

2015

U. S. History Teachers Perceptions of Georgia's Common Core State Standards

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Garnica Lewis

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2015

Educators' Perceptions of Georgia's Common Core State Standards
in U.S. History
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Ed.S. Albany State University, 2003

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Doctoral Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
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Abstract

Since 2011, 45% of high school seniors have not been graduating from a rural central Georgia high school, with the majority of them failing U.S. History. As of 2013, only 32% of seniors in Georgia passed U.S. History, which is a core course. Although the local school board mandates that U.S. History teachers use Common Core Georgia Performance Standards to improve passing rates, the low proficiency rates for U.S. History suggest that a gap in practice exists, thus indicating the need for further research. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore U.S. History teachers' experiences with and perceptions of Georgia's Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in the teaching of U.S. History. This study was guided by the Biggs model of constructive alignment, which advocates that there should be coherence among assessments, teaching strategies, and intended learning outcomes in an educational program. Four U.S. History teachers were conveniently sampled and served as participants. Individual, in-depth interviews were conducted, and the interview data were transcribed, open coded, and thematically analyzed. The findings, which are limited to this study site, revealed that the teachers' perceived misalignment between their curriculum, instruction, and assessments and the CCSS. This research promotes positive social change for the local site by providing data to assist in the restructuring of the U.S. History curriculum, assessments, and instructional practices for proper alignment with Georgia's CCSS. It is expected that when there is proper curriculum alignment, teacher training, and an aligned assessment system, student performance in U.S. History will improve and the graduation rate in Georgia's high schools will increase.

Educators' Perceptions of Georgia's Common Core State Standards
in U.S. History Courses

by

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my parents who believed in the education of African-Americans and provided me invaluable opportunities to pursue my goals.

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Section 1: Introduction of the Study

Description of the Local Problem

Since 2011, 45% of high school seniors have not been graduating from a rural central Georgia high school, a number which is high due to a larger number of course failures in U.S. History (National Council La Raza [NCLR], 2012). As of 2013, only about 32% of seniors in Georgia passed U.S. History, a core course in the school curriculum. Georgia's low graduation rates reflect the need for a more highly educated citizenry able to compete in a rigorous global economy (NCLR, 2012). Students who do earn a high school diploma are more adequately prepared for college and a career (Snyder, 2010).

Past research on the nation's struggling high schools has indicated that students who failed one or more courses, such as U.S. History, are twice as likely to drop out of high school (Smith & Niemi, 2001). Costa and Kallick (2009) suggested that students who fail core courses such as U.S. History require remedial course work, and many eventually leave high school without earning a diploma. The NCLR (2012) suggested that high schools could improve student achievement in U.S. History and other core subjects by using the rigorous Common Core State Standards (CSS).

Governors and legislators have made decisions regarding student achievement in many states, including Georgia. According to the National Board of Governors (2012), Georgia has accepted the call to action and has adopted a set of CCSS to help prepare students for college, a career, and the workforce. With the support of many of Georgia's educators and legislators, the state adopted a new set of state standards, the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards

(CCGPS), to accompany the current set known as the Georgia Performance Standards. While there may not be one plan for improving education, the CCSS can provide an opportunity for schools to improve student achievement across all grade levels and in all districts in the United States (CCSS Initiative, 2012).

The CCSS Initiative (2012) defined the common core standards as a set of clear guidelines detailing student learning goals. The standards were created to reflect the level of critical thinking that students will need in college, career, or in the workforce. The CCSS Initiative dictates that the CCSS are crucial to improving education for all students (CCSS Initiative, 2010). This research revealed key elements of the CCSS movement in a rural high school in Georgia to improve student achievement.

According to Snyder (2011), low student achievement in core courses such as U.S. History as well as low graduation rates have had a detrimental effect on the nation's economy and judicial system; that is, students who did not earn a high school diploma were 30% more likely to be incarcerated or using public assistance programs. Students who fail to earn a high school diploma negatively impact the nation's economy and cause states to spend \$713 million in state taxes to pay for indigent services such as welfare, Medicaid, and food stamps (French, Homer, Popovici, & Rubin, 2014). The United States Census Bureau (2010) indicated that students who fail to earn a high school diploma earn an average of \$17,299 annually, whereas students who earn a high school diploma earn an average of \$27,000.

According to Glickman (2010), curriculum, scope and sequence, and professional learning should be linked to make high schools effective and successful places of learning.

Glickman reasoned that for a high school to be successful, it must clearly define success and set a graduation goal for all students.

Research clearly indicates that students who pass core course subjects such as U.S. History and achieve a high school diploma are more likely to add billions of dollars to the nation's economy through career and college opportunities (French et al., 2014). Conversely, students who do not pass U.S. History and do not earn a high school diploma are more likely to negatively impact the nation's economy by becoming dependent upon government programs funded through state and federal taxes (French et al., 2014). Gouskova and Stafford (2005) concluded that nationally and in the State of Georgia, the impact of failing core courses such as U.S. History and dropping out of high school is devastating for national and state economies. As such, those who fail core courses such as U.S. History and fail to graduate are also more likely to become subsidized by the government in the future (Glickman, 2010).

Rationale of the Local Problem

The local issue being examined in this study is that since 2011, 45% of high school seniors have not graduated from a rural Central Georgia high school, and this high number is composed primarily of those who fail U.S. History (NCLR, 2012). According to Hunter (2011), graduating from high school marks the beginning of the lives of students, but not all students have this opportunity. Although the local school board mandates that U.S. History teachers use CCGPS, the low proficiency rates for the course suggest that a gap in practice exists and that there is a need for further research.

In 2010, the Georgia Department of Education suggested that the CCSS should be phased in over a number of years. In 2012, Georgia was reported to be near the bottom nationally in comparisons based on the graduation rates of students, from students with disabilities (30% graduating), to economically disadvantaged students (59%), to Black students (60%), to students with limited English proficiency (32%), and even to White students (76%). With Georgia's Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2011) reporting less than 55% of students meeting minimum standards in U.S. History and less than 70% of high school seniors earning a high school diploma annually, there is a sense of urgency with the use of CCSS. With low graduation rates and low passing rates in U.S. History raising awareness of this problem, Georgia educators, parents, teachers, and local legislators have started to examine factors that improve high school achievement. It is critical to understand how curriculum alignment, assessments, and teacher preparedness can lead to higher student achievement (Glickman, 2010). With higher student achievement, the dropout rates could be lowered and risks associated with high dropout rates such as high crime and incarceration rates, high poverty levels, and low skills for sustained employment could be avoided (Hunter, 2011).

The high school referenced in this study is located in rural, central Georgia. It is a midsized school that serves approximately 600 economically disadvantaged students. About 90% of the students come from single-parent and low-socioeconomic-status households. The school has a free lunch program for all students (Georgia Department of Education, 2012), along with one principal, two assistant principals, two counselors, five support staff personnel, 25 teachers, and five paraprofessionals. The district serves approximately 2,000 students ranging from pre-K to 12th grade, with over 98% of the students qualifying for free lunch services and with the

following racial/ethnic composition: 1% Asian, 80% African American, 6% Hispanic, 10% White, and 2% multiracial. The demographic makeup of teachers includes 200 certified teachers and 30 noncertified paraprofessionals with the following educational backgrounds: 7% high school diploma, 50% bachelor's degree, 30% master's degree, 10% specialist, and 3% doctorate degree (GOSA, 2010). The educational background and demographics of the teachers at the local high school are representative of the entire school district (Georgia Department of Education, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was Biggs's (2003) model of constructive alignment, which indicates that there should be coherence among the assessment, teaching strategies, and intended learning outcomes of an educational program (Thakore & McMahon, 2006). Biggs's model of constructive alignment has increasingly been used by course designers to improve the relationship among learning objectives, teaching techniques, and assessment methods. Biggs claimed that an effective constructive alignment would lead to tasks that support deeper learning as well as appropriate forms of assessment. Constructive alignment can also lead to the development of conceptually rich knowledge, which would serve as the basis for learning in new contexts. The development of conceptually rich knowledge is the opposite of surface learning, where students only learn basic concepts and principles but cannot integrate and apply these ideas and facts meaningfully in their lives (Mainka, Smyth, & Brown, 2005).

According to Biggs (2003), constructive alignment necessitates a balance and synergy among different instructional and educational variables. These variables are the professional

goals of the instructors, teaching methods used, curriculum, assessment procedures, wants and needs of the students, and psychological and social climates of both the school and the classroom. If balance is not reached, poor teaching and surface learning may emerge (Biggs, 2003). Each of these variables should focus on achieving common goals. If these variables are not well aligned, this can lead to inconsistencies, unsatisfied expectations, and inappropriate practices that can affect learning and teaching (Biggs, 2003). Constructively aligned learning environments wherein the emphasis is placed on the relationship among learning outcomes, learning activities, and teaching practice and assessment strategies can lead to more supportive inquiry and functioning knowledge (Mainka et al., 2005). The framework is supported by various educational scholars (Kallick & Colosimo, 2008; Squires, 2009) who have claimed that curriculum alignment, teacher training, and a strongly aligned assessment system can improve student performance in U.S. History and can lead to improvements in high school graduation rates.

Curriculum Alignment

One approach to ensuring that the school district's curriculum aligns with new CCGPS and its corresponding assessments involves vertical alignment and scope and sequence (King, 2011). Strongly aligned and clearly articulated curriculum and assessments provide a clear and coherent set of expectations for students and educators and dramatically increase student achievement (Kallick & Colosimo, 2008). When a district's curriculum is vertically aligned with state standards, the lessons are articulated logically and are presented in a consistent order for each subject area and from one grade level or course to the next (Ewing, 2010). Boscardin et al.

(2005) established that curriculum alignment is important for student achievement. They examined how several opportunity to learn (OTL) variables affect student outcomes and whether these effects can be consistently found across varying subject areas. They specifically looked at the effects of OTL variables on student performance in English and algebra. Despite the differences in subject areas, Boscardin et al. found that content coverage and student performance were linked positively. Moreover, teacher expertise is linked to student performance.

Raska, Keller, and Shaw (2012) concluded that engaging in the processes of constructive alignment such as aligning learning goals and outcomes, learning activities, assessment strategies, and assessment criteria can all serve as the foundation for improving learning outcomes. The researchers found that when teaching components were all aligned throughout the curriculum, students were more likely to learn and enhance their intellectual development (Raska et al., 2012).

Teacher Preparation

Ewing (2010) overwhelmingly confirmed that teacher preparation, particularly for the instructing of rigorous CCSS, is vitally important to increasing student achievement and raising graduation rates in the nation's high schools. Ewing indicated that

Teachers must have deep and appropriate content knowledge to reach student understanding; they must be adaptable, with enough mastery of content to teach students with a range of abilities; and they must have the ability to inspire at least some of their students to the highest levels of achievement. (para. 3)

Likewise, Squires (2009) suggested that teachers must understand rigorous common core standards as well as how to use the accompanying standardized assessments to increase achievement in their schools. Kober and Renter (2011) posited that aligning teacher preparation to the standards, developing curriculum materials tied to the standards, and implementing new assessments aligned with the standards all act as major barriers to the implementation of CCSS. Therefore, in the current study I assessed the views of teachers concerning their preparation to carry out CCSS in their classrooms, how they do it, and what the benefits are of doing so.

Use of Assessments

Wall (2012) assessed the perceptions of third, fourth, and fifth grade level teachers by carrying out six focus group discussions. Wall also performed three leadership interviews and open-ended online surveys, the results of which provided additional insights from the instructional staff at an upper elementary school. Wall found that using common formative assessments in this school influenced an improved and sustained mathematics achievement level. Wall found three major themes with regard to the focus and alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessments, using assessment data to stimulate instruction and differentiating instruction to meet student learning needs. Kober and Renter (2011) suggested that elementary school math scores can increase by 29% annually, if schools have strong principal leadership, teachers utilize effective instructional strategies, and schools foster a culture of high expectations for student learning. Four predominant types of leadership can assist in the implementation and effective use of common formative assessments: (a) renewal leadership, (b) moral/ethical leadership, (c) instructional leadership, and (d) distributed leadership. Cultural characteristics that emerged as

having significant contributions included (a) restructuring (b) teacher collaboration, (c) high expectations, and (d) caring relationships (Wall, 2012). Wall (2012) established that teachers' perceptions could reveal integral insights on CCSS. The need for appropriate leadership to carry out CCSS is also important in understanding teachers' preparation for the use of CCSS and how this use influences U.S. History subject proficiency. It is also critical for exploring the perceptions of the teacher leaders on how to improve professional development related to CCGS.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative, and thus I carried out a descriptive, case study approach. This method is deemed as the most appropriate for investigating phenomena such as perceptions, as a quantitative study would be too restricted by narrowly defined variables (Nakai, 2012). Using the qualitative approach would allow the researcher to obtain data specific to a particular context. The data in this study were collected through a series of taped interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to ascertain teachers' thoughts and perceptions as they relate to Georgia's CCSS and teaching U.S. History. According to Yin (2010), the goal of case studies is to understand complex social phenomena. Laws and McLeod (2006) claimed that a descriptive case study could lead to a detailed account of the phenomenon being studied. Moreover, the method is useful for presenting information about a phenomenon that has not yet been researched fully.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explain teachers' perceptions of the use of CCSS and how this use influences U.S. History subject proficiency. Another purpose was to explore the

perceptions of the teacher leaders on how to improve professional development of the CCGPS. To explain the Georgia common core initiatives to the research participants, specific terms were used to discuss the skills and knowledge needed to prepare students for the global economy. These terms include CCSS, curriculum, assessments, and professional development. The four terms are synonymous with the curriculum and instructional programs currently utilized in Georgia's public high schools (Georgia Department of Education, 2012).

