related to Research Questions*

Research question	Emergent theme	Frequency of theme
1. What concerns do the African American students have regarding the application of zero-tolerance policies in public schools' disciplinary system?	Poor psychological health concerns	7/10 participants
	Impoverished impacts on academic and social well-being	8/10 participants
2. Does discriminatory behavior manifest in the application of zero-tolerance policy when teachers are dealing with African American students?	Prejudiced behavior of teachers	10/10 participants
	Unjust disciplinary actions	8/10 participants
	Rehabilitative perspectives	10/10 participants
	Negative expectancies from African American students	6/10 participants
3. Is there a disparity in the practice of zero-tolerance policy for African American students?	Demeaning communication	8/10 participants
	Bias in teachers' conduct	9/10 participants

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, evidence of trustworthiness is defined by the four undermentioned features. The first is credibility, which counts for the research's internal validity, ensuring that the study has yielded the desired results. According to Shenton (2004), credibility deals with the congruency of the research findings with reality. The second is transferability that refers to the generalizability of the results. It is about the extent of replicability of the study; that is how the research findings can be applied to different situations. The third characteristic is dependability, which is the same as

reliability in quantitative research. Reliability in qualitative research can be addressed through reflexivity (Shenton, 2004). The final characteristic of trustworthiness is confirmability. It calls attention to the objectivity of the research findings. Confirmability ensures the impartiality of the research. In qualitative research, trustworthiness relied on the rigor of methodology while the accuracy and precision of the data tied to the competence of those collecting and analyzing the data (Patton, 2015). I corroborated trustworthiness in this research study through the following elements: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The following elaborated the measures I took to ensure the attainment of trustworthiness.

Credibility

The credibility of a research study reflects the research design and data evaluation. It informs about the internal validity of the study (Ravitch and Carl, 2016). According to Polit and Beck (2014), credibility is the crucial criterion of a study regardless of the type of research. The research findings and the credibility of a study rely on the implementation of techniques used by the researcher. In 2016, Merriam and Tisdell reported that credibility could be achieved by careful attention to data collection, data analysis, interpretations, and research presentation. The fundamental research was conducted according to the mentioned Walden IRB ethical standards. I had chosen adult students who attended school in the county of Bexar and Harrison (Texas) as research participants. The research used multiple methods to establish trustworthiness and provide credibility. To ensure the research study's credibility, I stayed precise in recruiting the participants meeting the eligibility criteria. Also, it helped in extracting the relevant,

meaningful data from the participants. Credibility was also sought by audio recording interviews, transcribing them verbatim, and taking notes during each interview. Member checking was used to ensure the accuracy of the data and to enhance credibility. Moreover, I made sure that each question in the interview protocol was asked in the same approach, for it also helped establish credibility.

Transferability

Transferability applies to the extent to which the findings of qualitative research can be generalized to other contexts. It is another criterion of attaining trustworthiness to the extent to which the research findings apply to other studies or situations (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of this research study was to know if discriminatory behavior existed in practicing a zero-tolerance policy that pushed the students from the School-to-Prison Pipeline. This research was not seeking to find generalizable data but could potentially be used in future studies. Therefore, this study used a sample of 10 students. The developed themes were like the precise quotes from participants that also authenticated the transferability of the study. The study included the adult students from African American backgrounds who suffered from discriminatory practices reflecting on teachers' biased attitudes, therefore assisting in making the study transferable to the other aspects suffering any form of disparities.

Furthermore, a detailed explanation of the research methodology and analysis has helped the researchers pursue further studies. Also, with the variations in gender and experiences of interviewees, it is most likely that the findings would be transferable to other research programs (Rudestam and Newton, 2015). Moreover, I backed my study's

transferability by obtaining a detailed description of the participant's experiences and asking questions requiring descriptive answers that continued until all the follow-up questions were discussed.

Dependability

Dependability is about the reliability of the research. According to Polit and Beck (2014), dependability ensures the stability of the data over time. The researcher's reporting of a study finding in detail would stay consistent if other field workers look into the data and reached similar findings as reported. The qualitative inquiry was appropriate because the research focused on a systematic problem. I also had followed guidelines for ethical treatment. To ensure dependability, I thoroughly documented the entire research process. The data were appropriately recorded and stored, including the audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews, consent forms, and other essential documents.

Interviewees were allowed to interact with the research through member checking. Thus, I had ensured that all steps were taken to protect the identities of research participants. No remunerations were offered to the participants to participate in the interview to achieve reliability. It had all been done voluntarily. To prevent any biases, I solely concluded participants' experiences, keeping my perceptions aside representing a researcher's role rather than a mentor. The research bias was also prevented by deploying a member-check methodology and documenting data collection and data analysis process details mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4. I also examined some studies of similar nature to check out the coding process to establish reliability.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which other studies can corroborate the study's outcomes (Hinton, 2018). It defines the extent to which the study's findings are consistent and can be repeated by another study or another researcher (Polit and Beck, 2014). I employed the strategies of overly checking the data and my notes. However, I also ensured to examine the phenomena from participants' points of view, and not according to own perceptions about the topic under study. Therefore, I employed member checking to confirm whether the conclusions were consistent with the participants' experiences. All participants were sent an email with the transcripts' copies a few days after the interview. Participants were asked to review the information and could make changes where they felt necessary. Most of the participants did not respond, whereas those who replied reported no complaints and agreed with the transcripts sent to them. Besides, any information that could be traced back to a participant's identification was made anonymous for confidentiality. I ensured that the study did not reflect any researcher bias; instead, it ultimately reflected the participants' views. Auditing the data helped me carry out this step. I also examined the collected data multiple times throughout the research study to identify any contrasting findings.

Results

The interview-driven case study explored the sufferings of students that face the disparate attitude of teachers. I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews to gather the data for this research study. To maintain a record of interview sessions reflecting on the research, I made a personal journal. Any biases, personal insights, and presumptions were

included in that journal made during the entire study. Almost every participant had reported suffering a discriminatory attitude from teachers. Relying on the interview transcripts and data coding, I picked out the following themes from the participants' conversations reflecting on teachers' behavior towards them. It includes (a) poor psychological health concerns, (b) impoverished impacts on academic and social well-being, (c) prejudiced behavior of teachers, (d) unjust disciplinary actions, (e) rehabilitative perspectives, (f) negative expectancies from African American students, (g) demeaning communication, and (h) bias in teachers' conduct. Each of the themes illustrated in Table 5 accompanies the direct words of the participants' responses.

