

2019

Disadvantaged Preschool Children: Public Policy, Education Models, and Kindergarten Readiness

Virginia H. Byerson
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Virginia H. Byerson

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the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Patricia Ripoll, Committee Chairperson,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Michael Knight, Committee Member,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. William Benet, University Reviewer,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

The Office of the Provost

Walden University
2019

Abstract

Disadvantaged Preschool Children: Public Policy, Education Models, and Kindergarten

Readiness

By

Virginia H. Byerson

MS, Central Michigan University, 2009

BS, Saint Leo University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

November 2019

Abstract

There is a high rate of academic failure among disadvantaged preschool and post preschool students in some school districts in Virginia, yet little is understood about the relationship between education models and academic performance among economically disadvantaged students (EDS). The problem explored is the absence of classroom exercises in pre and post preschools that capitalize on cognitive development to improve executive function (EF) and self-regulation (SR) skills. The purpose of this study is to understand if a change in current classroom practices impacts academic performance among low-income students. Narrative policy serves as a theoretical guide in this qualitative case study that focused on the perceptions of principals, teachers, and administrators regarding best practices for preschool and post-preschool students and, secondly, how teachers implement classroom exercises to capitalize on the development of executive function and self-regulation skills among economically disadvantaged students. All data were inductively coded and then subjected to a thematic analysis procedure and included archived school report cards, preschool enrollment, and semi structured interviews with 3 former teachers now serving as administrators who supervise classroom activities. Findings indicate that best practices for EDS were a responsive classroom approach to correct disruptive behavior while developing mental capacity and simultaneously capitalizing on exercises to improve EF and SR skills in a classroom environment. Implications of social change begin with the empowerment of students, teachers, and administrators. Policy recommendations for social change include mandating two years of high-quality preschool for EDS as well as pursuing policies supporting SR and EF skills.

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Dedication

Lord, Great is thy faithfulness! This work is dedicated to all past, present, and future early childhood teachers of economically disadvantaged students. A child is an investment of human capital in the future of a society. In the highly competitive environment of global markets, there can be no throwaway children; each child--each student must succeed. These heroic teachers of economically disadvantaged students are the vanguard for ensuring that every student succeeds.

Acknowledgements

To God be the glory for the great things He has done! I would like to continue in giving thanks to Dr. Patricia Ripoll, Committee Chair for her resilience she has shown to a perfect stranger over the course of my journey. A very warm embrace to Dr. Michael Knight, Methodologist, for his timely interjections and appreciated guidance, and a warm thank you to Dr. William Benet, The URR, for the quality time spent in reviews and making this study possible.

Certainly, I would like to thank my warm and kind husband, Dana Andre Byerson for quiet moments spent keeping me company, late into many nights, while the journey continued. My adult sons Brad Stefon, Brandon Andre and Braxton Ranard, bless you for supporting me in this study.

I would be remiss if I did not thank my siblings, AD, Steve, Geraldine, Andrew, Richard, Arnold, Randy, Vincent, and Mary, for checking on me from time to time and offering words of encouragement and input when absolutely necessary during this journey.

I would like to thank my late parents, Mr. Steve Mack and Mrs. Mary Ellen Pryor Mack for providing the foundation and insight for what it meant to love without hesitation and setting the groundwork for my platform long before this journey began.

Lastly, expressing appreciation to my colleagues with which the blackboard was shared, discussions were meaningful and constant encouragement shared.

God Bless

The Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study	1
Background of Study	3
The Virginia Preschool Initiatives.....	3
Early Childhood QRIS	5
Early Reading First.....	6
Even Start Family Literacy Program.....	6
Early Childhood Care and Education Policy.....	6
United Early Childhood Agenda	7
Virginia’s Constitution Article VIII.....	7
Virginia Foundation Blocks for Learning	7
Problem Statement	10
Purpose of the Study.....	12
Research Questions	13
Theoretical Framework	14
Narrative Policy Framework Summary	14
Cognitive Development Theory Summary	15
Social Construction Theory Summary.....	15
Conceptual Learning Framework Summary	15
Nature of the Study	16
Operational Definitions.....	16