The high school referenced in this study is located in rural, central Georgia. It is a midsized school that serves approximately 600 economically disadvantaged students. About 90% of the students come from single parent and low socioeconomic households. The school has a free lunch program for all students (Georgia Department of Education, 2012), along with one principal, two assistant principals, two counselors, five support staff personnel, 25 teachers, and five paraprofessionals. The district serves approximately 2,000 students ranging from pre-K to 12th grade, with over 98% of the students qualifying for free lunch services and with the following racial/ethnic composition: 1% Asian, 80% African American, 6% Hispanic, 10% White, and 2% multiracial. The demographic makeup of teachers includes 200 certified teachers and 30 noncertified paraprofessionals with the following educational backgrounds: 7% high school diploma, 50% bachelor's degree, 30% master's degree, 10% specialist, and 3% doctorate degree (GOSA, 2010). The educational backgrounds and demographics of the teachers at the local high school are representative of the entire school district (Georgia Department of Education, 2012).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

It was an assumption in this study that the chosen number of participants through convenience sampling is enough to obtain robust and accurate findings. The participants in this study were four 12th grade U.S. History teachers at a rural central Georgia high school. The number of participants is dependent on convenience sampling, which is the selection of participants based on the convenience of the researcher and is normally based on time, money, and the availability of sites or respondents (Ozdemir et al., 2011). Another assumption was that the data gathered and the emerging themes would be accurate and honest. It was assumed that participants would have the ability to articulate their experiences and be willing to do so truthfully.

The case study approach was a descriptive method, and therefore a limitation of this study was that it could not establish causal relationships like other types of quantitative methods (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2009). The study's findings are also not generalizable, which can affect the use of the results of the current study by future researchers. By using the descriptive study method, this study described rather than explained. This study was delimited by its focus on only the campus of a rural high school in central Georgia. The participants in this study included only 12th grade U.S. History teachers at a rural central Georgia high school, and therefore may only be generalizable to the district in which it is situated.

Operational Definitions of Key Terms

Assessments: Assessments involve summative feedback that can provide teachers and students with information regarding the overall mastery of content (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2012).

Professional learning: Professional learning is the process by which teachers collaborate with one another to design the curriculum, assessments, and instructional techniques to improve their educational practices (Schmoker, 2006).

Common Core State Standards: CCSS were developed as new learning goals designed to improve achievement while preparing students for the 21st century global economy (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). Although the CCSS were initially written to address English/language arts standards, history and technical subjects are being taught through literature, reading, and writing. These standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared for college, work, and success in the global economy (NCLR, 2012).

Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS): CCGPS are a new set of CCSS that are directly applicable to students in the state of Georgia (CCSS Initiative, 2012).

Scope and sequence: A scope and sequence in education refers to the breadth and depth of a specific curriculum. For instance, the scope is how much one will teach of a subject over the course of a semester or year. The sequence is the order in which an instructor will teach the lessons (Nichols et al., 2012).

Significance of the Study

Exploring these themes and improving student achievement in U.S. History courses is a daunting task for local educators. In the past, the curriculum was overhauled when new standards were introduced (Glickman, 2010). However, to continuously improve, districts must develop new methods of implementing CCGPS (CCSS Initiative, 2012). According to the National Council of History Education (NCHE, 2012), one important way to respond to the need to implement CCSS for improving U.S. History achievement is through the development of scope and sequence and professional learning. The NCHE (2012) suggested that U.S. History achievement can be significantly improved by the implementation of the CCSS through specific reading, writing, and thinking initiatives.

The purpose and rationale of this research study was to: (a) discover U.S. History educators' perceptions of their preparedness to teach the CCSS, (b) discover educators' perceptions of Georgia's CCSS, and (c) discover educators' assessments of students' low proficiency levels. The issue of diminishing graduation rates along with high failure rates in the subject of U.S. History among Georgia's public high schools is reviewed. This research will contribute to a better understanding of the local problem by suggesting, based on the perceptions of teachers, of what could act as barriers to the implementation of CCSS and what schools could do to improve the proficiency levels of high school students, specifically in the field of U.S. History, and to subsequently improve graduation rates.

Summary

Research related to the issue of low graduation rates and low achievement in U.S. History courses recognizes the importance of establishing a clear path to higher student achievement rates (Costa & Kallick, 2009). This is why there is a need to describe teachers' perceptions of the use of CCSS and how their use influences U.S. History subject proficiency, which is the purpose of this study. Another purpose is to explore the perceptions of the teacher leaders on how to improve the professional development of the CCGPS. The study endeavored to examine the issue of low proficiency rates through the lens of four U.S. History teachers at a rural central Georgia high school. I believe this research study may be of much value and significance to the education field. Exploring these themes and improving student achievement in U.S. History courses is a daunting task for local educators. In the past, when new standards were introduced, the curriculum was overhauled (Glickman, 2010). However, to continuously improve, districts must develop new methods of implementing CCGPS (CCSS Initiative, 2012). According to the National Council of History Education (NCHE, 2012), one important way to respond to the need for CCSS implementation for improving U.S. History achievement is through the development of scope and sequence and professional learning. The NCHE has suggested that U.S. History achievement can be significantly improved by the implementation of the CCSS through specific reading, writing, and thinking initiatives. To this end, this study has added to the existing body of research as it relates to improving high school proficiency levels. If this research reveals that teachers require professional development and that the local U.S. History curriculum lacks scope and sequence, then professional development will be provided to teachers, and the local U.S.

History curriculum will be amended to reflect scope and sequence with Georgia's common core performance standards.

Following a discussion of what the study aimed to do, the next section is a review of literature. In this section the CCSS initiative is discussed in detail based on the findings of past studies. This section also highlights the research gap that needs to be closed. Succeeding sections cover the research design and methodology, the findings, and the summary and recommendations.

Section 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe teachers' perceptions of the use of CCSS and how the use of CCSS influences U.S. History subject proficiency. Another purpose was to explore the perceptions of the teacher leaders on how to improve the professional development of the CCGPS. There has been significant discussion on secondary education literature as it relates to the implementation of rigorous curricular and instructional programs to increase student proficiency rates (Glickman, 2010). This section presents a review of the related literature. The review includes the studies on teacher preparation programs and professional learning. This is followed by the studies on assessment systems. After this, a review of the CCSS was conducted as well as assessments under CCSS. Subsections are devoted to the U.S. History curriculum and the studies on instructional strategies. I conducted a literature search by using online databases such as ERIC, Education Research Complete, Education from Sage, Education Research Starters, and Oxford Education Bibliographies. I looked for relevant studies in educational journals and used keywords such as *assessment systems*, *common core*, *common core state standards*, *CCSS and history*, *effects of CCSS*, *history curriculum*, and *instructional strategies for history*.

Literature Review

Teacher Preparation Programs and Professional Learning

Research conducted by The Leadership Collaborative (TLC, 2011) indicated that teacher preparation programs can greatly influence student achievement. TLC (2011) suggested that

preparation programs should prepare teachers to improve their instruction using CCSS, aligning the high school curriculum with state standards, and using assessments to promote instruction. Studies conducted by the American Council on Education and Center on Education Policy (2011) concluded that teacher preparation programs are vital components to ensuring the success of high school students in core subjects. The American Council on Education (2011) suggested that teacher preparation programs must become more active in recruiting prospective teachers and ensuring that these individuals understand the rigor associated with CCSS.

Kober and Rentner (2011) documented the importance of teacher preparation as a key factor for improving graduation rates and student achievement for U.S. History students. Their research suggested that the development of collaborative teams of teachers, administrators, and experts could establish a set of consistent standards from state to state that will ensure that students not only graduate from high school, but also become prepared for college and the workforce. Similar research conducted by Ewing (2010) concluded that the CCSS should influence every part of the preparation program for teachers. Ewing further indicated that high school history teachers should understand the standards. Teachers must have deep and appropriate content knowledge to understand these standards; they must be adaptable with enough mastery to teach students with a range of abilities (Ewing, 2010). As it relates to the teaching of U.S. History, the National Council for History Education (2012) suggested that extensive professional learning in the field of U.S. History education could greatly improve students' proficiency levels. It has been suggested that the training of teachers in the use of writing, reading, and critical thinking skills can bolster students' grasp of the rigorous CCSS (CCSS Initiative, 2012).

Mellander (2014) studied states' strategies, policies, and challenges in implementing the CCSS. The researcher looked at how 40 states responded to a survey conducted by the Center on Education Policy regarding the issue of implementing CCSS. The researcher found that supporters of the CCSS are confident that the standards would be able to improve student learning and achievement. However, the states that responded acknowledged that preparing students to meet the rigorous standards set would require schools to make important shifts and for teachers to change their instruction practices. The states that responded to the survey claimed that several activities were in place to prepare teachers, principals, as well as students for the CCSS. Specifically, it was found that states are “engaged in CCSS-related professional development activities for teachers and principals; informational meetings with various stakeholders; activities to prepare districts and schools for the CCSS-aligned assessments; and technical assistance related to the standards” (Mellander, 2014, p. 22). Furthermore, a majority of survey respondents reported that their state had already begun teaching CCSS aligned curricula. Those who still have not implemented CCSS-aligned curricula would do so soon (Mellander, 2014).

Assessment Systems

Research conducted by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) revealed that benchmark assessments are vital to improving the student achievement levels and graduation rates of high schools (Porter et al., 2009). The PARCC reviewed assessment data for both middle and high school students and concluded that the CCSS and the accompanying

assessments would work in tandem with teacher preparation programs to raise student achievement in core subjects such as U.S. History and English (Porter et al., 2009). National Center for Educational Achievement (NCEA, 2009) indicated that assessments are critical components that drive instruction in high performing schools. A needs assessment is typically completed to determine the extent to which assessments align with the standards in high performing classrooms. In the evaluation of standards and creating appropriate assessments, there is often a discussion of learning goals (Senge, 2011). The learning goals can lead to the impressive assessment of learning taking place after teaching. In U.S. History classes, assessments should be created before teaching (Senge, 2011). If instructors in the field of history simply instruct for determining the sophistication of students and do not evaluate whether actual learning has occurred, there will be little success over the course of a semester.

Finn and Petrilli (2010) showed that rigorous assessments and proper teacher preparation programs would develop master teachers. Moreover, Finn and Petrilli suggested that the use of the rigorous CCSS and assessments would improve graduation rates if students are experiencing higher achievement rates. Contrary to other research findings, Kallick and Colosimo (2008) maintained that standardized tests continue to feature short, choppy, superficial reading, as well as searching for information in bits, passively recognizing errors, and filling preselected responses to other individuals' questions. The use of these assessments is significant because the data produced from them are used to communicate messages to parents, students, and educators about what is important as well as how a student demonstrates that he or she has mastered a given content area. This level of evaluation is better obtained through performance-based assessments (Kallick & Colosimo, 2008).

Common Core State Standards

Porter, Polikoff, and Smithson (2009) theorized that student proficiency rates would increase if states across the nation utilized a set of common core standards. The CCSS Initiative involves using certain standards for subjects such as Math and English/Language Arts. The CCSS Initiative was designed to address low proficiency rates in Math and English; however, these standards are now being applied in Social Studies and technical courses (CCSS Initiative, 2010b).

Common core state standards have the ability to improve teaching because they foster shared learning goals and utilize quality assessments (CCSS Initiative, 2010a). Under the CCSS, teachers or instructors have a set of common standards serving as goals for what to expect from their students in terms of their level of knowledge and skills through grades K-12 (CCSS Initiative, 2010b). However, the CCSS is limited; that is, it does not address schools' curricular and instructional needs, nor does it provide staff-development modules for teachers. Krupa and Confrey (2010) suggested that low student performance is often related to ineffective teachers, weak curriculum and assessments, and a failure to provide job-embedded professional learning for teachers. Apart from lacking in knowledge and professional development, low proficiency levels in schools can be explained by the inadequacy of curriculums as well as weak assessment tools. Nevertheless, high schools can address the limitations of CCSS by providing the teachers with professional learning opportunities and quality assessment tools, thus ensuring that students receive high quality instruction (Marzano, 2003). Responding to teachers' lack of training and understanding of the CCSS is vital to student achievement. Accordingly, King (2011) suggested

that instructional issues caused by lack of teacher preparation and training can affect student achievement levels in core subjects such as U.S. History.

According to Ewing (2010), successful high schools provide their students with the opportunity to complete rigorous academic coursework, which exposes them to relevant learning opportunities. These high schools also ensure that students experience a strong curriculum that can provide them with practical knowledge and skills for college, a career, or the workforce. More importantly, this rigorous curriculum should align with state standards. Kober and Rentner (2011) suggested that if a curriculum is weak, student proficiency levels can be negatively affected as much as if teachers are ineffective and assessment systems inadequate. The researchers also emphasized that aligning curriculum and assessment methods with state standards can be the best way for schools to improve upon these limitations.

Assessments and Common Core State Standards

Rigorous assessments are at the center of the CCSS Initiative. Teaching and learning cannot occur without the proper evaluation system in place, as claims about student learning taking place cannot be correctly measured or verified without rigorous assessments (Murphy, 2010). In particular, history teachers typically evaluate their students with the use of essays, quizzes, and other types of multiple-choice measures. However, research suggests that these types of measures are now considered insufficient for providing accurate data on student achievement (Gage, 2010). Assessment instruments should reflect that teaching has been effectively provided and that as a result, learning has taken place. Assessment tools such as benchmark exams should demonstrate that a student has mastered numerous skills, including the

ability to understand and analyze questions, as well as the ability to apply what has been taught, even when the subject is entirely mastered (Gage, 2010). Moreover, Gage (2010) posited that exam results can be influenced by a number of factors ranging from emotion, cognitive, cultural and the economic status of students.