Table 5*Participant Data Alignment to Themes*

Theme	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Poor psychological health concern		x	x	x		x	x		x	x
Impoverished impacts on academic and social well-being	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x
Prejudiced behavior of teachers	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Unjust disciplinary actions	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x
Rehabilitative perspectives	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Negative expectancies from African American students	x			x	x	x			x	x
DemEANing communication	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x
Bias in teachers' conduct	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Research Question 1

What concerns do the African American students have regarding the application of zero-tolerance policies in public schools' disciplinary system?

Theme1: Poor Psychological Health Concerns

Every participant discussed the impacts of negative attitudes and behavior of teachers on the psychology of a student. This theme, reflecting on psychological health, emerged in response to exploring African American students' concerns about the punitive zero-tolerance policies. Most of the interview responses and reported works resulted in

this theme's emergence, reflecting psychological well-being. Electronic documents and the analysis of notes supported the emergence of this theme. Ill-treatment has worse long-lasting effects on life, mental health, and personality. It spoils nature or, say, puts an end to the confidence of being social in society. Out of 10, 7 participants shared their experiences that laid under the same theme and mentioned how people, especially the students, used to feel and respond when mistreated and how it affected psychological health. Often, uneven enforcement of punishment across racial lines critically affected African Americans' attitudes, norms, and behavior, imposing negative impacts of stress and trauma.

Participant 2: When I was in fifth grade, we had a party at school, and one of my Caucasian classmates asked me to share a toy with him, but I refused to do so. Soon after a few minutes of debate, we got to have a heated argument, and he went to complain to the teacher. On complaint, the teacher came to me and, without even asking the reason or the story from my side, took the toy from me and sent me home.

Zero-tolerance – suspending and expelling a large number of students from school imposed adverse effects on health and personality traits that prohibited them from finishing high school. Students who experienced suspension, expulsion, and arrests had been seen to pay high psychological and social costs, such as depression, suicidal thoughts, academic failure, and the risk of being incarcerated as adults.

Participant 6: One time, a Caucasian classmate said to me, “it is not that serious,” when I got emotional about systemic racism, and also the teachers asked me to leave the class. After that, I feel like I cannot speak my mind in class.

Although zero tolerance’s harsh implementation is not justifying as the concern has been raised, zero-tolerance policies may create, enhance, or accelerate adverse mental health outcomes for youth. This happens by increasing student alienation, anxiety, rejection, and breaking healthy adult bonds.

Participant 3: I would like to share an incident that happened to me when I was 13 years old. I was asked to write a scary story for a Halloween-based assignment. The story involved a character who shot students at a school ... Consequently, I got arrested and spent six days in jail ... before the police confirmed that no crime was committed...this incident surely imposed a negative impact on the morale, throwing me back academically as well, affecting other extracurricular activities too. I must say that behaving in such a discriminatory way by the teachers, more importantly, would have negative consequences on the lives or psychology of the students ...I felt it all.

Participant 8 shared a similar notion as “the strict steps to discipline the students of color impact the mental well-being... The punishments of suspension and expulsion overwhelmingly have a deterrent effect upon the psychology of students...”

Participant 10: Once... when I was in grade 3, I wrote ‘I love my friends Abby and Faith’ on a desk in Spanish class with an erasable marker... But the teacher deemed it as vandalism and suspended from class... It was so embarrassing for

me, also because of being out of the class, I missed the work, and classmates made fun of me...

Theme 2: Impoverished Impacts on Academic and Social Well-Being

The discriminatory dealing brings the students at risk for an academic setback. The African Americans were found with weak reading and writing skills than White students, and ultimately, such differences continue until the high school level (Bergh et al., 2010). The disparate practices are reflective of adverse effects on health and other areas of life. When students break the rule or fail to meet behavioral expectations, the policy is to respond with harsh punishments and sometimes even to get the police involved. It is also to note that all the kids are not equally affected. There are students of color (African Americans) and kids with disabilities that are disproportionately represented to the zero-tolerance.

The zero-tolerance policy is usually implemented to push these kids out of the school by arresting them for even minor offenses and then handling them within the criminal justice system instead, which poses a negative and disappointing effect on students' lives; more specifically, on the students of color. African American students may get disciplined more severely for less severe or more subjective reasons. Punishments like out-of-school suspensions can severely disrupt a student's academic progress, make them fall behind academically and socially as well, drop down their morale and self-esteem.

Maltreatment has worse long-lasting effects on life, mental health, and lower confidence in society. All the participants had discussed similar themes and mentioned how they felt and responded when mistreated.

Participant 1: Having a discretionary school discipline violation increases the probability of grade retention and dropout. My classmates call me lots of names because I am an African American, and when I respond to them, the teacher does not say anything to them; instead, suspended myself from the class for a whole day. Such similar incidents happened many times that have badly affected my academic progress just because I was absent from the class.

Participant 2: When I was in the sixth grade, I remembered a time when I asked a question and another Caucasian fellow of mine asked the same after me; the teacher explained him with immediate attention while ignoring me, and such incidents of ignorance had happened several times that results in, lack of academic progress, poor task delivery, and less involvement in other activities.

Participant 3: I want to share an incident that happened to me when I was 13 years of age and was assigned to write the scary story for a Halloween-based assignment. The story involved a character who bullied his African American fellows and did not get punished just because of the favoritism for being a Caucasian... Consequently, I got arrested and spent six days in jail ... before the police confirmed that no such crime was committed that needs to be charged ...this incident negatively impacted my social and academic life.

Participant 9 reflected the same thoughts as reported by Participant 2 and 3 by saying that “having been to jail or suspension critically impact the social and academic life”, likely Participant 7 buttressed that “getting punished for even minor mistakes pushed me back in my academics and also I began to feel inferior in the social gatherings.”

The learning process is badly affected when they saw teachers behaving in a discriminatory manner. This could result in grubbing grades, lack of self-confidence, annoyance, aggressive communications, and behavioral issues with other students and the teachers. Although participants had so many different views, perceptions, and experiences about the psychological outcomes, they all had similar biased behavior and maltreatment that pushed the students back in academics and social well-being.

Research Question 2

Does discriminatory behavior manifest in the application of zero-tolerance policy when teachers are dealing with African American students?

Theme3: Prejudiced Behavior of Teachers

Teachers’ biases matter a lot; usually, the bias is associated with worse instruction quality and lower expectations from the minority students. It poses negative impacts on the academic achievements of minority students. Generally, most interviewees believed that the teachers behave disparately among the students, especially when it comes to African American students. This theme, Prejudiced Behavior of Teachers, was the most acclaimed theme that almost every participant broached. This theme originated when

students were asked about the concerns regarding zero-tolerance in disciplining students.