Assumptions.....	17
Scope and Delimitations	19
Limitations.....	19
Significance of Study.....	20
Positive Implications for Social Change.....	21
Summary	22
Chapter 2: Literature Review	24
Introduction	24
Literature Selection Strategy.....	26
The Theoretical Foundations.....	26
Cognitive Development Theory.....	27
The Social Construction Theory	28
Conceptual Learning Framework	29
Literature Review	30
Kindergarten Readiness Concept.....	30
Executive Function and Self-Regulation Skills.....	31
Alternative Education Models.....	33
Montessori Education Model.....	33
High/Scope Education Model	34
Tools of the Mind Curriculum.....	34
Literature Conflict.....	35

Democratic Policy Design	36
Summary	37
Chapter 3: Research Method	40
Introduction	40
Research Design and Rationale	41
Research Setting	41
Role of Researcher	41
Methodology	42
Participant Selection Logic	43
Instrumentation	44
Data Collection	44
Data Analysis Plan	45
Trustworthiness of the Study	46
Credibility	46
Transferability	47
Dependability	47
Conformability	47
Ethical Procedures	48
Summary	49
Chapter 4: Findings	51
Introduction	51
Research Setting	52

Demographics.....	52
Data Collection.....	54
Data Analysis	57
Identifying Themes.....	57
Theme: Best Practices	60
Theme: Executive function and Self- regulation.....	61
Theme: Montessori Model	61
Theme: Age of Entry	62
Theme: Policy mandates	63
Theme: Outside resources	64
Summary	66
Chapter 5.....	68
Discussions and Recommendations.....	68
Introduction	68
Interpretations of Findings	68
Limitations of the Study.....	69
Recommendations	70
Social Implications.....	72
Policy Implications.....	72
Conclusion	74
References.....	76

Appendix A Confidentiality Agreement.....	89
Appendix B Data Collection Coordination Request.....	90
Appendix C Questionnaires	92

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Educational policies have been developed at national, state, and local levels for years. At the federal level, education policies began with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The intent of ESEA was to provide students with a full educational opportunity. Ackerman and Barnett (2006) stated that if quality in preschool is ensured, then readiness is supported. Heckman (2008) claimed that, to encourage growth trajectories during early childhood education, educators must consider income as well as family dynamics as both play a role in the lives of children.

U.S. educational policy has examined the need of preparing at risk youngsters by implementing programs that address readiness for successful outcomes. Jenkins, Farkas, Duncan, Burchinal, and Vandell (2016) believed that high-quality early care programs provide support for low-income families. For example, Head Start is a national development program for early childhood from birth to five years whose purpose is to provide classroom instructions to support academic, social, and emotional growth for income-eligible families. Head Start programs have positive reviews on short-term impacts of language, literacy, and early writing skills for three and four-year-olds (Jenkins, 2014). They have also been successful because they require parental involvement in their implementation. Ruzek, Burchinal, Farkas, and Duncan (2014) believed that infant-toddler high quality daycare is complicated among parents without affordability. Ziglar (1987) suggested that it is unreasonable to expect to close education gaps in 1 year among disadvantaged children. Herbers, Cutuli, Supkoff, Heistad, Chan,

Hinz & Masten (2012) caution that early education issues are concerns for economically disadvantaged children.

Masten, Desjardins, Cutuli, McCormick, Sapienza, Long, and Zelazo (2012) outlined the importance of training educators in facilitating low socioeconomic early childhood students. Hair, Hanson, Wolfe, and Pollak (2015) further noted, “families characterized as economically disadvantaged below a poverty level of 150% should be identified for additional resources” (p. 822). The Every Student Succeed Act (2015) suggested that building stronger schools is a component of strengthening the academic success of low socioeconomic students. The goal of ESSA includes increased access to high-quality preschool programs for all students.

Harvard Center on the Developing Child (2016) demonstrated that students enrolled in high-quality preschool develop EF skills that facilitate learning. This concept is comprised of three components: working memory, inhibitory control, and mental flexibility. Broekhuizen, Mokrova, Burchinal, Garrett-Peters, and the Family Life Project Key Investigators (2016) shared “the ideology of high-quality childhood education is positively related to social and emotional development.” (p. 212). Turner (2016) reported that mediators of poverty affect academic and social stability in early childhood students. In addition, Fitzpatrick, McKinnon, Blair, and Willoughby (2014) advised that the role of EF and self-regulation (SR) is essential in the process of academic performance, serving as viable components in early childhood education. Nesbitt, Farran and Fuhs (2015b) reported that young children who demonstrate EF skills in childhood

programs also achieve more academically, proving that the absence of EF affects the overall academic performance. Broekhuizen et al. (2016) further suggested that less than two years of preschool places the child at risk for non-performance.