According to Reich (2013), multiple-choice questions in U.S. History courses primarily measure the memorization skills of the students, rather than their ability to think critically about historical events or concepts. Moreover, Porter et al. (2009) asserted that the use of multiple choice questions measures skills related to content rather than the cognitive skills of the students, which are necessary for the mastery of history courses. According to Blankstein (2010), history teachers are challenged with the difficulty of incorporating systematic evaluation tools in the field. There should be a teaching and learning method that reaches beyond the rudimentary skills and operations required to pass the course. To master a subject, a student should not merely answer multiple-choice questions correctly, but rather they should demonstrate a multifaceted analysis of learning (Blankstein, 2010).

Chappuis (2009) claimed that assessments can only be effective if there is a clear understanding of what needs to be assessed. History teachers should focus on what operations are required to successfully master history courses rather than simply trying to provide the students with generalized forms of critical thinking (Chappuis, 2009). However, according to Good and Brophy (2008), assessment tools are more effective in measuring achievement if they are narrowly focused on a specific or individual skill. Moreover, U.S. History assessments should be used to determine whether students have attained the global skills required to master

history, as opposed to merely measuring whether they have knowledge of general history concepts (National Council Social Studies, 2011).

With assessment tools in place, teachers are more accountable for what they decide to teach and require their students learn (Chappuis, 2009). Higher test scores often result from teachers who instruct based on assessment data. Additionally, Emmet and McGee (2013) claimed that district-wide assessments can lead to insights on student achievement levels across subjects and among schools within the district. Therefore, school districts can use assessment data to make decisions that influence how instruction is provided in the classroom (Gage, 2010).

King (2011) stated that curriculum alignment, scope, and sequence are methods for school districts to align the content of the course to the CCSS Initiative. Alignment is the interconnectedness of content to the accompanying assessments (Kallick & Colosimo, 2008). Kallick and Colosimo (2008) also emphasized that an aligned curriculum with performance assessments enables instructors to assess the gaps in the instruction practices in a single school or between schools within a district. Porter et al. (2009) emphasized the importance of alignment between curriculum and the CCSS Initiative in enhancing student achievement levels. Currently, educational environments are implementing rigorous state standards and basing performance on the scores from high-stakes tests. However, school districts struggle to align a written curriculum with CCSS to enhance and improve high school students' achievement rates (Krupa & Confrey, 2010).

Krupa and Confrey (2010) suggested that districts can improve student achievement by identifying learning goals, grade-level targets and by articulating the breadth and depth of the content standards. There should be regular teacher collaboration and professional learning taking

place (Ewing, 2010). Principals should be effective leaders, whereas teachers should in turn collaborate with leadership. If principals are effective leaders, they can influence teachers to facilitate the important tasks associated with a curriculum review (Ewing, 2010). Heppen and Therriault (2008) stated that professional development as well as the utilization of curriculum teams can clarify state standards and highlight the programs that can improve the achievement rates of students effectively. This is the positive goal of CCSS, which makes it critical to understand why schools and teachers are still not implementing it, hence the need for the current study.

According to Kober and Rentner (2011), school districts should strive for a curriculum that is written, taught, and validated so that students can effectively learn and adhere to the standards. Moreover, the National Council of Social Studies Teachers (2010) claimed school districts should encourage teachers to be accountable and teach using solid instructional strategies so that students can be successful in core subjects such as U.S. History.

Instructional Strategies and the History Curriculum

Specific aspects of high-quality instruction are focused on a central tendency, namely differentiation. Differentiation connects standards-based instruction to student learning (Robinson, 2014). Differentiation is the process of finding out in a fair way what each individual student knows, understands, and can do (KUD) as well as determining how he or she feels about himself or herself as a learner. However, the first step in the implementation process of differentiation is the teachers' assessment of students' readiness, interest, and learning or thinking styles. Robinson (2014) suggested that the criterion for proper differentiation requires

teachers to increase learning, rather than simply documenting it, as well as choosing what is important for them to learn. Below are Robinson's suggested criteria for quality-differentiated lessons at the secondary level:

1. Presentation of curriculum in manner that is authentic either to a real-world experience or to the way the information was taught.
2. Integrated with other subjects.
3. Solicits the input of the students. (p. 282)

Moreover, teachers should consider what students can do alone and in which areas they will need assistance (Robinson, 2014). Teachers must sometimes use materials that may be above or below the readiness levels of all the students. For example, the use of computer-generated texts for U.S. History courses may require skills above the readiness levels of the students, while large print books may be require low levels of readiness (Spandel, 2009). Quality instruction considers the interest and learning styles of the students. Teachers should know what motivates and interests students and advantage student engagement based on those interests. Learning and thinking style inventories may help teachers to discover the learning preferences of their students (Stiggins, 2008). An assessment of learning styles includes an evaluation of the major learning types, including kinesthetic, visual, and auditory (Gilakjani, 2011). Thinking styles consist of creative, analytical, or practical approaches (Sternberg, 2011). Additionally, the use of a multiple intelligence checklist may be of benefit to U.S. History teachers. Discovering learning points such as narrative, logical, foundational, aesthetic, or experimental can help teachers understand how their students learn and process information (Sternberg, 2011).

How U.S. History Curriculum Is Currently Taught

Research related to the use of CCSS is clear that a set of common standards can be taught in all subjects and across all grade levels from K-12. According to Kober and Rentner (2011), school districts should strive for a set of common U.S. History standards and a curriculum that is written, taught, and validated so that students can effectively learn. Because most school districts operate under the premise of a set of content standards, common core will be infused in U.S. History courses through literacy standards, reading, and writing (U.S. DOE, 2010).

According to Porter et al. (2009), when the curriculum and assessments compare one with another, the level of alignment is low to moderate. The variability for both curriculum and assessments can be seen from state to state, which improves student-learning outcomes across the nation. Likewise, the national content that has been included in the common core standards covers subjects ranging from changes in American Democracy, Economics, Cultures, and Changing Roles of America in the World. These framework topics are divided into periods:

(a) Beginnings to 1607; (b) Colonization, Settlement, and Communities; (c) The Revolution and the New Nation; (d) Expansion and Reform; (e) Crisis of the Union: Civil War and Reconstruction; (f) The Development of Modern America; (g) Modern America and the World Wars; and (h) Contemporary America. (Porter et al., 2009, p. 103)

Due to regulations of the NCLB Act of 2001, all state student assessments are required to align with state content, and preparing students for common core should incorporate the use of more rigorous thinking skills and challenging reading materials (CCSS Initiative, 2010a). Teaching history to high school students should incorporate the process skills to promote historical inquiry (NAEP, 2011). The NAEP governing board for U.S. History suggested that the development of historical inquiry should apply critical thinking skills to inspect evidence, make thoughtful reflections on conflicting claims, and the process involved in the weighing of facts versus hypotheses. According to Porter et al. (2009), the use of historical inquiry nurtures experiences that are required to make reasoned and informed decisions; this allows each citizen to participate in American Democracy. It is through these types of diverse life experiences that a quality U.S. History curriculum shapes the lives of students. The teaching of these complex skills requires skill, precision, and a wealth of content knowledge.

The manner by which U.S. History content is taught is sometimes considered as important as the curriculum itself (Marzano, 2003). In contemplating the course of study, teachers should consider the Environmental Education for Kids (EEK), also known as the big idea. This is critical when teaching complex topics that are covered in U.S. History. For example, U.S. History teachers may use the EEK to focus on concepts, which are high priority and must be covered, such as the Civil War and Reconstruction. The use of an essential question makes these and other similar unit topics relevant through the natural inquiry embedded in learning. Knowledge, understanding, and can do are considered when assessing what topics students will or should know, understand, and be able to complete.

The teaching of standards, particularly at the secondary level, can include KUDs to bridge learning gaps (Shepard, 2008).

Measurable objectives are another critical component to be considered in standards-based curricula. Measurable objectives, or the goals established before learning, suggest that teachers move up the taxonomy of thinking skills for the objective. Students must move beyond rote memorization to be able to generate, create, and apply ideas (William & Leahy, 2007). For example, U.S. History students studying the War of 1812 may move beyond rote memorization of war facts to class reenactments that depict the impact of slavery on the 19th century U.S. economy (National Council of Social Studies Teachers, 2010).

Spandel (2009) suggested that many state-mandated curricula are not viable in allowing students the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of their goals and objectives because the result is rarely a succinct set of standards focused on a limited number of key concepts in practice. This is far from what it can achieve in theory, wherein it is expected that these standards communicate high expectations by focusing attention on the big ideas in each subject on a set of learning goals for each one. Influence to enumerate the skills as well as to put in place a system of fundamental concepts for each grade level results in documents that are vast. The focus on key goals such as content standards may provide an impetus for clarity (Spandel, 2009).

Curriculum implementation is a vital part of curriculum development; however, the successful implementation of content standards requires a thorough knowledge that students should have in a given subject by the end of secondary school (Spandel, 2009). Notably, research conducted by the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS, 2009) emphasized the

importance of the curriculum and the stated learner outcomes. The NCSS reported that social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance. It is important to separate high school standards from those of K-8, as students are now required to utilize the critical thinking skills learned in their math courses to interpret the charts, maps, and political cartoons studied in other classes (Chappuis, 2009). This type of integration is invaluable to U.S. History students' critical thinking skills and to their college and work expectations (Georgia Department of Education, 2009). Tarr, Grouws, Chávez, and Soria (2013) assessed curricular effectiveness in high schools that provide parallel paths wherein students can either study mathematics using one of the two content organizational structures: first, an integrated approach or second, a traditional subject-specific approach. The researchers asked 3,258 high school students enrolled in either Geometry or Course 2 across 11 schools located in same school district. The researchers found that those students who enrolled in the integrated curriculum achieved better performance in mathematics. These students have higher scores compared to those students enrolled in the subject-specific curriculum.

According to Stiggins (2007), group discussions incorporated into classroom activity should average about 15 seconds per every 50-minute period. With this instructional practice, teachers can account for cooperative learning groups, implement classroom practices, and raise the achievement levels of many students. Stiggins (2007) also maintained that when students consider their classroom safe, responsive, and emotionally supportive, social and academic achievement could more easily occur. Woodard (2008) suggested that autonomy and decision-making about learning can also greatly affect student

achievement. Luenburg (2008) found that student engagement, interactions, and teacher knowledge improve student performance in U.S. History courses. However, many students in Luenburg's study claimed that their teachers did not allow them to participate much, thus leading to a lack of engagement.

Winkler (2011) observed the instructional practices of teachers and collected artifacts from two middle schools. Teachers were classified into three categories based on their use of standards-based instructional practices. The classifications included highly and moderately engaging teachers based on their instructional practices. The findings indicated that the most engaging teachers provided an array of instructional strategies and activities (Winkler, 2011). In addition, the more engaging teachers tended to provide opportunities for students to have choices during lessons, encouraged students to take risks, and required independent and higher-order thinking.

Likewise, Newmann and Wehlage (2010) studied rural high schools in U.S. History and Mathematics courses and suggested that if students believed their work was authentic and that their teachers were supportive, an increase in their achievement and overall engagement could take place. Gage (2010), who suggested that authentic materials and activities had a greater impact on student achievement than teacher support, supported this research. Gage concluded that authentic work performed in small work groups would lead to increased achievement levels. In a small focus group interviews with 29 students in a Midwest high school, York-Barr et al. (1996) found that adolescents wanted a curriculum that was relevant to their daily lives.

Good (2008), on the other hand, found that teacher support and the willingness of educators to become actively involved in discovering what works in schools is becoming increasingly important for increasing the achievement levels of high school students. This implies that teachers' perceptions on initiatives such as the CCSS is important in ensuring the successful implementation of the initiative and for schools to achieve the positive goals associated with it. This is why the current study investigated the perceptions of the teachers on CCSS and the barriers to its implementation.

Quality U.S. History knowledge includes cross subject-area boundaries that are not formally taught in most high schools. The interest in U.S. History tends to focus on writing and reading. High-quality U.S. History instruction requires teachers and students to utilize rubrics for evaluating student work. Many social studies concepts such as the study of maps and the use of timelines require teachers to utilize group work and performance-based instructional methods (Northouse, 2010). With the implementation of a set of core state standards, many U.S. History teachers are discovering that rote memorization and the traditional modes of instruction are not yielding high student performance (National Council of Social Studies Teachers, 2010).

Summary

Based on the review of literature, for U.S. History content to “come alive” for students, teachers must possess the necessary skills to make the subject real and relevant for students, content must be rigorous, and teachers must teach in an effective manner to meet the needs of all learners. Through the CCSS Initiative, students and teachers have the opportunity to expand

upon their knowledge base; that is, the CCSS provided shared expectations, focus, efficiency, and quality assessments for students (CCSS, 2012). This, in turn, leads to greater preparation for the 21st-century global economy, jobs, and careers. This literature review was relevant to the issue of improving high school proficiency levels by providing a backdrop for research as it pertains to factors that can significantly improve student achievement in high schools. As such, it is important to understand teachers' perceptions of the use of CCSS and this influences U.S. History subject proficiency. The purpose of this study is to explain U.S. History teachers' perceptions of CCGSP and how to improve teacher effectiveness through the use of job embedded professional learning. The current study endeavored to examine the issue of low proficiency rates through the lens of four U.S. History teachers at a rural central Georgia high school. Section 3 details the study's research methodology. A descriptive study design was utilized for this study. The design was chosen because it ensured that the issue was not explored through one lens, but rather through a variety of lenses that allowed for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood. The subsequent section includes a discussion of the research design, its appropriateness, the data collection procedures, the data analysis method, and the ethical considerations of the study.