Several causes led to the trend of the emergence of this theme.

Participant 3: I was the best at football. Once, a Caucasian teammate has pushed me while playing, and I got severely injured. Due to this reason, I was marked unfit by my coach rather than providing me with medical services. The thing that hurt me was that the Caucasian boy did not get punished for this act.

Participant 4: When I was ten years old, I was caught with a small knife in a lunchbox, placed there by my mother, for cutting an apple... same as the fellow of mine brought the scissor to unwrap the meal ... but that Caucasian was dealt with leniency rather than being expelled from school for possessing a weapon....

Participant 5: Once, a Caucasian fellow bullied me, but the teacher did not say anything to him. After a few days, he called me by demeaning words, and when I repeated back to him, he complained to the teacher and expelled me from the school for two days—at the same time, punishing him in the class.

Participant 6 reflected a similar notion by sharing his observation that “the teachers view some students, particularly African Americans, as attitudinal or aggressive, even though they may be using the same talkback language as a white student... but punish the black students while not noticing the other...”

Participant 8: Linguistic use to be my favorite subject, and I consistently scored high in it. A new teacher appointed in the school usually favored the Caucasian students, as I observed several times. In a class assessment, I was sure that I would get the highest marks, but a Caucasian mate of mine scored two points

higher than me, and when I asked the teacher to get my assessment rechecked, she refused.

The disparate practices cause to bring adverse effects on health and other areas of life. Most of the students represented such a way that disproportionate treatment is among the leading cause.

Theme4: Unjust Disciplinary Actions

The biased attitude of teachers reflects disparities and injustice in disciplining minority students. It ultimately impacts the educational experiences, including their perceptions about the teachers that have adverse effects on the academic engagement.

Participant 2: When I was fourteen years of age... Under the school's strict disciplinary rules, a Caucasian student and I got into a quarrel initiated by him, but I got suspended. After several such conflicts that resulted in repeated, multi-day, out-of-school suspensions, I fell further and further behind, failed the seventh grade, and became increasingly alienated from school... all this has significantly impacted my academic progress and my confidence...

Participant 3: Once, we had a play-act at school, and my teacher selected all my Caucasian classmates, whereas I was very much willing to participate, but she did not consider me because of being dark-colored. It wasn't enjoyable for me.

Participant 5: When I was a junior at school, a white fellow of mine repeatedly called me the N-word as he sat at a table in the library. I responded by yelling and ended up on the floor in a headlock; all other white students, some of them laughing, stood by watching. I reported the incident, and the teacher, took

disciplinary action, including me, although I had not committed any mistake.

Later, I felt suffocated and stopped loving myself because I realized the community did not love who I am.

Participant 7: When I was in fifth grade, we had a party at school, and one of my white classmates asked to share a toy with him, and I refused to do so. We had a heated argument after which he complained to the teacher, and she took the toy from me and sent me home.

By listening to the undermentioned incident, teachers appeared to be the strongest supporter of zero-tolerance. They pave the way for higher dropout rates and involvement in the criminal justice system, a pathway that is often referred to as ‘School to Prison Pipeline.’ Teacher burnout worsens the climates of school.

Participant 8: Once, a Caucasian student bullied and persecuted me for just being of darker skin color, and the teacher did not say anything to him; instead ask me to let it go, whereas if it were me, the one bullying, I would have gotten punished for sure.

Participant 10: I have been one of the victims of zero-tolerance; I don’t even bother about being called *negro* (a Brazilian term that translates to a big black guy), but at times it is not just the word, but it is the intonation that my fellow was using to spot me out differently; that annoys me, and we both get into fights. As a result, I have been suspended from school multiple times.

Theme5: Rehabilitative Perspectives

After completing the data analysis, this theme of an idea looking for effective rehabilitative approaches to mitigate the discriminatory attitudes in educational institutions had been emerged. It mainly emerged out in response to the research question about students' concerns regarding implementing a zero-tolerance policy. This theme was shared by almost all participants when discussing their perception of suitable measures to bring fairness in the application of zero-tolerance policy. Participants 1, 3, 4, 6, and 10 commented that maltreating students with zero-tolerance affected the school learning environment, and conflict with adolescent development deteriorating their behavior. Thus, it was vital to reform zero-tolerance and practice therapeutic approaches to deal with students that demonstrate positive behavior — for this reason, conducting sessions to provide training to the pedagogues about treating students with equality and leniency. Likewise, Participant 2 also mentioned the need to organize teachers' training sessions for professional development to manage classroom settings – making school a safer and better learning place.

Participant 2: Every other student should have a second chance at least to consider, understand, and try not to do the same again for which he or she has been warned once. Zero-tolerance should only be put into practice in case of severe or illegal activities. It was because teachers' discriminatory behavior has adverse effects on the psychological, social, and moral health of a student.

The participant students most discussed this theme. The participants referred to rehabilitation as a critical component of reintegrating back into society. Participants

spoke on the need for rehabilitative approaches to prevent the individuals from being involved in the criminal justice system in the first place. Participants 4 and 9 reflected on discrimination dealing as a significant contributing factor in the number of students entering the criminal justice system.

Participant 4: I believe systemic violence and disparate school discipline policies hinder equitable, just, and safe schooling. They also restrict access to social opportunities and civil liberties that push us back socially and academically.

Participant 7 responded with the following viewpoint on asking what should be implemented to promote and achieve school safety and discipline.

The unfavorable perceptions strongly influence trust in teachers and other school authorities... so the school should organize improvement training sessions for teachers to improve student-teacher relationships and improve school climate for racial and ethnic minority students...

Participant 9: When I was eight years old, I was suspended from third-grade class for two days for bringing a pair of cuticle scissors to open the wrapper on school breakfast ... I missed two days of school, and now has a suspension on permanent school record [sighs] ...

She further added: If there are high-quality alternative schooling opportunities that the students could participate in instead of being suspended and expelled... where they are not being isolated but trying to be led back into a learning community... I think that's something that needs to be pursued...

Participants with different perspectives on education and the rehabilitative approaches almost all agreed to the view that education must be provided to every student, whether they were convicted of violent crime or non-violent crime, for it is the fundamental right of each. Participant 6 presented his point of view that all students should be provided with an equal opportunity to get a quality education and be successful in life despite their background. He believed that some assistance should be provided to bring the formerly incarcerated students convicted of any violent or non-violent offense back on their feet.

Interviewees 5, 7, and 8 discussed the similar notion that classroom management skills must be taught to the teachers for creating a safe and sound learning environment. They should focus on eliminating bias and must understand the consequences of discrimination. They must not consider the zero-tolerance approach while dealing with minor offenses or misdemeanors that could be treated other way.