Academic performance among the disadvantaged student population is a growing concern among education leaders, government officials, parents, and communities. Nesbitt et al. (2015a) suggested that young children demonstrating executive function (EF) skills in early childhood also achieve more academically. In educational programs, school budgets or teacher preparation are partially responsible for the outcomes of disadvantaged children in early childhood programs. In addition, learning component suggestions can be successful in current programs. Little, however, is studied about the ideas, thoughts, and beliefs of the staff involved in implementing such programs.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to address a gap in the education literature to classroom experiences, especially those that capitalize on the implementation of self-regulation (SR) and executive function (EF) skills in proven educational models. Additionally, I examined proven childhood education models and how policy may impact academic achievement among the economically disadvantaged. It was explored why early educational programs for disadvantaged children result in varied outcomes involving Region 1 schools.

Background of Study

The Virginia Preschool Initiatives

The Virginia Preschool Initiative provides funding from lottery proceeds to schools and community-based organizations to deliver quality preschool programs for at-risk, 4-year-olds underserved by the Head Start program. The Virginia Department of Education (2016) established academic standards with programs for students to achieve kindergarten readiness. Nooe and Patterson (2010) and Herbers et al. (2012) identified low-socioeconomic living arrangements as high-risk indicators that potentially impede academic performance. Jenkins (2014) and Broekhuizen et al. (2016) suggested that preschool fosters the transition into kindergarten supporting growth trajectory as a child transitions into later years. The Virginia State Literacy Plan (2011), developed under the U.S. Department of Education's Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program (2014), ensures that all children display growth trajectories through high school graduation. In support of high-quality education, Herbers et al. (2012) advised that the success of early childhood programs fosters growth trajectories among disadvantaged students and serves as a mediator of school readiness. Moreover, Weiland, Barata, and Yoshikawa (2014) asserted that the development of EF skills and receptive vocabulary in early childhood has an association with the beginning of preschool receptive vocabulary and the end of preschool EF components.

The 2013 Virginia General Assembly directed the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to review The Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI). Key findings in this assessment were the following:

- An improvement in literacy performance during the pre-k instruction and exceeded achievements of kindergarteners; also, reviews from kindergarten educators and senior administrators confirmed that pre-k graduates are academically prepared for kindergarten and subsequent early childhood grade levels.
- High-quality preschool involvement of at-risk preschoolers is preparation for growth trajectory toward later years with lasting benefits.
- No participative localities with a population of at-risk preschoolers do not fill allocations for varying reasons, furthering concerns of denied access for all at-risk early childhood students and local VPI programs not being 100% compliant with program requirements.

Yazejian, Bryant, Freel, Burchinal, and Educare Learning Network (ELN)

Investigative Team (2015) identified academic programs for at-risk children where a significant number of students are not income eligible. This excludes students from high-quality education opportunities. Further, Yazejian et al. (2015) stated that a lack of participation in those programs potentially creates academic gaps between the economically disadvantaged and their middle-class peers, beginning as early as 9 months of age. The following early childhood quality programs within the study's school district are under the umbrella of the Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS) and Virginia's Preschool Initiative.

Early Childhood QRIS

QRIS is one of the systems across Virginia, whose aim is to increase the quality of early childhood programs from infancy through preschool or up to 6 years of age. Smart Beginnings Coalition partnered with Virginia's Office of Early Childhood Development in efforts to progress, integrate, and evaluate all early childhood service infrastructure and public policy interaction. The Virginia Star Quality Initiative agrees that evidence of quality early education through performance measurements advances cognitive development.

Early Reading First

A support program under VPI, ERF is a discretionary yet competitive grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Education. The program supports early childhood centers of excellence focusing on areas of development, especially early language, cognitive, and reading skills for children primarily from low-income families.

Even Start Family Literacy Program

Even Start is a unique support literacy program under VPI and is designed to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and low literacy for low-income families with children aged birth through 8-years-old. The Even Start program targets early education, adult education, parental skills education, and interactive parent-child literacy activities. The Promise Neighborhoods Program, resurrected in 2010, and the federal government invested \$270 million in more than 50 of the United States' most impoverished communities-representational of approximately 700 schools.