Section 3: Methodology

Introduction

A qualitative descriptive study design was utilized for this study. A qualitative research design was appropriate for the study because it aided in the examination of the perceptions of U.S. History educators concerning the implementation of Georgia's CCSS. The qualitative research approach assisted in addressing the prospective and existing needs for framing the empirical nature of the implementation of CCSS by exploring the lived experiences of educators (Creswell, 2012).

Research Design

For this study, I deemed that the most appropriate method to use is a qualitative one. In particular, utilizing the case study design allowed for the examination of the phenomenon in question within the context in which the phenomenon is taking place (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2009). Moreover, qualitative studies can allow new theories to be formed based on the data collected (Anderson, 2006). A qualitative approach enabled an understanding of the topic based on the perceptions of the respondents, which is integrated to the context within which the phenomenon occurs (Brown, 2008), which is necessary for the current purpose of assessing the perceptions of the teachers with regard the use of CCGS in their classrooms. Case studies are often used by researchers as a means of conducting up-close examinations of subjects or events (Kohlbacher, 2003). Additionally, according to Yin (2003a,) "the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (p.

2). Subsequently, I found the use of a case study approach to be the most advantageous approach to conducting my research; as I sought to conduct an up-close examination of U.S. History teachers' perceptions of the CCSS.

A quantitative method would be inappropriate, as it starts with a particular theory, involves gathering empirical data to prove or disprove this theory, and determines a central phenomenon as a matter or procedure (Creswell, 2012). A quantitative method would be more appropriate if the purpose was to measure static realities using numerical data to test hypotheses. In contrast, the objective of the current qualitative analysis was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the topic (Anderson, 2006). A quantitative approach was not appropriate for addressing the research questions of this study because of the need for context-specific knowledge to understand the issue of faculty workload obligations. By utilizing qualitative interviews as the main instrument, the participants were not influenced by any ready-made answer, which allowed them the freedom to respond with their own words, ideas, and reasoning (Vähäsantanen & Saarinen, 2013). Nunkoosing (2005) suggested that interviews involve interactions such as thinking and talking; whereas, questionnaires can be a bit more stringent, requiring individuals to respond a set of prewritten questions. When using qualitative interviews, the objective is to comprehend how the participants think, feel, or behave, which differs from a quantitative study where the aim is to measure a quantifiable variable. Quotes from the interviews were used to strengthen and clarify the different findings. Quantitative research does not adequately capture the insights of participants' experiences, is limited by narrowly constructed variables, and requires pervasive access to the research site (Maxwell, 2012).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe teachers' perceptions of the use of CCSS and how this influences U.S. History subject proficiency. Below are the research questions that guided this study:

RQ1. What are educators' perceptions concerning the barriers associated with Georgia's Common Core State Standards, such that students are not passing U.S. History and not graduating?

RQ2. What are U.S. History teachers' perceptions concerning Georgia's Common Core State Standards and assessment system?

Context

The study was conducted on the campus of a rural high school in central Georgia. The high school's approximately 600 students reside within the community. The high school awards both college preparatory and special education diplomas and serves approximately 600 students in grades 9 through 12, with over 98% of students qualifying for free lunch services and with the following racial/ethnic composition: 1% Asian, 80% African American, 6% Hispanic, 10% White, and 2% multi-racial. The study included approximately four certified teachers with the following educational backgrounds: 100% bachelor's degrees and 50% master's degrees (GOSA, 2010).

Precautions were taken to protect the participants' rights in this study; that is, (a) the goals of the study were articulated both verbally and in writing so that they were understood by the participants; (b) written permission to proceed with the study was obtained and articulated

from the participants; (c) a research exemption form was filed with the Institutional Review Board; (d) the participants were informed of all data collection devices and activities; (e) written interpretations, reports, and verbatim transcriptions were made available to the participants; (f) the participants' rights, interests, and desires were the first priority when reporting the data; and (g) decisions regarding the participants' anonymity were based on that individual's choice.

The participants in the study are U.S. History teachers with varying educational backgrounds. Teacher 1's degree included a bachelor of arts in history. He is currently pursuing a master's in history and has been teaching for three years; however, this is his second year teaching at this particular school. Teacher 2's degree included a bachelor of arts in secondary education with a minor in history. He is a retired member of the military, with personality traits indicating that he holds a strong belief in discipline and order. This is his first year teaching at a high school. Teacher 3's degree includes a bachelor's of art in history and a master's degree in counseling. He has been teaching history for five years. Teacher 4's degree includes a bachelor's of arts degree in art history. He is currently pursuing his teaching certificate and has been teaching and coaching athletics for one year at the high school.

Table 1

Background of Teacher Interviewees

Participant	Education	Currently pursuing	Years of Experience
Teacher 1	bachelor's degree	master's in history	2nd year
Teacher 2	bachelor's degree	master's in history	1st year
Teacher 3	bachelor's degree	master's in counseling	5th year
Teacher 4	bachelor's degree	teaching certificate	1st year

The participants in this study were four 12th grade U.S. History teachers at a rural central Georgia high school. Interviews of the participants were completed in their classrooms and offices. Four U.S. History teachers were conveniently sampled as participants in the study. The number of participants is dependent on convenience sampling, which is the selection of participants based on the convenience of the researcher and is normally based on time, money, and the availability of sites or respondents (Ozdemir et al., 2011). I did not need to incur the cost or time required to select a random sample (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Using a descriptive case study approach, the focus was to describe the phenomenon and real-life context of high school teachers' perceptions of U.S. History students' low EOCT passing rate and low graduation rate. This included describing in detail teachers' perceptions concerning the use of the CCGSS. Attention was paid to the experience of the high school teachers in which the CCGPS was used to guide the teaching of 12th grade U.S. History.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is to function as the primary data collector (Creswell, 2012). This role requires that I identify personal values, assumptions, and individual biases at the beginning of the research study. In the case of the present study, my perceptions of secondary education and experiences as a public school educator have been formed by personal experiences. Beginning in the fall of 2003 and up until 2005, I served as an elementary and middle school teacher. In the fall of 2005, I became a middle school and secondary school administrator. As a member of the administrative team, I was directly involved with in-depth administrative decisions while working closely with teachers, district administrators, students, and parents. In addition to serving as a building-level administrator, I worked on the district level accreditation as well.

I believe that being both a teacher and administrator has enhanced my ability to understand the context of this research. It also assisted me in working with the participants in this study. I have a wealth of knowledge of both the development of teachers as well as the administrators to this study, and both roles were vital to this research. However, my previous experience working closely with teachers may have created certain biases in the present study. Every effort was made to ensure objectivity; however, these biases may have shaped the manner in which I viewed and interpreted the data, as well as the way participants evaluated their experiences. I began this study with the position that the teaching of high school students is a challenging responsibility. I viewed teaching and learning as integral components of the education process.

Data Collection

The data being collected for use in this study included a minimum of bi-monthly, 40-minute individual taped interviews with participants. Creswell (2012) recommended two to 10 participants or research subjects as being sufficient to reach saturation. Creswell posited that individual interviews using open-ended questions affords participants opportunities to voice their experiences and perspectives in a confidential manner, as opposed to focus groups during which participants openly share their perspectives. A copy of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B.

The interview questions were divided into the teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to implement the CCSS, their perceptions of the implementation of CCSS, and their perceptions of the barriers to the CCSS. Two follow-up questions for each interview set were also included, focusing on the teachers' views of how to improve CCSS. Kober and Rentner (2011) suggested that the development of collaborative teams of teachers, administrators, and experts can lead to consistent standards from state to state to ensure that students not only graduate from high school, but also become prepared for college and the workforce. The perceptions of teachers on how prepared they are and what the barriers are in implementing CCSS are important.

Data Analysis

For the data analysis procedures, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggested that qualitative data analysis entails classifying things, individuals, and events based upon characteristics. Throughout the data analysis process, descriptive case study researchers code their data using many categories and descriptors (Stake, 2013). Descriptive researchers seek to identify and

describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred (Yin, 2011).

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) theorized that research using qualitative content analysis looks at language and communication. Conversely, Budd, Thorp, and Donohew (1967) theorized that researchers should focus on content and meaning in the written text, as opposed to counting words or evaluating vocabulary. However, content analysis is the evaluation of a phenomenon (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314). Subsequently, content analysis involves the process of evaluating the content for the purpose of coding and identifying themes. Also, involved in content analysis is the analyzing of the data starts in a recursive manner to develop the data and for the purpose of understanding the phenomenon (Tesch, 1990). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that data should be continuously evaluated to produce codes. Coding involves the process of identifying words from the narrative that demonstrates exact concepts from the interviews. Next, the researcher documents and analyzes the data. The researcher repeatedly does this until codes emerge, which resemble the key thoughts or themes. These initial codes become the based for a coding scheme. Afterwards, the codes are sorted and categorized until it becomes clear which codes have similar characteristics. Finally, emergent categories generate codes that are grouped and organized. The codes are then organized into groups or clusters (Patton, 2002). I used content analysis to organize and chronologically categorize the data, review them numerous times, and code them continuously.

Moreover, the data analysis processes was supported by the use of a qualitative data analysis program called Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). Yin (2011) and Stake (2013) suggested that the use of a database to effectively organize data is

essential to the research process. Using a database improves the reliability of the case study, as it arranges tabular materials, narratives, and audio files into “bins” in which data can be collected and organized. Digitally recorded and transcribed interviews were completed with each participant for review, in addition to comparing notes with the tapes to verify accuracy. All data collected during the study were stored and locked for security and will be destroyed after a period of 3 years. CAQDAS software was used in the study to search for meaning in the interview responses. The software assisted in discovering patterns, identifying themes, and obtaining insight into new findings.

Validity and Reliability

When carrying out a qualitative research, it is the responsibility of the researcher to determine the personal values, assumptions, and biases that may affect the way in which the data are interpreted (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003). Guba (1981) argued that the trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry can be maintained if credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are all ensured. Credibility refers to the researcher’s ability to take into account all the complexities that may manifest in the study and address patterns that are not easily explained (Guba, 1981). For the current study, the credibility of the study would be ensured through member checking. Member checking will be conducted by asking the participants to check the transcripts to make any necessary corrections or clarifications. Member checking will also involve asking the participants to review the overall report before the findings are shared in final form. Guba (1981) also contended that the credibility of a study could further be strengthened by the researcher’s use of referential integrity. Referential integrity is carried out

when analyses and interpretations are tested against data collected as part of the study. To do so, findings will be supplemented or refuted by existing literature.

Transferability refers to the qualitative researcher's belief that everything examined in the study is context bound and not of the researcher's objective or intention to develop *truth statements* that can be generalized to a larger group of people beyond the study setting (Guba, 1981). To do so, the researcher should ensure rich, descriptive, context-relevant statements by collecting detailed descriptive data. Guba (1981) described dependability as the stability of the data. The researcher would give a detailed, written description of each process and access to field notes, artifacts, and archival data, so that the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation could all be verified. Triangulation of the data for comparison purposes and to crosscheck the data will also be utilized. The interview responses would be supported by literature. Existing literature can show whether the findings of the study are new or contributing to what has already been found.

Expected Findings

The purpose and rationale of this research study was to (a) discover U.S. History educators' perceptions of their preparedness to teach the CCSS, (b) discover educators' perceptions of Georgia's CCSS, and (c) discover educators' assessments of students' low proficiency levels. The issue of diminishing graduation rates along with high failure rates in the subject of U.S. History among Georgia's public high schools will be reviewed. The findings of the study are expected to allow readers to have a better understanding of the local problem by suggesting, based on the perceptions of teachers, what could act as barriers to the implementation

of CCSS, as well as what schools could do to improve the proficiency levels of high school students, specifically in the field of U.S. History, and to subsequently improve graduation rates. It is expected that the teachers have reasons for not implementing CCSS effectively in their classrooms—reasons that schools should consider for the initiative to be successful and for student achievement rates to improve. It is expected that the findings would lead to the in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the teachers as they relate to use of the Georgia State Standards and their perceptions of low student achievement in U.S. History.

Summary

This section included a discussion of the research method used to achieve the purpose of the study. The section discusses that the qualitative method is the most appropriate for the study and why. The instrument, sample, and the role of the researcher are all detailed. The data collection and analysis procedures are also discussed. Ethical procedures as well as the measures taken to ensure validity and reliability of the data findings are discussed.

Section 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe teachers' perceptions of Georgia's Common Core State Standards for U.S. History, which having been implemented, has resulted in many students failing the standards and subsequently not earning a high school diploma. While the issue concerning the plight of these Georgians because of the newly implemented curriculum is a pressing issue, it was unknown whether the school district's U.S. History curriculum was aligned with the state's content standards. This section contains the presentation of the results of the data collection activities implemented to answer the research questions posed for this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews involving four U.S. History teachers at a rural Georgia high school. I met with each participant individually and discussed the following: (a) introduced the study, (b) offered participation, (c) reminded individuals of the initial deadline, and (d) signed informed consent documents. Participants consented to participation in the study by signing an informed consent letter and participating in the interviews. I also provided an Institutional Review Board number as well as an explanation regarding the 35 to 45-minute periods necessary for completion of the interviews. The interviews were conducted between August 20 and August 25, 2014.