Theme6: Negative Expectancies From African American Students

The African American students are disciplined more frequently. The people of color were found to be over-represented in suspension. African American students use to be misperceived and are more likely to be expelled than their compeers at the same level. Racial disparities are ubiquitous in different aspects of life. Skiba and William (2014) reported, forty years of research found that black students overrepresented in consideration of suspension and exclusionary discipline. Following were some of the excerpts from the interviewee's responses.

Participant 1: I have been victimized by zero-tolerance multiple times. Once I got stuck in a debate with my classmate. The teacher reported and asked both of us to clear our positions. She asked my fellow first and listen to her attentively. When it was my turn, she accused me of being disrespectful even without allowing me to say anything just because we got trapped in a stereotype that black pupils do bad stuff.

Participant 5: The learning process for other students is affected when teachers deal with the students disparately Ongoing events like this can interfere with focus ... which can result in lower grades and behavioral issues with other students and the teachers ... which might result in throwing the students through the school to jail link.... I believe the schools should make amendments in the existing punitive approaches to even less dreadful mistakes and design alternative approaches for maintaining a safe school learning environment...

Participant 6: The first time that I ever called the N-word was at Nobles by someone who, at the time, was in my grade. What made this situation worse was someone that I thought was a friend of mine. I was on the squash courts, playing with teammates when I heard a knock on the glass. I look over, and it's him. And it became more disappointing when this happened in the class premises, and my teacher punished me when it was not my fault as I did not say anything to him. In fact, to this day, I still, unfortunately, remember and think of that moment.

Participant 9: My fellow Afro-Americans, including myself...usually... are most often disciplined for more subjective offenses, such as disrespect, loitering, or

making excessive noise, whereas white schoolmates are likelier to be suspended for more concrete violations, including smoking, skipping school, or vandalism... Participant 4 shared a similar perception by reporting an incident “once a Ten-year-old Afro-American fellow of mine was dealing with severe emotional and behavioral disturbances. Over two months, some Caucasian mates harassed him multiple times ... He reported the harassment to school officials, to no avail. A week after being choked by a student, he was knocked to the ground by the same student while others watched and laughed.... Frustrated, angry, and frightened, He jumped to his feet, shouting, “I could kill you.” ... When school officials called the police, sadly, he was expelled from the school in handcuffs, placed alone in the back of a police van, and charged with making “terroristic threats.”

Research Question 3

Is there a disparity in the practice of zero-tolerance policy for African American students?

Theme7: Demeaning Communication

The less concern about maintaining a mutually respectful environment among the student has negative impacts on the academic achievements of minority students. Also, the disrespectful attitude reflects a bias in disciplining African American students.

Participant 2: When I was in the sixth grade, I remembered a time when I asked a question and another Caucasian fellow of mine asked the same after me; the teacher explained him with immediate attention while ignoring me, and such

incidents of ignorance had happened several times that results in, lack of academic progress, poor task delivery, and less involvement in other activities.

Participant 7: Maltreatment has worse long-lasting effects on life, mental health, and personality and spoils nature or, say, put an end to the confidence of being social in the society. When I was in fifth grade, we had a pool party at school, and one of my white classmates asked me for tube float, and I refused to give him. We had a heated argument after which he complained to the teacher, and she scolded me and gave that to him. Likely, Participant 8 shared a no different notion by saying that “In an easter party, I brought two themed piñatas given me by my mommy, a Caucasian mate asked me to show, and he made it dirty by holding it with wet hands. I got angry at him, and my teacher scolded and punished me while said nothing to him.”

Participant 9: When I was at a sit-down table one day, a teacher reached out and touched my hair to admire it. She said that I knew an African American girl with hair like yours! So cool! This interaction made me less confident in my appearance as I do not want to look cool but beautiful. As in *cool* describes a nice pair of shoes. I am a human being... Participant 10 also indicated, “a Caucasian girl from a senior grade calls me out *negro* in a humiliating way”, I found it lousy to be heard when in a gathering.

Punishments like out-of-school suspensions can severely disrupt students’ academic progress, making them fall behind academically and socially and spoil their morale and self-esteem.

Theme8: Bias in Teachers' Conduct

Most of the students believed that disproportionate treatment is among the leading cause. Out of 10 participants, 9 participants discussed their self-suffering due to the mistreatment by the teachers.

Participant 5: Minority students, including myself, used to get strictly punished for things like going to the toilet without permission, eating in class, being late to school, or not being in proper uniform, and... the school supports things like zero-tolerance policies... due to this the school becomes an unwelcome place where the focus is on controlling students instead of the students being seen as people who deserve a welcoming and fair learning environment... I had suffered through an incident in a school when I was fourteen years old... Under the school's strict disciplinary rules, a Caucasian student and I got into a quarrel initiated by him, but I got suspended. After several such conflicts that resulted in repeated, multi-day, out-of-school suspensions, I fell further and further behind, failed the seventh grade, and became increasingly alienated from school.

Participant 6: When I was in the sixth grade, I remembered a time when I asked a question and another Caucasian fellow of mine asked the same after me; the teacher explained him with immediate attention while ignoring me, and such incidents of ignorance had happened several times that results in, lack of academic progress, poor task delivery, and less involvement in other activities.

Participant 7: I have been one of the victims of zero-tolerance; I don't even bother about being called *negro* (a Brazilian term that translates to a big black guy), but

at times it is not just the word, but it is the intonation that my fellow was using to spot me out differently; that annoys me, and we both get into fights. As a result, I have been suspended from school multiple times.

Participant 1 said, “teachers’ bias results in the students’ aggressive attitude, “ and these words were further stressed by Participant 3 “when I see my teacher doing a favor to the Caucasian fellows of mine, it really annoys me”. Furthermore, Participant 9 added a similar notion “when I was in grade 8, a Caucasian girl and I got into a quarrel on something, the teacher suspended from class for two days, whereas she just got punished in the class...”

There should be some other more effective measures to deal with the students equally, as far as zero-tolerance is concerned. It should be there to deal with some of the critical cases. It is more important to have effective measures to ensure that such discretions are utilized equitably for students of color, who often experience disproportionate disciplinary exclusion, which might most of the time due to the teachers’ misperceptions. Revisions to school disciplinary policies and professional training to teachers represent more promising steps to ensuring effective and fair school discipline.