Early Childhood Care and Education Policy

With substantial financial support under VPI, Early Childhood Care and Education Fund, early interventions promote healthy babies and toddlers improving safety in childcare by monitoring continuous quality improvements and support innovation at all localities.

Unified Early Childhood Agenda

The Unified Early Childhood Agenda creates adequate funding for early interventions promoting healthy babies and toddlers and active in efforts to improve childcare safety, which further endorses continuous quality improvement initiatives in early care settings. As an advocate of high-quality early learning, unified supports innovation to advance better education and health access for all children.

Virginia's Constitution Article VIII

The General Assembly (2014) stated, "Public schools of high quality be maintained; it shall provide for a system of free public elementary and secondary schools for all children of school age in the Commonwealth and shall seek to maintain a high-quality education program" (p. 1).

Virginia Foundation Blocks for Learning

The Virginia Department of Education, in collaboration with the State's Office of Humanities and Early Childhood and Virginia Department of Education (2013), prepared Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning outlining the standards for 4-year-olds. The components of these general principles are a multitasking of literacy, personal and

social development, health and physical development, the arts, mathematics, science, history, and social science.

In agreement with the Office of Humanities, a range of expertise and tasks for 4-year-olds were compiled into the Foundational Blocks for Early Learning. These blocks are for the expressed purpose of providing early childhood educators a set of minimum standards in the eight blocks of early learning for successful kindergarten entry.

Virginia's Preschool Curriculum Review Rubric and Planning Tool (2013) set the standards for 4-year-olds to assist educators in creating a high-quality learning environment. Skills are formed through EF, assembling three dimensions: working memory, inhibitory control, and mental flexibility.

Harvard Center on the Developing Child (2016) described these components as “a team collaborating to develop executive function skills; as working memory provides the capacity to retain and control information internally over brief periods” (p. 1). In children, working memory allows the ability to associate material from one paragraph to the next, to carry out tasks with multiple levels, like math problems and getting settled after arriving to class in the absence of cues. Inhibitory control or self-regulation allows the filtering of thoughts and actions to challenge or oppose distractions or impulses that may enter the mind. Lastly, mental flexibility is the changing of the brain to apply rules for an acceptable response. Mental flexibility also allows innovation in thinking and recognizing errors and correcting them. Harvard Center on the Developing Child (2016)

suggested that this developed skill in children enables rules to be applied in grammar and to further comprehend classroom assignments.

The Horizons National (2015) provided an illustration of two students from contrasting socioeconomic backgrounds: a depiction of an educational gap between a disadvantaged student and their middle-class peer. As the two students begin kindergarten together, the low-income child starts behind the middle-income child academically due to the lack of educational resources available during early childhood. The middle-income child starts with a 6-month lead ahead of his marginalized peer. During kindergarten, the two students learned together but over the summer the middle-income child moves ahead approximately 1 month and the low-income student has fallen 2 months behind the middle-class child. The difference in educational advancement is due to learning of one kind or another for the middle-class child that occurred over the summer. When the two students return for the first-grade school term, the gap has widened from the previous summer. The two students will learn together during the first grade. The next summer, activities of the middle-income child include a summer of reading, family trips, camps, and time spent at libraries. These resources allow the middle-income child to move ahead once again while the low-income child experiences fewer or no opportunities to reinforce summer reading or any educational activities supporting advancement. The following second-grade term, the two children will learn together. Another summer without resources sets the lower-income pupil back while the middle-income pupil moves ahead widening the academic gap. By the beginning of the

third grade, the two students are far apart in their academics. At the end of the fifth grade, the gap is now 2 1/2 to 3 years behind for the low-income child. This gap will continue to grow throughout middle school. The Horizons National (2015) argued that the gap created during the summer period makes it impossible for the low-income child to close the gap during the school year without remedial resources during summer months. The high-quality learning that occurs from September to June is weakened during summer months and compounded by the lack of educational resources before the start of the next school year.