At the start of each interview, I advised the participants that the interviews were voluntary, and that there was a possibility that I would need to ask additional information or conduct member checking if necessary after transcription, coding, and analysis. At the beginning of the interviews with the participants, I explained the interview process, including the need to audiotape the sessions as well as the transcription process. Participants were advised that a field log (notebook) would be kept to ensure accuracy in detailing the interviews.

The interviews with the participants followed a structured plan, in which teacher participants were asked a series of questions and were allowed to respond to each question. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. To maintain anonymity, I created a system to identify teachers for the analysis of the data. Subsequently, I created a system of identification using the pseudonym Teacher 1, 2, 3, and 4. Following the initial review of the transcribed interviews, I found that some participant responses required clarification. I conducted follow-up interviews with the participants from September 1 and September 5, 2014. The decision to conduct a follow-up interview was justified because of the need for data saturation.

The transcriptions of interviews were then processed using thematic analysis. In doing the analysis, I utilized Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software for sorting, identifying, and coding information as relevantly shared by the participants. The use of this software proved useful in the data analysis process because it allowed me to effectively organize the interview data. Using the software also improved the reliability of the case study, as it arranges tabular materials, narratives, and audio files into virtual bins in which data can be collected and organized.

The process of coding required me to do a horizontal and vertical review of the codes based on how these codes were spoken and shared by the participants. Vertical review allowed me to review how the code evolved from the beginning of narratives of the participants up to his or her statements where substantial information are offered. Horizontal review allowed me to examine the emergence of the code according to how the words or statements were expressed by the participants. The codes generated from the participants allowed me to see the patterns of the descriptive information that were relevant in answering the research questions of the study.

Demographic Information of the Participants

I interviewed four teachers working at a rural Georgia high school. Each of the participants was responsible for approximately 30 U.S. History students.

Teacher 1. Teacher 1's degree included a bachelor's of arts in history. He is currently pursuing a master's in history and has been teaching for three years; however, this is his second year teaching at this particular school.

Teacher 2. Teacher 2's degree included a bachelor's of arts in secondary education with a minor in history. He is a retired member of the military with personality traits indicating that he holds a strong belief in discipline and order. This is his first year teaching at a high school.

Teacher 3. Teacher 3's degrees include a bachelor's of art in history and a master's degree in counseling. He has been teaching history for five years.

Teacher 4. Teacher 4's degree includes a bachelor's of arts degree in art history. He is currently pursuing his teaching certificate and has been teaching and coaching athletics for one year at the high school. Table 2 shows the demographic description of the participants.

Table 2

Demographics of the Participants

Pseudonym	Qualifications	Experience	Degree
Teacher 1	Bachelors	1 year	History
Teacher 2	Masters	2 years	History
Teacher 3	Masters	2 years	History
Teacher 4	Masters	2 years	History

Findings

This subsection presents the results of the thematic analysis from the transcripts of the four U.S. History teachers at a rural Georgia high school. The analysis was conducted purposely to answer the questions: (a) What are educators' perceptions concerning the barriers associated with Georgia's Common Core State Standards, such that students are not passing U.S. History and not graduating? (b) What are U.S. History teachers' perceptions concerning Georgia's Common Core State Standards and assessment system?

Theme 1: Professional Learning and Teacher Knowledge on CCGPS Hinder the Academic Achievement of Students in History

Limited pedagogical knowledge on CCGPS instructional skills and strategies. Four of the participants revealed that extensive knowledge of U.S. History concepts such as general facts, dates, and historical writings is insignificant when teachers are unable to transfer such information to their students. Teacher 1 explained that in terms of the subject content, teachers possessed the required knowledge. However, Teacher 1 said, “CCGPS is quite rigorous in its content.” Teacher 1 claimed that teachers require pedagogical skills appropriate to the learning demand of CCGPS. Teacher 1 said:

The standards are very thorough and require critical thinking and reasoning; however, I am concerned that due to the fact some of the students are not on grade level the rigor of the standards may be a bit to challenging for some of my students.

As such, these participants requested professional trainings. Teacher 3 shared: “I would like to receive training on how the use some of the state’s new resources such as FIP (Formative Instructional Practices). I would like to use the modules to improve instruction in my class.” Teacher 4 also shared: “I would like to learn how to deconstruct content standards. I need to learn effective ways to communicate the standards to both my students and their parents.”

Inability to adapt to the curriculum change. Each of the U.S. History teachers was aware that there had been changes in Georgia’s Common Core State Standards, but the participants claimed that they did not know how to adjust their curriculum to align with them. Teacher 2 shared that he had difficulty meeting the learning demand of CCGPS curriculum. Teacher 2 shared:

...due to the fast pace of the curriculum and amount of time allocated for development of each standard, I often have to move quickly from one concept to another. Sometimes, I simply have to move forward to cover the topics under each standard. This can be problematic for struggling students and slower learners, but with only 180 instructional days, I have to adjust the curriculum to accommodate for the time that the students are actually in class.

Lack of practical training on CCSS. While the four U.S. History teachers indicated that additional professional learning was needed in the areas of curriculum, assessments, and differentiated instruction, they also said that they had attended some professional learning sessions (webinars), but added that they could benefit greatly from further training on how to implement CCSS. Teacher 4 said, “I think the barriers of lack of professional learning, funding, and the like are the most pressing issues facing U.S. History dept.” Teacher 1 indicated that he had a cursory knowledge of Georgia’s Common Core State Standards, but did not understand all of the content standards or the new assessment Georgia Milestone. According to Teacher 1, there are insufficient resources available to teachers to help with the implementation process; however, it is the teacher’s perception that the content standards are rigorous and will challenge the students. Teacher 1 also shared:

Most of the training for CCGPS was done using webinars. I found the webinars did not provide sufficient training for me on the areas needed to be a successful teacher of CCGPS content. For example, I did not receive training on how to differentiate the content. This is critical for me as a teacher; however, I did not receive training on how to

do this. This lack of staff-development in key areas has made the roll out of CCGPS somewhat difficult in some areas.

Teacher 2 shared that issues such as a lack of technology and books are hindrances. He also believed that he had not received sufficient professional training. He stated, “I think that additional staff development is needed from department of education. The teachers were trained using webinars or by administrators. I would have been most beneficial to receive training from members of the department of education.” Teacher 3 stated:

Barriers to CAPS can include resources and professional learning. Many of my students and colleagues have not received the necessary supplies and instructional materials. In addition, I do not know how to access the resources that are available to me as a teacher. I have learned that the department of education has created links for resources, but I do not understand how to access or use the resources. I would like to receive training on the resources available to me as a U.S. History teacher.

Table 3 reflects professional learning and teacher knowledge as it relates to CCGPS and the U.S. History Curriculum.

Table 3

Theme 1: Professional Learning and Teacher Knowledge on CCGPS Hinder the Academic Achievement of Students in History

Elements	Teacher Occurrences	% of Occurrences
Limited pedagogical knowledge on CCGPS instructional skills and strategies	4	100%
Inability to adopt with the curriculum change	4	100%
Lack of practical training on CCSS	4	100%

Theme 2: CCGPS Is Not Congruent With the Mainstreamed Curriculum

Four of the participants indicated that they did not feel that the U.S. History curriculum that they used on a daily basis aligned well with Georgia's CCSS. Teacher 3 thought that the "curriculum needs to be adjusted to monitor pacing and to evaluate the curriculum maps."

Teacher 2 realized the need for alignment following his observation:

I reflect on my students' scores and realize that what I have taught them and what was tested was obviously very different. I have not been very pleased with the implementation process and would like to improve the alignment of the district's curriculum with Georgia's content standards.

Teacher 2 further recommended, "The curriculum should probably be reviewed at least once per instructional year to ensure that it aligns well with any new assessments that the state is implementing."

Three of the participants believed that they were teaching irrelevant content that would not necessarily be tested on the Georgia Milestone Assessment. These participants suggested that the pacing guides and curriculum maps used in the U.S. History department were outdated and misaligned with the nine-week grading academic system being used by the local high school.

Teacher 4 stated:

The pacing guides will need to be reevaluated to consider the resources that are being used and also the instructional needs of the students. Most of the pacing guides and curriculum maps are several years old and should be updated. It is my hope that the district will provide time for teachers to complete this work.

Theme 3: Outdated Instructional Resources

Three of the participants viewed that instructional resources such as technology, software, and graphic organizers were outdated and required further improvement. Teacher 1 said, “There is not a great deal of resources available to teachers to help with the implementation process.” Three of the participants pointed out that they did not have access to up-to-date instructional software and assessment databases that could aid them in preparing for analyzing student data. Teacher 4 said:

The biggest barriers that I have experienced is needed improvements to technology. I would like to have a classroom in which students were engaged in technology to make the standards come alive, but it is very difficult to do this when the software and technology is dilapidated.

Instructional tools such as Promethean boards and laptops were inappropriately used as overhead projectors or, in some instances, not used at all. Teacher 4 indicated that CCGPS in U.S. History courses required them to use additional resources to teach map skills and timelines, to which they did not have access. Teacher 4 said:

The school district should provide additional resources such as technology to assist teachers with the implementation of CCGPS. I think that teachers need training on the use of instructional resource. I know that I have strong content knowledge, but I could benefit from learning the most practical means of providing instructions to students.

Theme 4: Undifferentiated Instructional Strategies

Four of the participants indicated that there was very little differentiation of instruction for their students. Teacher 3 received a recommendation to improve her approaches in assessing her instruction. Teacher 3 said, “I have been also instructed that I needed to work on improving my assessment strategies to help ensure that what I teach in my class correlates well with Georgia’s content standards and assessment the Georgia Milestone Assessment.” Teacher 4 shared that while “the professional learning that I have received has helped me to prepare to teach CCGPS,” he still “needs training on differentiated instruction.” Teacher 4 further said, “Although I have received some training, I think that I need more coaching in this area.”

Three participants also indicated that their lessons were presented using PowerPoint presentations and lectures with little to no varying of instructional strategies. Teacher 2 stated:

Some of the instructional strategies that I use are lower level and do not require differentiation. I often use question answer prompting or fill-in the blank on tests.

Subsequently, my lessons are either lectures or worksheets. I feel that this instructional mode may not be the most beneficial mode of instruction for my students; however, I do not know how to address reading deficiencies or other academic issues.

Teacher 1 also believed that the standards were attainable, but that the teachers did not fully understand how to scaffold the material to make learning easier. Moreover, Teacher 1 stated,

Teachers are provided a copy of the content standards and a lesson plan template and told to teach the standards. This is very difficult if the students do not read well or do not

think critically. U.S. History teachers need to be trained how ways to scaffold and differentiate the lesson for students.

Teacher 2 stated: “In order to improve the achievement levels of students, teachers must first know and understand how to differentiate lessons and assess students for mastery.” The issue concerning the inability of teachers to respond to students’ need to develop critical thinking will be addressed in the section concerning students’ critical thinking.

Theme 5: Limited Knowledge Concerning the Use of Assessment

Three of the participants indicated their lack of use of instructional and assessment strategies may be a barrier to student achievement. These three participants shared that their students were unprepared to take the standardized assessment due to instructional barriers, including the lack of differentiation. Teacher 3 shared that students who are scheduled for assessment would need careful planning. Teacher 3 said, “I would like to have greater opportunities to review the curriculum and pacing guides for each semester and plan in accordance with the students’ most recent testing data.” The teachers did not indicate a solidified knowledge of the content or test constructs that were to be used on the Georgia Milestone. Teacher 4 stated:

In my class, we are often so pressed for time that we do not have an opportunity to focus on all the CCGPS standards. This is problematic because we do not know which standards will be tested on the new assessment system.

Teacher 1 added that while she is knowledgeable about the assessment, she needs additional knowledge concerning assessment and the appropriate use of the concepts in improving students' achievement. Teacher 1 said:

Although I understand how to assess my students, the uses of CCGPS content standards require that I assess my students more often and in multiple ways. I am hoping to learn about appropriate ways to assessment my student for learning.

Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 shared that a majority of their training on the new standards consisted of lectures with some differentiated lessons; however, the assessments were multiple choices, constructed response, fill-in the blank, and short answer options. Teacher 2 shared that the instructional mode of delivery was that of a lecture or PowerPoint in most of the U.S. History classes, but the standardized assessment would be administered on the computer using multiple measures.

Theme 6: Students' Lack of Critical Thinking Skills

Four of the teachers shared that professional training for teachers in the implementation of CCGPS would remain ineffective because the barrier of successful completion includes the ability of the students to think critically. Teacher 2 stated, "My students are often not successful in U. S. History and other courses that required high level critical thinking skills because they do not analyze or comprehend well." Teacher 3 suggested, "CCGPS requires high order thinking and analytical skills; however, I do not think that my students have been taught to think critically or analytically." Teacher 4 agreed that barriers to the implementation of CCGPS and improvements to student achievement would require greater emphasis on not only correctly

aligning the U.S. History curriculum with the state's content standards, but also an increase in teacher knowledge and preparation, particularly in their role to develop the students' critical thinking. Teacher 1 stated:

Students can be successful using the common core state standards; however, teachers, students, and parents must understand that some additional work must be done to improve upon the quality of lessons provided to students and increase the instructional supports provided to struggling students. Many students think that U.S. History is simply about the recall of historical facts, when in fact, it has very little to do with simple facts. Understanding U.S. History requires students to analyze political cartoons, read and interpret historical works and understand geographical concepts. The curriculum and assessments used in U.S. History classes should correctly align with the curriculum being tested by the state of Georgia on the Milestone Assessment.

Teacher 4 valued the importance of teaching the students the critical thinking skills they need to pass all academic subjects. Teacher 4 said, "It is somewhat difficult to try to expose students to higher order thinking questions and lessons when the students are unprepared."