Summary

The results of this research study were presented in this chapter. The research process to obtain the findings from this case study of 10 enrolled students was presented in this chapter. The central research question examined the existence of teachers’ disparate attitudes towards students belonging to different races pushing them into the School-to-Prison Pipeline. The interviews specified that the discriminatory practice relied

on various factors, particularly the teachers play a crucial role. These interviewees' responses reflected their personal experiences and communicated with individuals from different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. While analyzing the data, the following eight themes emanated: Poor psychological health concerns, Impoverished impacts on academic and social well-being, Prejudiced behavior of teachers, Unjust disciplinary actions, Rehabilitative perspectives, Negative expectancies from African American students, Demeaning communication, and Bias in teacher's conduct. The research findings backed the perceived thoughts about the punitive approaches, teachers' biased attitude, and their effects on students' lives. The students expressed that the teachers' discriminatory attitude adversely affected their morale while also influencing their academic and social life. The next chapter will elaborate on future research recommendations, potential implications for social change, and a summary of the findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this interview-driven case study was to explore the experiences of African American students to determine the contribution of teachers' behavior in propelling them into the school-to-prison pipeline. In this case study, I sought to understand the impact of discrimination on the participants who were African American students. Bertalanffy's (1968) general system theory provided the theoretical lens through which I viewed the experiences of study participants. The theoretical framework assisted me in answering the research questions to satisfy the purpose of the study.

One goal of the study was to substitute punitive zero-tolerance policies with better policies to favor the educational systems. During the interviews, the candidates reported information related to the elements that affected the students and added to factors of disproportionate behavior toward the African American boys, girls, and people with disabilities. This theory helped me assess the drawbacks present in the system so the study findings could illuminate the details regarding zero-tolerance policy enforcement and discrimination behind funneling African American students from schools to prisons.

Because racism and discrimination were fundamentally rooted in some social institutions, the problem had spread across many social segments of U.S. society, including the education process. Throughout the United States, discrimination against Black students had become familiar with experts linking it to inadequate school enrollment among Black students (Aloud & Alsulayyim, 2016). A campus environment was harsh, with college and university administration accused of neglecting the needs of African American students. Financial support of Black students had gone down, which

further contributed to lower admissions because education had become unaffordable (The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, 2013).

I developed a research strategy that included using social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest to recruit participants. The criteria for being eligible to become a participant were clearly mentioned in the recruitment materials. This approach enabled me to connect with the appropriate candidates. 10 students from the African American community contacted me regarding interest in participating in my study. This restricted my ability to collect data from students of other communities. I remained open to the participants so that they would feel comfortable sharing their experiences.

Before the commencement of the interviews, I asked potential participants go read the consent form and confirm their agreement by emailing the words “I consent.” Then, the interview was conducted on a social media app considering the safety protocol during the COVID-19 pandemic. The digital recorder was also used to record the conversation for later transcription.

I used a qualitative approach and a case study design to determine the discriminatory behavior of teachers propelling African American students through the school-to-prison pipeline. 10 African American students were interviewed to obtain valuable responses regarding their lived experiences of being punished, suspended, and expelled from the school premises. The participants shared the impact of disproportionate behavior of teachers in the different aspects of life, mainly academic, social, and psychological. The following three research questions guided this study: (a) What

concerns do the African American students have regarding the application of zero-tolerance policies in the disciplinary system of public schools? (b) Does discriminatory behavior manifest in the application of zero-tolerance policy when teachers are dealing with African American students? (c) Is there a disparity in the behavior and practice of zero-tolerance policy for African American students? I found the following answers to the research questions:

- All participants shared that they experienced the prejudiced behavior of teachers.
- Out of 10 participants, eight reported that they met the unjust disciplinary actions.
- Out of 10 participants, eight shared that disparate behavior of teachers strongly impacted their academic and social well-being.

Research on this topic was conducted to understand the disproportionate minority contact with the criminal justice system. The theoretical framework assisted me in answering the research questions to achieve the goal of understanding how the exclusionary disciplinary practices along with zero-tolerance policy had resulted in greater adverse outcomes for African American students when compared to White students. Moreover, this research helped fill the gap in determining the causes behind the disproportionalities affecting African American students' lives in funneling them into the school-to-prison pipeline. This chapter includes the interpretation of the research findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications for positive social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

I carried out this interview-driven qualitative case study with a foundation in the reported literature to explore the experiences of African American students. However, there had been extensive research reported on the problems faced by African Americans. The peer-reviewed literature reviewed in Chapter 2 detailed the existing gap in research. The research findings from the current study may inform field researchers and also contribute to the literature.

Theme 1: Poor Psychological Health Concerns

The first emerged theme of the study was that the African American students suffered through psychological issues due to the discriminatory attitude of the teachers. Of the 10 participants, seven reported that they faced discrimination from the teachers among them and their White classmates. This was consistent with the literature reviewed for this study. Marchbanks and Blake (2018) found that African American students got punished more strictly and more harshly for their actions. In the current study, the shared experiences of African American participants regarding psychological concerns were consistent in frequency and quality with the reported literature. Utsey et al. (2008) reported that the associated poor health concerns of African American students were prevalent in different U.S. counties, which was consistent with the findings of the current study.

In an educational institution, teachers should treat all students equally regardless of their race. The lack of equal treatment in the school premises results in poor mental health consequences. As presented in Chapter 2, teachers play a crucial role because they

have the ability to bring about positive changes by treating each student equally (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The prior research findings were consistent with the current study because the participants described the intense poor impact on their psychological health due to the disparate treatment of teachers.

Theme 2: Impoverished Impacts on Academic and Social Well-Being

The participants described the elements that played an important role in making them fall behind academically and socially. This theme was described by eight out of 10 participants in the study. The findings revealed that the teachers' discriminating way of dealing with and handling the students on the basis of race left a profound and lasting impact on the lives of students. The discrimination from teachers disrupted students' confidence, affected their self-esteem, and made them antisocial. These characteristics of academic and social setback (see Hutchinson & Bodicoat, 2015) were in alignment with the current participants' description of teachers' biased attitude, which impeded participants' academic and social development.

Theme 3: Prejudiced Behavior of Teachers

The theme of prejudiced behavior of teachers was one of the two themes described by all of the participants. This signaled to me the role of teachers' behavior in the different aspects of African American students' lives. The research findings showed that the discriminatory attitude of teachers within the educational system was formulated through misconceptions of teachers regarding students of color. These were the teachers who were more likely to make a student a victim of the school-to-prison pipeline from the early stage of education (see U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The current study

confirmed that teachers' prejudiced behavior strongly impacted the academic, psychological, and social lives of African American students.