Heckman (2008) spoke of early childhood education that fosters cognitive skills, attentiveness, motivation, self-control, and character skills turning knowledge into competence and people into dynamic citizens. Coleman claimed that schools were incapable of developing life changes among students in comparison to the influences of family and schoolmates (as cited in Ravitch, 2000). Carroll advised that almost any child could learn whatever schools expected if adequate time is provided in instructional learning (as cited in Ravitch, 2000).

Problem Statement

Some preschool and post-preschool students fail to perform at preschool and post preschool levels. Classroom exercises that capitalize on improvement of executive function and self-regulation skills may prove as innovative practices in the development of cognitive ability. This problem of systemic academic failure among the economically disadvantaged is usually associated with budget shortfalls and/or teacher preparation.

Rarely have the values, beliefs, and perceptions of the teachers and administration involved in the delivery of early childhood programs among disadvantaged students been examined, described, and researched. Some teachers develop a social construction of the children and the programs that contribute to the failure of the economically disadvantaged.

Policy makers should examine disadvantaged pre and post preschools' inability to achieve school readiness. Archived data from the 2013-2016 school terms provide a foundational reference in decision making for policies that benefit the underserved. Factors affecting early childhood learning include teachers fostering social construction biases among economically disadvantaged students. Brownstein (2016) and Turner (2016) outlined such social construction of underprivileged students through labeling, implicit bias, and inferiority. Elements of the narrative policy framework (NPF) addresses issues such as social construction among disadvantaged populations.

The group identified for failures in core subjects makes up approximately 65% of the student population per unit of analysis according to archived data (Virginia Department of Education, 2013). In the last five decades, educational outcomes among economically disadvantaged students show underperformance at preschool and post-preschool levels. Researchers suggested that adequate preschool enrollment experiences could improve school readiness with growth trajectory into later years (Duncan and Magnuson, 2013; and Jenkins et al., 2016).

A qualitative case study was appropriated to explore the issue of kindergarten unpreparedness through staff involvement in preschool programs. The findings of this study could enrich local policies by including those values, beliefs, and opinions of staff responsible for the implementation and delivery of early childhood programs.

The Virginia Department of Education (2013) established preschool guidelines; however, preschool entry is met with conditions of income eligibility. Income eligibility occurs when a household's current income disqualifies a child for high-quality preschool entry. Enrollment in early childhood programs reduces the chance of undeveloped cognitive ability and the skills to participate in a structured environment. Early childhood programs provide perpetual skills in cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development. Public policy should mandate requirements for all low-socioeconomic preschool students be enrolled in high-quality programs at a minimum of 2 years before kindergarten entry.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, case study was to understand if a change in current classroom practices and education models will impact academic performance among the economically disadvantaged GAP groups. These changes may include education models, increased instruction time, or small group interactions. The possibilities may include individual participation led by college interns with an education major. Classroom interventions may facilitate marginalized students in mitigating the existing gap between the underperformers and their middleclass peers. In addition,

public policy narratives may provide an understanding of the experiences of underperforming children and what is necessary to define kindergarten readiness.

I was interested in the perceptions of the administrators with significant populations of economically disadvantaged students. The exploration and identification of alternative education models are additional tools that can be considered to close the gap that exists among low socioeconomic students. This population's education disparities fragment self-sustainment and portions of the citizens become a burden to society in one capacity or another.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of principals, teachers, and administrators regarding best practices for preschool and post-preschool students from economically disadvantaged homes?
2. How would teachers implement classroom exercises to capitalize on the development of executive function and self-regulation skills among economically disadvantaged students?

Sub questions

1. How do principals, teachers, and administrators perceive Montessori as best practice among the economically disadvantaged?
2. What age do principals, teachers, and administrators perceive as most beneficial for age entry into preschool for economically disadvantaged students?

3. What viewpoint would principals, teachers, and administrators suggest to policymakers to craft policy for preschoolers and post-preschoolers to allow adequate preparation for kindergarten readiness?