Teacher 4 explained the strategies he used to help his students. Teacher 4 said:

I have tried to use the frameworks provided by the state department and challenged my students to ask more questions and develop responses more independently. As I prepare my students for college, career, or the workforce, I know that it is imperative that they understand how to think critically; therefore, I try to incorporate activities in my U.S. History lesson that teach those skills.

Limitations

The participants in the research study provided a significant amount of insight to answer the research questions posed for this study. The participants elaborated extensively on the merits of many components of CCGPS, including professional learning, curriculum planning, and resources. However, as the focus was on the perceptions of teachers only, the findings may be restricted in the context of how teachers viewed the overall barriers of students' completion, particularly their achievement in the history class. This limitation could further be strengthened when future researchers explore the phenomenon utilizing the perceptions of the school administrators and the students.

Another limitation of the study is that the themes emerging from this study were only representative of a small number of teachers. However, this research approach was appropriate, as this study was designed to explore the contemporary phenomenon of teacher perceptions within the real-life context of their classrooms and school as it relates to barriers of CCGPS. As such, while data saturation was reached in this study, additional themes could possibly re-direct the focus of the emerging themes in this study. A small sample of teachers, particularly those who shared similar demographic characteristics, may offer similar information thus affecting data saturation (Yin, 2012).

Evidence of Quality

The case study was developed in relation to the systematic process of data collection and analysis. In an effort to ensure consistency in the data collection and analysis procedures, I strictly adhered to the established procedures. This required me to gather the data from

individuals who possessed an in-depth knowledge concerning the phenomenon of interest (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The interview proceedings were then audio-recorded and transcribed by a third party to ensure that the proceedings were free from my biases.

An evidence of the quality of the study was the conducting of the follow-up interviews to clarify salient information that may have been of value to this present study. It is essential that salient cases should be well understood to ensure that descriptive information of the phenomenon is presented (Brown, 2008). The follow-up interviews provided the added benefit of clarifying misconceptions and further explanation. The accumulation of the data provided a more in-depth understanding of the U.S. History teachers' perceptions of content standards, professional learning, and barriers to implementation.

Additionally, I utilized several methods to ensure trustworthiness of the research. Participants received copies of their transcriptions and were asked to clarify any erroneous or discrepant information. This process was called member checking. Member checking was used to ensure the accuracy of the content of the interviews and to ensure that concise information is reported in the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Member checking is important to establishing the accuracy and reliability of qualitative research (Koch, 2006). This step allowed the participants the chance to determine possible inconsistencies within the transcript (Silverman, 2011). All members checked the accuracy of their transcripts and provided feedback regarding any discrepant information and no discrepant information was found. It is noteworthy to indicate that bracketing occurred in the process of conducting this research, because I was more concerned with developing theories as they relate to teachers' perceptions, as opposed to

exploring their true perceptions of CCGPS. Minimizing personal opinions was critical in this research to ensure that the participants' perceptions were discovered and revealed through the authentic data analysis process. Moreover, I reviewed the transcripts and the exact language used by participants to ensure that their precise sentiments were conveyed.

Summary

This research study was conducted to ascertain the perceptions of U.S. History teachers as they relate to the barriers associated with the implementation of CCGPS in a rural Georgia high school. In efforts to grasp that understanding, participants answered interview questions related to the use of the CCGPS assessment system, the influence of CCGPS on the graduation rates of seniors, professional learning, curriculum content, and the new assessment system known as the Georgia Milestone. The participants shared their perceptions of the merits of CCGPS in general, and provided suggestions for improvements. Following the transcriptions of the interview and verifying the information through member checking, I utilized Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software to provide assistance in sorting and coding the textual information. These codes were then utilized to proceed with thematic analysis. The analysis generated six themes, namely (a) professional learning and teacher knowledge on CCGPS hinder the academic achievement of students in history, (b) CCGPS is not congruent with the mainstreamed curriculum, (c) outdated instructional resources, (d) undifferentiated instructional strategy, (e) limited knowledge concerning the use of assessment, and (f) students' lack of

critical thinking skills. This study will conclude with Section 5, which includes interpretations of the findings and implications for social change.

Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, Recommendations

Introduction

Educators are the vehicles for the implementation of most initiatives designed by the Georgia Department of Education. Like many programs, the implementation of the CCGPS was not without its challenges and successes. Teachers across the State of Georgia, particularly those in rural Central Georgia, entered the phase of CCGPS with concern, excitement, and reservations. In most cases, educators relied on the use of instructional supports, professional learning, and curriculum documents developed by the state's department of education. However, in some instances, local school districts developed their own curriculum and instructional supports to implement CCGPS.

For the U. S. History department at one rural Georgia high school, the implementation of CCGPS was both daunting and rewarding. The intent of this case study was to discover the perceptions of 4 U.S. History teachers as they relate to the implementation of CCGPS. To collect data from the four teachers, I conducted in-depth interviews. I analyzed the collected data at the end of interviews to focus on the most pertinent issues and to develop a thorough understanding of the participants' perceptions of the issue, as outlined in Section 4. In the final section of this study, I review previous sections, interpretations of the findings, discuss implications for social change, recommend further action and researches, and conclude with reflections on the process.

Interpretation of the Findings

Examining teachers' perceptions of the implementation and use of CCGPS in U.S. History courses was a complicated task. With the state of Georgia holding teachers, administrators, and schools accountable for students' success, it is paramount to discover teachers' perceptions of the landscape of curriculum and instructional issues in high school. As I examined the literature as it relates to high graduation rates, core curriculum, and the influence that teachers' perceptions had on student achievement, it was critical to consider instructional methods, resources, and assessments as well.

The guiding questions for this case study focused on the perceptions of U.S. History teachers regarding graduation rates and the CCSS. Teachers' perceptions had not been greatly considered regarding the decisions being made by local boards of education, legislatures, and even the local high school. This was problematic, in that teachers are the primary providers of content; however, their professional opinions were being overlooked. In the next section, I address the research questions as well as the influence of teachers' perceptions and the general knowledge of the research participants regarding U.S. History content.

A case study approach was used to analyze the perceptions of 4 U.S. History teachers at a rural Georgia high school. Related topics included the implementation of CCGPS, graduation rates, professional learning, curriculum, and instructional resources. The perceptions of teachers are critical to the effective implementation and use of CCGPS, as teachers are the professionals in the classroom. It is theorized that if the teachers do not feel supported in their efforts to

implement and use CCGPS, it would not be implemented properly, and students will not attain the proposed benefits.

The use of a case study approach for this research allowed the discovery of U.S. History teachers' perceptions of the implementation and use of the CCGPS system. This included the use of the CCGPS resources, professional learning, curriculum and instructional planning, and assessments. I conducted interviews at one rural Georgia high school involving 4 U.S. History teachers. Each teacher participated in a 30 to 45-minute, in-depth interview during which their thoughts and feelings were revealed as they relate to the use and implementation of CCGPS. The teachers explained their perceptions of their students' abilities to comprehend the rigorous standards, and their professional knowledge as it related to the use of CCGPS. Teachers immersed themselves in rich discussions of their use of the webinars provided by the state department, curriculum documents, instructional strategies (differentiated instructions), and students' readiness for the Georgia Milestone. Teachers noted their apprehensiveness to use some of the instructional and assessment resources offered by the state, as well as their struggles with technology and software. Some of the impediments revealed during the in-depth interviews led to further conversations as it related to eliminating barriers and using or redesigning the resources offered by the district or state department.

Two research questions framed this study and formed the basis for additional questions posed to participants:

RQ1. What are U.S. History teachers' perceptions of the barriers associated with the implementation of CCGPS, such that students are not passing the standardized assessment and not graduating from high school?

RQ2. What are U.S. History teachers' perceptions of the CCGPS assessment system?

Stemming from the two central research questions, the following sub-questions were formulated that were the basis for the interview questions:

1. What are U.S. History teachers' perceptions of the implementation and use of CCGPS related resources?
2. What are U.S. History teachers' perceptions of the use of CCGPS related curriculum documents such as pacing guides and curriculum maps?
3. What are U.S. History teachers' perceptions of the Georgia's new assessment system the Georgia Milestone Assessments?

The in-depth interviews revealed several interesting facts as they related to teachers' perceptions of the CCGPS system, such as the view that the CCGPS was a rigorous set of content standards and that the students would benefit greatly from their use. However, there was great concern regarding teachers' professional knowledge of the content standards and their use of instructional strategies. Teachers also shared how CCGPS could lead to higher US History achievement and high school achievement rates. These will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Teacher Knowledge and Professional Learning

As reflected from the responses of the teachers, I found that teachers understood the implementation of the content standards; however, they did not have a clear understanding of how to scaffold the content standards for their students. I learned that teachers had a basic understanding of the content standards, but did not know how to collect and utilize the resources

offered by the Georgia Department of Education or other venues to bridge the gap between implementation to application. Teachers reflected on reservations about the understanding of the Teacher Resource Link (TRL), which is a primary component of the implementation and use of CCGPS. This finding was significant, particularly because teachers' understanding and applications of the pedagogy are crucial in the achievement of students (Ewing, 2010; Kober & Rentner, 2011).

In terms of the policy and support provisions given to the teachers in the implementation of CCGPS, the participants expressed concerns with the state's use of webinars to implement CCGPS. Note that this finding is significant in the context of the implementation of the CCGPS, as none of the teachers are fully trained in the use of web-based training. It was found that in the implementation of professional learning opportunities, the participants felt "disconnected" from the trainers and had limited opportunities to ask questions or to respond to the trainers' web-based questions. The interviews revealed that participants felt limited in their ability to participate in professional learning opportunities. Administrators and district curriculum personnel underwent face-to-face training, but teachers indicated that they did know where to locate professional learning opportunities offered by the Department of Education. Moreover, time was a considerable obstacle. Participants often did not have sufficient time or software available to take advantage of the webinars. The participants also revealed that their planning times were filled with other obligations such as student discipline or other non-instructional tasks. The participants indicated that the lack of preparation time and insufficient technology caused gaps in instructional practices and professional learning opportunities. Participants discussed the desire to receive professional development for the new state assessment, the

Georgia Milestone. According to participants, additional training would also be necessary for teachers to learn comprehensive methods for assessing students using both formative and summative assessment practices.

In the context of the result of the study, it is essential to note that the current implementation status of CCGPS is not congruent to the expected outcome of the curriculum. As explained by Biggs' (2003) theory, assessment, teaching strategies, and intended learning outcomes should be coherently implemented to positively contribute to the learning of the students. The results of the study found that although the teachers are knowledgeable of the teaching pedagogy, they claimed that the new curriculum imposed to them is new and adopting to change is relatively difficult for them.

Expected learning outcome is not congruent to the students' current level of critical thinking skills development. In Biggs' (2003) model, improvement of learning objectives, teaching techniques, and assessment methods should practically be developed constructively. However, constructive alignment had been a difficult task for teachers, particularly because there are several unresolved issues in the students' achievement that may not be resolved using the CCGPS. Constructive alignment necessitates a balance and synergy among different instructional and educational variables (Biggs, 2003). These variables are the professional goals of the instructors, teaching methods used, curriculum, assessment procedures, wants and needs of the students, and the psychological and social climates of both the school and the classroom. If balance is not reached, poor teaching and surface learning may emerge (Biggs, 2003). Thus, it could be implicated that with the current level of teachers' understanding on CCGPS, students' positive achievement on history may not be addressed at this period.

Curriculum and Instruction

The participants revealed that the curriculum documents provided by the Georgia Department of Education were somewhat useful, but were not always used by the teachers in the district. Participants revealed that they were still using older curriculum maps, pacing guides, and instructional resources created several years ago. Many of the curriculum resources did not reflect the use of CCGPS in content and instructional practices. As such, while at the leadership level, the initiative to improve the curriculum, scope and sequence, and professional learning were the priority, the teachers at the school level did not find these initiatives essential in the achievement of students (Glickman, 2010).

Gaps also existed in the use of the documents. Some of the U.S. History teachers used the curriculum documents provided by the local school district or the state department, while others created their own. There is a disconnect in the curriculum and in the instructional practices of the teachers. As earlier postulated, the congruence of assessment, teaching strategies, and intended learning outcomes are crucial in students' academic achievement (Biggs, 2003). Moreover, the interview data revealed that participants did not follow the curriculum documents with fidelity. Some participants used the curriculum maps, pacing guides, and instructional frameworks sporadically, with others using it even less because they preferred other instruction methods and tools. Overall, the curriculum use of the participants was minimal and did not reflect consistency of practice. Data revealed that participants used textbooks least of all the instructional aides. Teachers often borrowed instructional items from other districts or from the department of education. Administrators and district level instructional staff-members

selected instructional items for the teachers at times; however, participants indicated that they reserved the right to select items that they deemed appropriate for their individual classes.

Most of the participants revealed the need for additional training on the use of differentiated instruction. Participants indicated that they would like to learn how to differentiate U.S. History lessons so that they could meet the instructional needs of all students. Lectures were the most common instructional method used by the U.S. History department; however, participants indicated that the use of group work and question-answer sessions was also common. As it relates to research-based instructional strategies, participants indicated that they needed additional professional training to learn how to implement instructional practices that raise student achievement levels. Data most often revealed the use of curriculum exemplars. Although teachers indicated that they had a general knowledge of differentiation, additional training is needed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the instructional practice. This finding supports earlier research work claiming that curriculum alignment, teacher training, and a strongly aligned assessment system can improve student performance in U.S. History and can lead to improvements in high school graduation rates (Kallick & Colosimo, 2008; Squires, 2009).