Theme 4: Unjust Disciplinary Actions

The findings of this study showed that the teachers' disparate dealing with students of color had lasting impacts on the students' health. Eight of the 10 participants had experienced unjust treatment. I viewed this collective data as the teachers dealing with the African American students harshly rather than providing equal treatment. Moreover, the psychological impacts were related to stress (see Utsey et al., 2008). The stress had an impact on health, especially on psychosocial factors for African Americans. However, African American students did not realize that the stressors were affecting their psychological health. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) reported that the African American students either dropped out or were expelled for misdemeanors whereas their White classmates did not get strictly disciplined like neither suspended nor expelled. Smith (2015) mentioned the need for reforms within the disciplinary system of schools because the zero-tolerance policies affect the students while increasing their chances of dropping out.

As described in the literature review, both African American boys and girls were affected by racial obstacles. In addition, African Americans suffered increased exclusionary discipline (Murphy et al., 2013). Furthermore, research literature indicated that exclusionary discipline that removed students from their learning environment was mainly associated with worse academic outcomes, juvenile justice system contact, and higher school dropout rates (Barnert et al., 2015). The current study's findings were

consistent with those reported in the literature that African American students have had stricter disciplinary experiences compared to their White peers. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) reported that students facing strict disciplinary measures face adverse reactions that have an enormous impact on their ability to perform well at school.

Theme 5: Rehabilitative Perspectives

The perspective for have rehabilitation against the punitive zero-tolerance policy has been described by 10 out of 10 participants in the study. Holly (2016) found that the policies like zero-tolerance have worse impacts on students. The current study echoed this finding as the study participants expressed the need for rehabilitative approaches. This theme was congruent with the Curtis (2014) findings that rehabilitative measures were necessary to deal with the problems more effectively rather than considering zero-tolerance in every discipline case. From the date, I found that by having rehabilitative approach to deal with students' misconduct and other discipline issues would be more helpful for the development and progress of students. This study's findings shown that a deliberate integration of alternate approaches was vital to improve the bias environment.

Theme 6: Negative Expectancies From African American Students

The overarching theme that emerged from the findings in light of the research question was negative expectancies from African American students. It has been mentioned by 6 out of 10 participants. This suggested that the participant's perceptions about the discriminatory attitude of teachers were correct. It was the misbeliefs about the African American students that they do bad stuff (Alnaim, 2018). Since teachers hold certain expectations for their students based on student characteristics such as race,

ethnicity, and performances; therefore, further research should continue to explore African American students' experiences in educational settings to understand the extent of discrimination.

Although the results of this study were limited to a small number of participants within the State of Bexar and Harrison, these findings from the participants further extended knowledge that the exposure of students to racially bias environments had a lasting impact on personal perceptions and behaviors. This impact could lead to variations in students' beliefs, understanding, and behavior towards the teachers and society. On the institutional level, the findings of this research possibly assisted the authorities in thinking of making informed choices within the educational system, especially when it came to dealing with students of color. Knowing and understanding the challenges the African American students faced in the Caucasian dominant community was critically required for improved policy practices and social change.

Theme 7: Demeaning Communication

Out of 10 participants, 8 shared that they face demeaning words and sentences from their peers and also teachers that cause them disappointment and badly affects their self-esteem. This finding was aligned with the existing literature by White (2018). Additionally, Curtis (2014) demonstrated that the students from different racial backgrounds encountered problematic behaviors and attitudes. The participants shared similar experiences of odd behavior showing consistency with the reported literature (Cowan, 2016). The findings of this study demonstrated that use of demean way of talk

affects the attitude and the responses of the African American students that resulted in suspension or expulsion from schools.

Theme 8: Bias in Teacher's Conduct

The bias attitude of teachers have been reported by 9 out of 10 participants in the study. In the present study, I explored the impact of teacher discrimination on disciplining African American students. The findings revealed that the African American students got highly impacted by discrimination from teachers in schools. The students shared their experiences reflective of teachers' bias behavior that has profound and lasting impact on the psychological well-being of the students, ultimately affecting their academic progress. The shared experiences from the current study coincide with the findings teachers being the active influencer of zero-tolerance policies that pave the way from school-to-prison, specifically in case of African American students (Moreno and Scaletta, 2015). It was found that African American students perceiving disparities from the teachers intensely experienced strict school discipline in the form of suspension, spending time in detention, and expulsion. This finding was important as it denoted the involvement of teachers' bias with the African American students that badly affects the different aspects of life while pushing them at higher risk for school discipline (Thompson, 2017).

The research findings of this study confirm the choice of the theoretical framework of Bertalanffy general system theory that mainly discusses how the enforcement of zero-tolerance policy and discrimination are the major causes behind the funneling of more African American students from school to prison pipeline. Like,

almost every participant discussed that the disparate behavior of teachers with the students had been a fundamental reason for negative consequences in students' social and academic lives. The responses from interviewee students also reflected their perceptions of the zero-tolerance policies and the associated punitive punishments primarily due to the teacher's negative expectancies from African American students. Thus, this theoretical framework assisted in exploring the role of discrimination in pushing the students, particularly the African American students, from the school to prison pipeline. The interviewees' responses showed that their personal experiences formed due to the exposure to prejudiced behaviors and disparate attitudes from teachers and their peers contributed to their psychological well-being. The misperceptions that Black students do bad stuff make the teachers deal with the African American students disproportionately. This behavior ultimately becomes the reason for getting the students involved in the chain of the criminal justice system. Students' shared experiences further supplement the general system theory by highlighting that the systemic drawbacks due to the consideration of punitive zero-tolerance policies for even misdemeanors are the core reasons behind funneling African American students through school to prison pipeline.

Although the results of this research study are limited to a few participants within the counties of Bexar and Harrison, the findings may vary a few different implications. The research findings from the participants further extend knowledge of the theoretical framework to suggest that the individuals exposure to various community settings and environments from their own could strongly impact their perceptions and behaviors. The impact can lead to changes in what teachers and peers believe about their fellow African

American students and the understanding of disparities within the educational systems. Also, the changes could enable us to make more informed choices when it is needed to deal with any mistakes rather than considering zero-tolerance policies. Therefore, it is required to conduct further research in different counties. Moreover, the findings of this research study assist policymakers in making more informed choices within the education system to make the institutions a peaceful place. However, understanding teachers' perceptions regarding students of color will be crucial for improved policy and social change.

The findings of this research study reflected that the school systems generally be the major reason for discrimination among African American and Caucasian students. The general system theory stressed the roles and importance of context and environment and the way a system can reach its goals by taking different paths. Since the general system theory by Bertalanffy (1968) envisioned to address the complexity of problems in schools in this study, it emerged as an exemplary form of inquiry. It came out to be an eminent way of thinking that permitted to study the interconnections between the system and the students.