Theoretical Framework

Narrative Policy Framework Summary

McBeth, Jones, and Shanahan (2014) created the NPF that adopts an empirical lens toward the claim that truth and narratives should have a role in the policy process. McBeth et al. (2014) called policy storylines worthy of understanding. McBeth et al. (2014) defined NPF through four core elements generalizes across time and space with different contexts: setting, characters, plot, and morals. First, setting deals with policy narratives consistently connected to something associated with societal problems positioned in policy contexts. McBeth et al. (2014) also suggested, “the setting of policy narratives is a consequential phenomenon linked to constitutional boundaries, legal considerations, and economic conditions” (p. 228). One character is absolute in a policy narrative accompanied by a cast of characters with differing views and a primary mission, providing a solution to the problem (Ney, 2006; Stone, 2012). The plot formulates the characters within the policy setting and creates a relationship between characters. Stone (2012) added that the element of morals represents the promotion of a resolved rule. Yazejian et al. (2015) linked high-quality education care and reduced achievement gaps. Cronley (2010) argued that societal perceptions of poverty prompted engagement in social constructions among varying groups.

Cognitive Development Theory Summary

Piaget (1964) focused on discovering how knowledge is developed; Piaget believed that children of varying ages have a different view or perception of the world than those of adults. Piaget's sequence of progression contained four levels of advancement in the following order: infancy, early childhood, later childhood, and adolescence. The sensorimotor stage, the preoperational stage, the concrete operational stage, and the formal operation stage include the interaction of biological factors and experiences, also known as equilibration, which is a descriptive of cognitive balancing of new information with old knowledge.

Social Construction Theory Summary

Cronley's (2010) study of social construction concerned the economically disadvantaged and framed from the ideologies of contrasting groups of society with a subjective foundation of unfair characterizations. Nooe and Patterson (2010) found that occurrences of poverty have individual and social consequences and, in many cases, serve as a detriment in social interactions. The construction theory was selected for this case study as it provides an explanatory framework of perception for the marginalized population affected by negative outcomes.

Conceptual Learning Framework Summary

Harvard Center for the Developing Child (2016) states that everyone is born with the potential to obtain EF development through experiences during infancy, or the

sensorimotor stage, as described by Piaget (1964). The ability to develop these executive functions and self-regulation skills is contingent upon positive cognitive development.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was based on a qualitative case study on school readiness among economically disadvantaged preschoolers and post-preschoolers in Region 1 in Virginia. Kindergarten readiness is key in reducing failures among the economically disadvantaged preschoolers and post-preschoolers. Ackerman and Barnett (2006) examined policy that governs school policies and guidelines on readiness and the benefits of quality preschool programs and found that high-quality programs provide a benefit among economically disadvantaged children and promote kindergarten readiness. McBeth et al. (2014) suggested that the power of policy narratives is worthy of understanding providing a social construction storyline for policymakers.

As early as preschool, low socioeconomic children suffer from disparities of limited educational resources. Cronley (2010) argued that perceptions of poverty are instigated by ill practices of society, and political disputes have congregated among varying influential groups. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014) reported that reading proficiency in the United States is unacceptably low, and a disproportionate representation of students from poor socioeconomic environments are the victims of this misfortune.

Operational Definitions

Development: A child's development of knowledge and skills that aid thinking and understanding the world around him or her (Pitts, 2013).

Early childhood education: Provides all learners with the capabilities required to become economically sound, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies, and enhance individual wellbeing (Campbell-Barr, 2014).

Executive function: Ability to resolve problems through the use of components of working memory, inhibitory control, and mental flexibility (Fitzpatrick et al., 2014).

High-quality education: Facilitates students to be healthy, well nourished, ready to participate in learning, and supported by their families and communities; high-quality education ensures living environments are healthy, safe, protective, and gender-sensitive, and they provide adequate resources and facilities (Yazejian et al., 2015).

Narrative policy: Generalized narrative elements applied across different policy context (McBeth, Jones, & Shanahan, 2014).

Self-regulation: Composed of working memory, mental flexibility, and inhibitory control (Harvard Center on the Developing Child, 2016).

Assumptions

McBeth, et al. (2014) guided this case study to identify with academic challenges among economically disadvantaged early childhood preschool and post preschool students. McBeth et al. (2014) narrative policy framework (NPF) is a new theory with an empirical lens that described four elements of the NPF, the setting, which is always connected to issue-related problems of legal and constitutional limitations; the plot,

which creates bonds between characters; the characters that do harm, is harmed and the characters who provide a resolution to problematic conditions. The moral of narratives provides a resolution for those harmed.