Participants revealed that their knowledge of the scope and sequence of the standards was also a cause for concern. The participants have a cursory knowledge of the standards and instructional practices; however, much training is needed to raise the instructional bar for students. The use of curriculum frameworks requires teachers to possess in-depth knowledge and understanding of CCGPS. Data revealed that teachers possess only a cursory understanding of the breadth and depth of the curriculum. The units and frameworks provided by the

department of education are comprehensive; however, the participants did not follow the frameworks and accompanying assessments. This was problematic because the instructional frameworks necessitate strict adherence to ensure sufficient implementation.

Participants revealed that there was frustration with the use of instructional supports due to the length and the number of tasks in each curriculum unit. The suggested texts were difficult to assess or had high costs that prohibited their purchase. Moreover, some of the instructional support such as text was controversial or inappropriate for specific grade levels. Difficulties associated with acquiring the instructional support suggested by the local district or Department of Education led some participants to choose materials that were not approved by the district. This was problematic because the instructional materials may not correlate well with CCGPS. Participants viewed the curriculum units designed by the state department as somewhat “disorganized.” Additionally, training is needed to understand the frameworks and to implement the accompanying assessments.

Assessments

The participants expressed apprehension regarding the use of formative and summative assessments. They revealed that although there was some use of formative assessment practices, much work was needed to ensure the adequate use of formative assessments designed to improve student achievement levels. Participants indicated that the majority of the assessments used by the U.S. History department were pen and paper examinations related to passages discussed in classes. The use of formative assessments, unit assessments, and other methods is a relatively new process for the department. As such, while the school district’s curriculum aligns with new

CCGPS and its corresponding assessments is with vertical alignment and scope and sequence (King, 2011), the teachers at the school level struggled to meet these expectations. It is therefore theorized, that due to curricular and assessment constraints, students would likely fail the Georgia Milestone assessments, which is aligned to the CCGPS standards (Kallick & Colosimo, 2008).

The teachers also indicated that even when formative assessments were used, they did not often have time to disaggregate the data and redesign lessons to remediate the students. Most of the formative assessment practices involved administering assessments to derive a grade for student averages. Very little time and thought was devoted to ensuring that the assessments were rigorous. Although the new summative assessment, the Georgia Milestone, would be implemented in the spring 2015, teachers had not begun administering mock tests or developing assessments that correlated to the Georgia Milestone. A sense of urgency was not present as it relates to assessing student performance and adjusting instructional practices in light of student performance data.

This is problematic for the implementation of CCGPS because one of the key components to CCGPS and the improvement process is the use of assessments to assist in monitoring student achievement levels. It is counter-intuitive for teachers to minimally assess students and fail to use the assessments to drive the instructional practices of the department. Much work is needed for teachers in the area of assessment practices to ensure that decisions regarding student achievement are predicated on the most recent student test data.

Students' Development of Critical Thinking Skills

Data revealed that despite the strength of the curriculum, students must possess the necessary reading, writing, and critical thinking skills to pass U.S. History. Moreover, the use of standard-based classrooms and grading policies helped to improve student proficiency rates. Participants revealed that although U.S. History had some bearing on the graduation rates, subjects such as math, English, and science had the greatest impact on graduation rates.

Participants unanimously agreed that graduation rates could be improved by involving parents and the community in graduation initiatives. Students need to understand the impact that a high school diploma has on one's economic status in the future. Teachers indicated that they often felt that students did not understand the true influence that earning a high school diploma could have on their future. Participants suggested that courses such as U.S. History provided some basis for conversation as it relates to improving graduation rates through the historical analysis of political and social events; however, the true implications for graduation needed to be experienced through real world application found outside of the history classroom. Lastly, participants described U.S. History as being less of an obstacle than other core subjects are; however, absenteeism, lack of motivation, and reading skills were also major challenges for students.

Participants suggested that students did not apply themselves in class. Participants indicated that students often did not view U.S. History as an important course, and subsequently did not apply themselves with the same tenacity as was seen in other core courses. Participants revealed that U.S. History students often appeared bored or disinterested in the content.

Although the participants agreed that they would use strategies to engage the students in U.S. History, they were unclear as to whether they felt their efforts would be beneficial to students.

Professional Knowledge

Overall, the participants were knowledgeable about general U.S. History content and concepts. All of the participants had degrees in history from four-year colleges and expressed an aptitude for general history concepts. Although the participants had a cursory knowledge of teaching strategies, there was not a clear level of understanding for the standards-based or research-based instructional strategies. The participants revealed that lectures were the primary mode of instruction, followed by question-answer sessions or group discussions. Pen and paper exams were the most commonly used method of assessing student performance. Although the participants indicated that their students often did not retain the content taught during the lessons, the teachers continuously used the same mode of instruction. When prompted to explain their rationale for pursuing the least productive mode of instruction, participants explained that they did not have knowledge of other, more beneficial methods of instructing students.

Additionally, the participants expressed knowledge of basic curricular skills such as using pacing guides and curriculum maps to assist with the implementation of CCGPS. The participants knew where and how to access curriculum documents, but indicated that they did not always follow the documents with fidelity. Varied responses in the phases of the data collection process revealed that the participants were familiar with the U.S. History curriculum and expectations for learning. U.S. History teachers demonstrated a content knowledge in general; however, the application of the teaching and the learning process requires additional training.

Curriculum and Instruction

The CCGPS content curriculum was regarded as rigorous as it relates to scope and sequence. However, participants indicated that they were concerned that the curriculum may be so rigorous that their students may not possess the necessary critical thinking and analytical skills to master the complex content. Additional training was needed to improve the curriculum documents, such as, pacing guides and curriculum maps, which the participants indicated were outdated and did not correlate well with CCGPS. Moreover, participants indicated that their students' comprehension skills were weak, subsequently causing problems for students attempting to read and understand complex textual objectives. Marzano (2008) concluded his research by suggesting that reading comprehension skills are vital to critical and analytical thinking. Likewise, Stiggins (2009) suggested that teachers needed to assess students at high levels, and that required students to have knowledge and a basic understanding of the subject matter. With that in mind, the current researcher's interpretations of U.S. History courses is that teachers are seeking improvement, but may need additional training on research-based instructional and assessment strategies, while students need assistance with comprehension, as well as analytical and critical thinking skills.

As teachers continued to prepare themselves for the changing landscape of U.S. History content, they were concerned about the use of the new CCGPS standardized assessment, the Georgia Milestone. Chappuis (2012) indicated that the classroom assessment of learning should prepare students for assessments of learning. The research participants indicated that they had done very little to prepare students for the upcoming Georgia Milestone. Moreover, it was revealed that participants had not assessed students using test constructs that would be similar to

those used in the Georgia Milestone. The participants revealed that most often their students were assessed using multiple-choice questions or true and false responses. Stiggins (2012) contended that one of the cornerstones of assessment for learning is that both teachers and students must maintain an ongoing picture of the students' achievement progress. Frequent assessments provide continuous feedback to both the students and the teachers. However, participants indicated that their assessment practices were often infrequent and ineffective. The teachers also indicated that they would like to learn more effective ways to assess their students, and some had spoken with administrators about registering for professional learning to help them to design better assessments for their students.

The participants in this research were energetic and eager to learn meaningful ways to teach and assess their students. The participants were cognizant of the changing landscape of education and understood the urgency associated with improving student achievement and graduation rates. There was a clear willingness to learn and increase professional capacity amongst all of the participants. To that end, policy makers, boards of education, and other groups could benefit significantly from understanding how teachers' perceptions of the implementation of CCGPS can foster greater gains in student achievement.

Implications for Social Change

The goal of this research was to ascertain teachers' perceptions of the implementation of CCGPS, and the influence that these perceptions could have on the landscape of student achievement and graduation rates. The value of this research is that teachers' perceptions of this issue are critical to understanding what needs to be done to improve the achievement levels of

the students. This includes changes that may be needed in curricular issues, professional learning, and student assessments. Although this research focused primarily on the perceptions of U.S. History teachers, it has overarching considerations as it relates to teachers of core subjects in general.

Educators at a variety of levels could benefit from this research and learning how teachers' perceptions influence student achievement. Teachers' perceptions and professional opinions are often overlooked as compared to other data sources such as test data; however, teachers' perceptions can provide significant insight into how teachers think and feel about a particular educational issue (Kober & Rentner, 2011). Additionally, teachers' perceptions of important curricular issues such as lesson plans and curriculum maps detail the usefulness of these items. Often, lawmakers, administrators, and the school community ignore the voices of the teachers, who are the individuals in the classrooms implementing the curriculum. Understanding how teachers think and feel about topics such as CCGPS or graduation rates may shed light on what needs to be done to improve student achievement levels and graduation rates as a whole.

Additionally, lawmakers and boards of education could benefit from this research. In the local school district, decisions regarding what is taught in schools are decided upon with very little input from classroom teachers. Each school term, the teachers sign contracts indicating that they will teach the prescribed curriculum. Although the teachers are some of the first educators to determine whether the curriculum is too complex for students, they are required to teach the content standards set forth by the state of Georgia and the local board of education. With that, lawmakers need to know and understand from teachers' perspectives

whether the curriculum is too weak or too rigorous for their students. Lawmakers or other individuals who are not in the classrooms with students often make decisions regarding what and when subject matter is taught in schools. Often, these lawmakers only receive summative data regarding student achievement, without knowing the barriers that exist to the full implementation of CCGPS. This type of decision-making “far outside of the classroom” is fostering disconnectedness for the students and teachers.

Particularly across the state of Georgia, stress placed on teachers to perform at high levels and for students to achieve at high levels, the curriculum is often watered down to meet the level of students who are not academically ready for the rigors of CCGPS. Lawmakers need to know and understand that teachers need instructional support to prepare students that enter their classrooms unprepared for the challenging curriculum. When lawmakers understand an issue from the teachers’ perspective, there can be greater consideration for important issues such as funding for instructional materials and the professional learning needed by teachers.

Lastly, parents and the community as a whole could benefit from this research. Parents need to be educated from the teachers’ perspective as it relates to CCGPS implementation. They need to know and understand what is being taught to their children and the influence that teachers’ perceptions can have on student achievement. Parents should understand the basics of curriculum and CCGPS to help support the instruction that is provided to their student in the classroom. Community members could also benefit from knowing teachers’ perceptions of the curriculum and their influence on graduation rates. The educational community as a whole must embrace changes associated with the core

requirements of high school students to foster a learning environment that encourages high scholastic achievement. Although this research is not a “silver bullet” for all the woes associated with CCGPS, it does provide an opportunity for educators, lawmakers, and the greater educational community to embrace the power of teachers’ perceptions regarding educational issues. To foster social change, members of society must embrace student achievement and support the efforts of teachers.

Recommendations for Action

In an effort to facilitate effective change in the local school district, I plan to share the information and data gathered in this doctoral research. I will share a report from this doctoral study with the local board of educators, the Superintendent of the district, and the high school principal. I will also include excerpts from this research in the local newspaper so that parents and community officials can begin to understand the influence that teachers’ perceptions have on graduation rates and overall student achievement levels. As a scholarly practitioner, I will seek to present these findings at educational conferences and professional learning sessions. Additional information may be shared on social media sites and in educational forums.

With the sense of urgency associated with improving student achievement levels and graduation rates, I will meet with teachers, administrators, and instructional staff-members to make recommendations regarding improving the local U.S. History curriculum, assessments, and instructional practices of teachers. My recommendations for revamping the local U.S. History curriculum include topics relating to current events, political cartoons, and the use of technology by students and teachers. It is clear that much work is needed to improve the instructional

practices of teachers; therefore, recommendations will be made to incorporate professional development and departmental planning throughout the school day. Recommendations for improving teacher effectiveness will include technology training, curriculum and assessment training, and pedagogical training. Teachers will be taught how to collect and use student performance data to drive instruction, as well as how to re-teach and re-assess failing students. I recommend an overall review of the grading policy to ensure that standards-based grading procedures and policies are in place. Lastly, I recommend teacher training to improve student engagement. It was apparent that teachers need training on designing performance-based assessments and engaging (interactive) lessons for students.

Recommendations for Further Study

This research lends itself to further study. Educational researchers could consider exploring the influence that students' perceptions of CCGPS have on their achievement levels and graduation rates. The perceptions of school administrators themselves are another angle that could be looked at. Instead of the perceptions of the teachers, the perceptions of the students themselves may be as insightful. Instead of a qualitative study, a quantitative study or a mixed methods study establishing correlation between the same variables of CCGSS implementation and student achievement can be carried out. Furthermore, the use of survey questionnaires than interview may be effective in determining the relationship of the implementation of CCGPS to the academic achievement of students.

As discussed in the limitations of the study, the interview of four teachers to understand a broad empirical phenomenon concerning students' achievement and the implementation of CCGPS may not sufficiently cover the possible barriers of students' achievement in history. It is further recommended that a larger sample of participants covering multiple cases of implementation could be explored to determine other possible themes that could explain the phenomenon.

Summary

The goal of this research study was to gain a better understanding of teachers' perceptions of CCGPS, and how these perceptions influence student achievement at a high school in rural Central Georgia. Overall, I feel that I have learned a great deal as it relates to scholarly writing, teacher perceptions, and data collection. Having experienced the doctoral process, I can appreciate the need for reflection, evaluation, and tenacity. I have learned the skills of deductive and inductive reasoning, as well as how to examine educational issues from several points of view. Learning how to collect data and conducting interviews was challenging, but will prove to be an invaluable skill as an educator. Being able to reflect on my own personal biases was critical to the ability to collect data. Before beginning this research study, I did not realize the personal assumptions and biases that I harbored that could influence the data collection process. I was required to learn how to discover teachers' perceptions and to not draw my own conclusions. Moreover, through this process, I have learned to be patient and to take time to review transcripts thoroughly, and ask deeper questions to arrive at the participants' real perceptions of the issues. Through the qualitative research process, I learned to patiently wait for themes to emerge and to not rush to judgment. I often had to check my own assumptions as they

relate to an issue and to rely on the data to reveal themes. Coding participants' thoughts and feelings helped me to remain objective and address subjectivity.