Discrimination manifests in multiple ways ranging from overt and intentional to subtle and ambiguous, from personal to institutional as well. The emergent themes from interviewee responses addressed that the educational institutions and the teachers are the much involved in discriminating among the students of African American descent. The discriminatory behavior from teachers created barriers for students to access equal treatment and opportunities which ultimately resulted in the form of adverse effects.

Thus, Bertalanffy's general system theory assisted in the identification and measurement of discrimination effects on African American students. However, disparities are socially undesirable but are being practiced openly which are more likely to take complex forms. Besides, some subtler forms of discrimination happen spontaneously and go unnoticed, especially at the institutional level.

The findings of this research study showed that the educational institutions (the school systems) generally contributed to the discriminatory environment rather than providing equal treatment to all the students. The majority of the study participants experienced this disparate attitude of the teachers in the form of demeaning communication and bias in conduct that leaves impoverished impacts on the academic and social well-being of the African American students. I viewed this information as due to the negative perceptions about the African American students that made the teachers deal disparately and consider actions that seem unjust. As presented in the theoretical framework, rehabilitation is necessary for institutions to minimize the prejudiced behavior of teachers among Caucasian and African American students. Moreover, the research findings showed that the purpose of rehabilitation is not just to achieve an equitable environment. The interviewees (students) correlated efforts as an investment in their health concerns and their academic and social life. It denoted a potential correlation between the need for teachers' training and the improvement in students' outcome.

When analyzed in the context of Bertalanffy's general system theory, the research participants' shared experiences for the emerged themes fell in alignment with the systemic drawbacks. When describing the biased conduct of teachers, the data aligned

with lacking in the system for not having rehabilitative perspectives. The teachers have the ability to understand the needs of every student, but the negative expectancies causing prejudiced behavior were the reason behind the discriminatory treatment.

Limitations of the Study

This study resulted in interviews from 10 participants residing in the counties of Bexar and Harrison, Texas. All were adult enrolled African American students. Assuming the findings could be generalized to the entire state of Texas or other regions in the U.S. would possibly be misleading as the findings represent a minute proportion of African American population in Bexar and Harrison.

My research used a qualitative design and a case study research approach required to know the lived experiences of people. I conducted in-depth interviews with African American students that had self-experienced the phenomena under study for gathering the data. The limitations in this study included those associated usually with the qualitative studies: (a) lack of generalizability and transferability due to the small size of the participants, (b) data was obtained from self-reporting participants, (c) the exclusion of Caucasian students, and (d) the potential for bias.

The results of this study may not provide a broader spectrum on the perceptions of students other than African Americans residing in the same county about the discriminatory behavior of teachers. Limitations to trustworthiness that arose from this study were the racial identity. I also noted my own opinions regarding the social and psychological impact on minority students who make up a large portion of the confined population in the prisons. Therefore, I made a note of the issues in my notebook while

collecting the data. To prevent this bias from carrying over in my interviews, my committee members and instructor reviewed my interview questions and provided feedback on suggested modifications.

To further improve my research study, my chairperson helped me out. It was suggested to use the term African American students despite saying the minorities or the students of color. It was because of the reason that using the term African Americans was better as opposed to using words like students of color, Black students, and minorities. These suggestions were all noted, and I made the necessary adjustments to my interview questions (Hinton, 2018)

The small sample size refrained the transferability of the data. The entire data collection was compounded by the restricted African American students of 18-24 years. Therefore, the results might not be representative of other African American students. Furthermore, the small number of participants restrain the ability to generalize the results. Interviews were conducted to collect the data, and the interviewees were asked to share their personal experiences; therefore, their responses could have been perverted to reflect socially desirable responses. Social desirability bias was the tendency to report such an answer that the respondent felt more socially acceptable than the truthful answer (Byers, 2018). Nevertheless, African American students' responses might be limited to understanding the teachers' perceived impacts of discriminatory behaviors and unjust disciplinary actions.

Another limitation was the exclusion of Caucasian students from the study. It was more likely that their lived experiences would be different from those of the African

American students. It was likely that the lived experiences could add a valuable piece of information to the research.

My personal bias and skills as a researcher and an interviewer might also have created some limitations. I might have unintentionally reacted to participants' words during the interviews. Such reactions that occurred naturally and were observable through facial expressions or body language incorporated the concept of reflexivity.

However, there were a few limitations in this study. First, we assessed students' observations of perceived teacher discrimination; however, we did not have information on the ethnic background of the teacher. Future research should also consider teacher background to understand how racial biases and stereotypes may shape teacher-student interactions. According to Pigott and Cowen (2000), the African American teachers had more positive views of all the students than Caucasian teachers. Therefore, the findings indicated that the racial background of a teacher could also have a notable impact on the number of disciplines students receive.

Additionally, the study was not about gendered racism. Hence, the researcher should continue examining the gendered racist experiences while exploring teacher-student interaction and school discipline. It could be associated more with issues of psychological and social distress.

Moreover, I did not report the school climate. Though, the school climate could strongly impact the level of discipline students receive. As Benner and Graham (2013) reported, the school climate was associated with discrimination in schools.

Overall, the strengths of this study included examining teachers' discriminatory attitudes among African American and Caucasian students. I found that perceptions of African American students about teachers' discrimination were predictive of school discipline. However, there were few limitations in this study. First, we assessed students' experiences of perceived teacher discrimination; however, we did not have information on the ethnic background of the teacher. Therefore, the future researcher must include teacher racial background to understand the stereotype of racial biases in shaping the teacher-student interactions. Like cultural mismatch theory suggested that racial stereotyping and cultural mismatch were associated with higher office referrals.

Moreover, the African American teachers had more positive views about their students compared to White teachers. Hence, it indicated that the teachers' racial background could have a significant impact on the level of disciplining students. The research should do future research on teachers' identities to better understand school discipline and teacher-student interaction.

Another limitation of the study was the scanty information about the environment of the school. Also, it did not report school climate. For instance, schools practicing corporal punishments towards students were indicative of more punitive responses towards students. Benner and Graham (2013) said that perceptions of the school climate were highly associated with perceiving higher and lower levels of discrimination in high schools and colleges. Thus, it was crucial in understanding the school climate because it can strongly impact disciplining students.

Recommendations

This case study research sought to gain insights into the discrimination by teachers for propelling the African American students through the school-to-prison pipeline. My research findings supported that the role of teachers was an important reason. Given the study's limitations, future research should be carried out across a larger population, including diversified geographic locations—also, the inclusion of a multi-cultural population. The research findings failed to discern that the increased rate of suspension and expulsion improve the students' behavior. Therefore, the school authorities must treat all the students with equality and consider rehabilitative approaches that effectively deal with any misconduct. The findings of my study also illustrated the need to abolish the use of a zero-tolerance policy while dealing with class-based transgressions or non-violent offenses to improve the healthy school environment. Since specific expectancies of teachers from African American students had impacts on their lives, future research should explore more about the experiences of students of color.