McBeth et al. (2014) shares the assumptions that identify with the NPF. In this context, *social construction* magnifies varying definitions that are assigned by individuals or specific populations in processes attached to public policy; the second assumption is *bounded relativity* in that changes in public policy that support processes differentiate in the creation of varying policy realities that are bounded by, but not limited to beliefs and ideologies; lastly, *generalizable structural elements*, in taking a structuralist stance which revisits the importance of narrative elements that can be identified in narrative contexts (McBeth, et al., (2014).

Qualitative research is associated with smaller sampling of participants involving interviews, written documents, and archived data. Employing multiple methods of data collection increases credibility and dependability and strengthens the trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2009). Ethical procedure dictates the researcher to mitigate bias at its highest level in order to understand the predicament of the target population. Participants were chosen based on their standing among economically disadvantaged students.

The labeling theory that originated in Becker (1960) "*Outsiders, Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*" related to the area of research but was not investigated in this

study. An example of the labeling theory is a child outwardly identified by the teacher as exercising poor academic performance, and disruptive classroom behavior and categorized as learning disabled. The child believes the suggestive remarks made by teachers and continues the behavior by refusing to engage in assignments, being disruptive while taking on the labeled behavior.

It was not the intent of this study to address the ills of early childhood education statewide. The intent was to identify the issues that reside with the economically disadvantaged population of preschoolers and post preschoolers and the actions necessary for renewed policy, stakeholders, and the education community within the region.

Scope and Delimitations

The study sample consisted of six districts in Region 1 with less than full accreditation during the 2013-2016 school terms. I focused on schools with less than full accreditation. Participants were administrators with a minimum of 20 years of experience with the economically disadvantaged on a consistent schedule and who were closely affiliated with the targeted students in pre-k through fifth grade. The boundaries of the study included students in the economically disadvantaged GAP group. The analysis was conducted on programs and reported scores to the Virginia Department of Education. Archived and unobtrusive data were analyzed that contained information about the target population programs.

Limitations

Price and Murnan (2004) suggested that limitations drawn by characteristics might affect interpretation of research findings. These findings may impact generalization and practical applications, and they may require methods to establish validity. Reasonable measures to address limitations involve appropriate methods for exploring and investigating the problem. Abiding ethical guidelines mitigates researcher bias, and the uses of unobtrusive and archived data are examples of this guidance. All data collected could be verified through access of provided resources.

Significance of Study

Region 1 uses the education model adopted by the Department of Education for the State of Virginia. Guidelines for early childhood education have programs in place to facilitate the Foundational Blocks for Early Learning. Virginia's Preschool Curriculum Review Rubric and Planning Tool (2013) sets the standards for four-year-olds with guidelines developed to assist educators in creating a high-quality learning environment.

The evaluation factors for this study included the lived classroom experiences of the economically disadvantaged children and the exacerbation of underperformance. Consideration was also given to the age of consideration, alternative education models, executive function, and self-regulation skills, and best practices. High-quality preschool programs can better prepare economically disadvantaged students for kindergarten entry; however, it is clear by the findings that the target population of students demands more preparation and cognitive building skills that capitalize on cognitive development.

This study provides further recommendations to develop and establish innovative

policies and education guidelines that instigate additional scholastic exercises that support the development of executive function and self-regulation skills.

Halle, Forry, Hair, Perper, Wandner, Wessel, and Vick (2009) reported “evidence of disparities in cognitive development measured by the composite Bayley, provide discrepant findings at nine and 24 months” (p. 8). Similar findings on achievement gaps are supported through research from Duncan and Magnuson (2013) and Yazejian et al. (2015) among socioeconomic groups. For this outcome to manifest, there must be innovative policies and classroom exercises that foster the development of mental, physical, emotional, and social aptitudes to encourage a total child concept.

Lash, Monobe, Koptur, and Black (2016) described Montessori as an educator and physician and one of the Seven Wonders of the early childhood world. Maria Montessori established the approach to education around the early 1900s nestled in a disadvantaged district in Rome. Montessori claimed that the first five years of a child’s life are the significant stages of cognitive development.

Nesbitt et al. (2015) defined EF as a compilation of developmental skills comprised of three components: working memory, mental flexibility, and inhibitory control. McClelland and Cameron’s (2011) perspective of self-regulation is a positive determinate of social and academic outcomes. A policy mandate of a two-year high-quality preschool period for all economically disadvantaged preschoolers would support the recommendations of Jenkins (2014).