In conclusion, discovering teachers' perceptions is vitally important to examining educational issues. Whenever possible, data collected from the perceptions of teachers should be considered in addition to other valuable data such as student achievement or graduation rates. It is significant to understand how the perceptions of teachers can influence student achievement to shed light on their professional opinions of the issue. It is critical to know that the teachers involved in this study have expressed interest in attending professional workshops to learn how to use standards-based instructional practices such as differentiation to raise achievement levels. Moreover, it was meaningful to discover how the lack of technology in their classrooms was an impediment as it relates to the implementation of CCGPS. Teachers revealed that their efforts to implement components of CCGPS, such as a rigorous curriculum and instructional practices, were hampered when they were unable to access the instructional frameworks provided by the Georgia Department of Education. It was interesting to learn just how important these missteps were to the overall success and implementation of CCGPS. Furthermore, a discussion of the graduation rates revealed that teachers perceived that graduation rates could be improved by improving assessment practices. Teachers perceived the CCGPS curriculum as rigorous, and understood that students needed prerequisite skills and improvements in reading comprehension to be successful. Additionally, comments from the teachers regarding outdated curriculum documents and pacing guides revealed a serious need to improve the instructional materials in classrooms by teachers.

Overall, understanding teachers' perceptions of critical issues as they relate to the implementation of CCGPS led to the understanding that there is a need for change. Reviewing the graduation rates and discussing updates for improving student achievement reminded of the urgency of the work yet to be done in the field of education. The connection between teaching and learning is clear; for students to be more successful in the classroom, teachers must be better equipped for the challenges associated with new assessments, including the CCSS.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions for U.S. History Teachers

Introduction: Thank you for participating in my doctoral research study for Walden University. I appreciate that you will allow this session to be audio taped. You will have an opportunity to

review your answers before I use them in my study. Also, you have the opportunity to stop participating at any time you feel uncomfortable in the interview session. I may contact you in case I need to clarify some of your answers. Every question I will ask will pertain to U.S. History, so I might not say the phrase each time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

General Information:

1. Could you please tell me about yourself?
2. Could you tell me about your educational and professional preparation?
3. Tell me about your interests outside of teaching.

Interview Questions:

RQ1: What are educators' perceptions concerning the barriers associated with Georgia's Common Core State Standards, such that, students are not passing U.S. History and not graduating?

Barriers:

1. Tell me about the barriers that you experienced in preparing for the implementation of CCGPS for U.S. History? How have you addressed the barriers?
2. Tell me about barriers that you have encountered with the implementation of CCGPS. How has the barriers impeded students achievement in U.S. History? Tell me, in as much detail as possible, what you are doing in your classroom to address the barriers with CCGPS; so that students will be successful in U.S. History courses.
3. Tell me about the professional learning or staff-development that you have received to prepare you to teach using CCGPS? How was your training beneficial to the achievement level of your students? Did you receive feedback from administrators as it relates to the implementation from CCGPS? If so, tell me about the feedback? Was it beneficial in the implementation of CCGPS? Why or why not? Please elaborate.
4. As you plan for future instructions, please provide suggestions to eliminate barriers associated with the implementation of CCGPS?

RQ2: What are U.S. History teachers' perceptions concerning Georgia's Common Core State Standards and assessment system?

Assessments:

1. Tell me in as much detail, how you feel about the current CCGPS assessment system. Is it beneficial to students? Is the U.S. History curriculum aligned to common core standards? If so, how do you determine vertical alignment? Who monitors the vertical alignment of the standards to the assessment?
2. Tell me about how prepared you think the students are to take the standardized assessment for U.S. History. How was students' progress monitored prior to testing? How often do students receive feedback as it relates to their performance on benchmark assessments? Is this information shared with parents?
3. Tell me about how U.S. History assessments are analyzed. How do you use the data? Is the data displayed in classrooms or discussed with students?
4. Please share any other information, as relates to your perception of the effectiveness of Georgia's Common Core Assessment system.

Follow-up Questions:

1. Please share with me any other information regarding instructional barriers that may influence students' proficiency rates.
2. As you plan for upcoming instructions tell me about how you will use assessment data to make informed decisions to help improve U.S. History instructions.
3. Is there any other information that you could share that would shed light on ways to improve professional learning, assessments or curriculum as it relates to U.S. History instructions.

Appendix B: Participant Letter

Dear Participant:

My name is Garnica Lewis. I am a doctoral student at Walden University in the College of Education. You are invited to participate in a research project entitled, Educators' Perceptions of Georgia's Common Core State Standards in U.S. History course. The purpose of this study is to discover how educators' perceptions of the common core state standards may influence student proficiency rates. The Walden University's Institutional Review Board has approved this study.

Interview questions were developed to gain insight into your perceptions of Georgia's common core state standards. It is my hope that this information will provide potential benefits of research to others. There are no identified risks from participating in this research.

The interviews are confidential. Participation in this research is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without consequence. The interview will take approximately 40 minutes to complete. You will receive no compensation for participating in the research study. Responses to the interview questions will only be reported in aggregated form to protect the identity of respondents. There is no conflict of interest with the results. The data collected from this study will be kept in a locked cabinet for three years.

To ensure safe and proper research procedures, auditors of the Walden University Institutional Review Board and regulatory authorities will be granted direct access to the research data without violating the confidentiality of the participants. Further information regarding the research can be obtained from me or from Walden University's representative, Dr. Leilani Endicott. Dr. Endicott can be reached at 612-312-1210. If you wish further information regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

If you would like to know the results of this research, contact Garnica Lewis at garnica.lewis@waldenu.edu. Thank you for your consideration. Your help is greatly appreciated. Your signature below indicates that you have read the above information, are at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in the study Educators' Perceptions of Georgia's Common Core State Standards in U.S. History courses.

Printed Name

Signature _____

Date

Appendix C: Permission Letter

June 3, 2014

Dear Superintendent of Schools,

I am a doctoral student at Walden University in the College of Education under the supervision of Dr. Donald Poplau. I would like to conduct a research project entitled: Educators' Perceptions of Georgia's Common Core State Standards in U.S. History Courses, in your school district. The purpose of this study is to discover how educators' perceptions of the common core state standards may influence student proficiency rates. The Walden University's Institutional Review Board has approved this study.

Interview questions were developed to gain insight into Educators' perceptions of Georgia's common core state standards. It is my hope that this information will provide potential benefits of research to others. There are no identified risks from participating in this research.

The interviews are confidential. Participation in this research is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without consequence. The interview will take approximately 40 minutes to complete. Neither the school district nor participants will receive compensation for participating in the research study. Responses to the interview questions will only be reported in aggregated form to protect the identity of respondents. There is no conflict of interest with the results. The data collected from this study will be kept in a locked cabinet for three years.

To insure safe and proper research procedures, auditors of the Walden University Institutional Review Board and regulatory authorities will be granted direct access to the research data without violating the confidentiality of the participants. Further information regarding the research can be obtained from me or from Walden University's representative Dr. Leilani Endicott. Dr. Endicott

can be reached at 612-312-1210. If you wish further information regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact Walden University Institutional Review Board.

If you would like to know the results of this research, contact Garnica Lewis at garnica.lewis@waldenu.edu. Thank you for your consideration. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the above information, are at least 18 years of age and grant permission to conduct the study Educators' Perceptions of Georgia's Common Core State Standards in U.S. History courses.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

Appendix D: Interview Questions

3:30-3:30

I welcomed thanked the interview participants and provided copies of the informed consent document. Consent forms signed and submitted.

General Information:

- How long have you been teaching?
- How long have you been teaching in this school district?
- How long have you taught U.S. History?
- What college did you attend?
- What was your major?
- What is the highest degree that you have obtained?

3:30-4:15 Discussion

Perception: The ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses. A way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something: a mental picture. This definition demonstrates the significance of one's ability to be aware or have the sense of something.

The use of this term can help to characterize teachers' sense of issues. To that end, teachers are able to provide a sense or understanding of issues in their classes or at their schools.

Perception (2014). Wikipedia. Retrieved September 15, 2015, from <http://www.wikipedia.com/perception>

5:00-5:45

Interview Session 1

1. Tell me about the barriers that you experienced in preparing for the implementation of CCGPS for U.S. History?
2. In the previous question, you shared your experiences as it relates to the barriers associated with the implementation of CCGPS for U.S. History. Can you please explain how the barriers have impeded student achievement in your U.S. History classes? Tell me, in as much detail as possible, what you are doing in your classroom to address the barriers with CCGPS; so that students will be successful in U.S. History courses.
3. Did you receive feedback from administrators as it relates to the implementation from CCGPS? If so, tell me about the feedback? Was it beneficial in the implementation of CCGPS? Why or why not? Please elaborate.
4. Tell me about the professional learning or staff-development that you have received thus far, to prepare you to teach using CCGPS? Was the training beneficial to your growth as a U.S. History teacher? How was your training beneficial to the achievement level of your students? Have you been able to share your knowledge with your colleagues, if so, to what extent?
5. As you plan for future instructions, please provide suggestions to eliminate barriers associated with the implementation of CCGPS?

Tell me in as much detail, how you feel about the current CCGPS assessment system. Is it beneficial to students? Is the U.S. History curriculum aligned to common core standards? If so, how do you determine vertical alignment? Who monitors the vertical alignment of the standards to the assessment?

7. Tell me about how prepared you think the students are to take the standardized assessment for U.S. History. How was students' progress monitored prior to testing? How often do students receive feedback as it relates to their performance on benchmark assessments? Is this information shared with parents?
8. Tell me about how U.S. History assessments are analyzed. How do you use the data? Is the data displayed in classrooms or discussed with students?

9. Please share any other information, as relates to your perception of the effectiveness of Georgia's Common Core Assessment system.

Follow-up Questions:

1. Please share with me any other information regarding instructional barriers that may influence students' proficiency rates.
2. As you plan for upcoming instructions tell me about how you will use assessment data to make informed decisions to help improve U.S. History instruction.
3. Is there any other information that you could share that would shed light on ways to improve professional learning, assessments, or curriculum as it relates to U.S. History instruction.

6:00-6:05

I thanked the participants and informed each that we would meet again in approximately one week to conduct the second set of interviews.

Appendix E: Interview Session 2

3:00-3:15

Preliminary introductions re-established for the second set of interviews. Since this was the second meeting for participants, this portion of the interview process went fairly quickly.

3:15-4:00

Interview Questions 2

1. Tell me about how your school district rolled out CCGPS for U.S. History?
2. Georgia Department of Education provided web based professional learning to help teachers become familiar with CCGPS standards and expectations. Tell me about any barriers that you may have encountered as it relates to receiving this training. Were you provided sufficient a substitute teacher will you received this training? Were there any issues with the technology? If so, what were the issues? How were the issues resolved?
3. CCGPS provided supplemental materials; such as, “blueprints and orientation videos” to aide in the implementation of CCGPS. Tell me about your experiences using these resources. Were the resources beneficial to you in the implementation process? Did you feel more prepared to instruct after you familiarized yourself with the resources?
4. With the implementation of CCGPS, there are budgetary issues to consider, what if any, were some of the budgetary issues that you encountered with implementing CCGPS in your classroom? How has budgetary issues influenced your ability to

- implement CCGPS in your classroom. As you plan for future instruction, how will you address the budgetary issues so that the impact will not be disruptive to your students' academic success?
5. Georgia Department of Education provides curriculum frameworks to help teachers instruct using CCGPS. Have you used the curriculum frameworks? If so, tell me how you used the frameworks in your class. Tell me about any barriers that you may have encountered with using the frameworks? How have you addressed the barriers?
 6. Recently, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement published its most recent standardized test data for the 2014 school term. Based on the 2013 test data, U.S. History achievement rose by 3%. What do you attribute this modest growth to?
 7. In what ways, has the use of CCPS helped to improve U. S. History instruction in your classroom? Tell me how you feel that the use of CCGPS for U.S. History might help improve the graduation rate?
 8. Are there any other barriers related to the implementation of CCGPS that you would like to share.

Assessment System

9. Georgia Department of Education will implement a new summative assessment system, the Georgia Milestone, beginning the fall of 2014, how has your school district trained you for the implementation and use of this new assessment system?

10. Do you have concerns regarding the alignment of the Milestone to CCGPS? If so, please explain in as much detail as possible, what your concerns are and how you will address them.
11. In light of the implementation of a new assessment system, does the U.S. History department have plans to revise the current curriculum and assessments to align with the Milestone Assessment? If so, who will be responsible for the revisions? Who will approve the revisions?
12. The Georgia Department of Education has implemented the Georgia Formative Assessment Resource to evaluate student achievement in preparation for the Milestone Assessment. Tell me how you will use this formative assessment tool to prepare your students for the Milestone Assessment.
13. Tell how prepared you feel to use the Formative Assessment Resources and the Georgia Milestone Assessment.
14. Tell me how you will use Georgia's assessment system to ensure that your students are College and Career Ready?
15. Please share with me your assessment strategies as it relates to preparing students for both norm referenced and criterion-referenced exams. What will you use as performance measures?