In summary, discrimination has a long history, and it is found prevalent in American society. The problem cannot be wholly stamped out; therefore, all the citizens need to make efforts throughout the U.S. and ultimately make this country a better place to live. It strongly required that appropriate laws should be practiced to ensure the students were not discriminated against based on their ethnicity. Academic administrators must make sure that news legislation fits with protection laws to operate smoothly without conflict. American society is multi-ethnic; hence it is difficult to achieve zero levels of discrimination. Racism has always been a source to provoke diverse attitudes

and behaviors of humans. Awareness of racial stereotyping and cultural diversity in society helps to reduce discrimination.

Implications

Teachers should interact with all students to show they had high expectations and display no discriminatory practices (Fields, 2014). Teachers had the responsibility of improving student achievement of all their students, including the African Americans. Participants were given the platform to share their lived experiences through in-depth interviews, allowing their voices to be heard, creating positive social change. From the knowledge obtained from this research, I hope to bring greater awareness about the need to provide professional training sessions to the teachers.

This research study had brought many findings. It was identified that African American students were routinely subjected to severe outcomes than their White peers. Therefore, the concerned need to pay closer attention to why this is occurring and how to keep it from happening. The research study found that African American students encountered strict disciplinary actions. To the extent that the administration was able to organize professional training sessions and thus the level of discipline needed in the school should decline. Training could be used to help teachers better understand the behavior of students they were encountering on a daily basis and reduce the chances of misperceiving behavior as disruptive.

Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson (2020) identified that the Black students face much more severe disciplinary outcomes for the same number of discipline events as their White compeers. More research into this was necessary as fairness was a hallmark

of the American system. If the students of color were committing any serious offenses than white students, there could be little cause of concern. Our research findings were of particular attention. Special care must be taken to ensure that the disciplinary process did not simply recreate a zero-tolerance approach that had been to be ineffective (Harris et al., 2017; McClain, 2015; Smith, 2015). In terms of the prison pipeline, policymakers needed to figure out the mechanisms leading to worse outcomes for students of color. More importantly, the justice system should be among the most color-blind systems because of its cornerstones being equity, fairness, and truth to be served. The higher rates of school discipline for African American students led to a much higher rate of juvenile contact predicted with less school discipline. Therefore, every concern, including teachers, policymakers, administrators, and scholars, needed to determine how to best deal with the students encountering disciplinary system.

The implications for this research involved recognizing the radicalized experiences of African American students. Examination of differences aided in providing responsive interventions despite viewing African American students as monolithic groups. The experiences of the African American students were unique within the educational institutions.

This study also has implications for teacher training and teacher development. As the research findings indicate, teachers play an essential role in students' academic achievement, especially in the lives of African American students. Therefore, effective teaching practices that were free from any prejudice were necessary to value the ethnic differences of the students in the classroom. During developmental sessions, teachers

could learn the appropriate and professional ways of dealing with the students with equality. The discriminatory behavior never allows the African American students to succeed and leads them to academic failures. The teachers' professional training sessions enable them to better manage the classroom environment and promote equality among all students regardless of their racial backgrounds. It could possibly result in more academic opportunities for the African American students who were often overlooked, ignored, or disparately punished in schools.

I advocate that the schools develop innovative disciplinary policies that allow the students to remain in the school environment and not abolish any rules. If the student was disciplined, it was needed to provide with the assistance necessary to succeed. This research has brought forward many issues that were not all negative. Therefore, I hope that this contributed to better outcomes for the students, particularly African Americans, across the nation.

Conclusion

In the present study, we explored the impact of teacher discrimination, and the findings revealed that African American students were impacted differently by perceived discrimination in schools. We found that African American students perceiving disparities from teachers were likely to experience strict school discipline in the form of suspension or expulsion. These findings corroborate research from the U.S. Department of Education - Office of Civil Rights (2012), the students of color were generally suspended and expelled at higher rates than their compeers.

Positive relationships with teachers and staff promote healthier psychological well-being. Perceived teacher discrimination has adverse effects on academic outcomes. Bryan et al. (2018) reflected that teacher discriminatory behavior was associated with lower academic outcomes. My research finding also furthered literature by reporting the negative impact of discrimination on the academic outcome. This research aligns with the Butler-Barnes and Inniss Thompson (2020), stating that teachers' negative perceptions about African American students resulted in adverse outcomes.

The implications of this research involved recognizing the racialized experiences of African American students. Instead of keeping negative expectancies from African American students, treating them equally aided in providing positive interventions. This research also had implications for paying heed to teacher training and development. As our findings emerged indicative that teachers play a crucial role in students' academic achievement and social and psychological well-being, especially in the lives of African American students. Hence, culturally effective teaching was essential to value the ethnicity of all students on school premises. During the training sessions, teachers could learn appropriate ways to deal with the students despite evaluating them on racial or ethnic norms. It was necessary because the discrimination in practices never allowed the students of color to perform well in their academic and social life. Therefore, the professional development sessions could increase success for students of color and more educational opportunities, usually overlooked and severely punished in schools.

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Appendix: Research Questions and Interview Questions

Interview Questions Related to Research Question 1

What do you think will hinder the application of zero-tolerance policy in the disciplinary system of public schools? Please explain with examples.

Based on what you experience, can you please share your opinion about the psychological concerns that the African American students may have regarding the application of zero-tolerance policy in the disciplinary system of public schools?

From your experience, does the zero-tolerance policy help to bring law and order to public school systems?

Follow up question: Do you think there should be an existence of the zero-tolerance policy in schools, or can other punitive measures be more effective? Please justify your answer.

What do you believe will be the financial impacts as a result of the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy?

Interview Questions Related to Research Question 2

What do you think will be the perceptions of students belonging to different races about the application of the zero-tolerance policy in schools?

In your opinion, do you think there is a difference in the application of zero policy based on ethnicity (race)? What led you to form this opinion? And what race?

In your opinion, what will be the suitable measure to bring fairness in the application of the zero-tolerance policy for all students?

Interview Questions Related to Research Question 3

What disparities can you describe in the practice of implementing school to prison pipeline?

In your point of view, what probable behavioral changes might come in the implementation of school to prison pipeline?

Having served a verdict as a result of school to prison pipeline, what overall impact has there been on your life?