Positive Implications for Social Change

Jiang, Ekono, and Skinner (2015) found that parents who have attained higher education levels are more likely to have children model the parent's education achievement than parents having not achieved diploma or degree completion. Fostering social change involves the support of stakeholders, the education community, policy makers, and the adjustment of behaviors. Sharma and Monteiro (2014) argued that a social change among the education community is difficult without positive influence on education fairness and renewed awareness among society. Sharma and Monteiro suggested that adult citizens understand social change and equality. Jenkins (2014) and Heckman (2008) suggested that the benefits of early childhood education and its growth trajectory on societal deficiencies are developments that promote social change and increase economic progress.

The results of this study may reveal the causes of unpreparedness for kindergarten among preschoolers and post preschoolers. It is paramount that policymakers and school administrators provide the protection needed by those who cannot protect themselves. School officials, as well as stakeholders and parents, should share in responsibilities to collaborate for early childhood programs that serve as a benefit to those who experience negative outcomes from a lack of resources beyond their control. Cognitive development is a tool that can bridge the gap of academic failure and academic achievement. Teaching with purpose is the first step in making a difference in the life of an economically disadvantaged child.

Summary

In Chapter 1, the importance of early childhood education was highlighted. The awareness presented for the research background, the problem, and purpose statements of the case study and research questions were presented. The chapter also featured the theoretical frameworks led by NPF with supporting frameworks and concepts of the study. The significance of the study supports reasons why this study should concentrate on preschoolers and post preschoolers who eventually turn into vulnerable adults when intervention is nonexistent.

Virginia's Department of Education in collaboration with the State's Office of Humanities and Early Childhood prepared guidelines for Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning (2013). The comprehensive standards for 4-year-olds consider components of literacy, personal and social development, health and physical development, visual arts, music, mathematics, science, history, and social science, which can influence academic outcomes of low socioeconomic students.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of supporting literature on the research of early childhood education.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this study, I explored failures among economically disadvantaged preschoolers entering kindergarten and those students who are failing pre and post preschool. I aimed to explore classroom practices and existing programs designed for the purposes of advancing economically disadvantaged students toward academic achievement. Further, I outlined the values, beliefs, and perceptions of staff involved in the implementation and delivery of such programs. Lived experiences disclose the significance of social construction and the importance of how these empirical experiences may impact academic performance and policy decisions. School readiness is a focal point at federal, state, and local levels. A child's readiness depends on many factors that engage physical, emotional, social, and cognitive developments. Ansari and Winsler (2014); Cameron & de Leeuw (2011), Dogru (2016), Edwards (2002), Lash et al. (2016), and Schweinhart (2003) have shown alternative education models such as Montessori, tools of the mind, and High/Scope as proven methods in addressing learning disparities among disadvantaged children during early childhood. Reynolds, Ou, and Temple (2018) showed that if continued intervention is established early, the intervention performance outcome is associated with higher midlife postsecondary attainment. The influence on a variety of life-course outcomes in social, emotional, and physical elements on educational attainment is an important long-term outcome of early childhood interventions.

Jenkins et al. (2016) compared the effects of two early childhood programs, head start and pre-k. Head start mandates a *total-child* approach with an objective of supporting developments across multiple areas, whereas pre-k focuses on a child's early academic skills to prepare for the multifaceted nature of kindergarten. Jenkins (2014) and the "Perry Preschool project stated an estimation of 17% return on investment in early childhood development" (p. 148). The Perry Preschool project also resulted in preschool students producing trajectory through age 40 in employment, salary, and decreased adult poverty and diminished arrests. The Chicago Child-Parent Center program displayed increased high school graduation rates among disadvantaged students. Ackerman and Barnett (2006) demonstrated that participation in preschool could have a positive effect on future academic progress.

Schmitt, McClelland, Tominey, and Acock (2014) suggested that early SR intervention promoted effectiveness among low socioeconomic children by impacting progressive academic results comprised of social, learning, and literacy inequalities. Scholars recommend that high quality programs beginning at the age of 3 to foster positive academic performance (Broekhuizen et al., 2016; Jenkins, 2014; Jenkins et al., 2016; Nesbitt et al., 2015a; Zigler, 1987). Beginning at age 3, children demonstrate stronger reading skills in a high-quality prekindergarten setting as opposed to beginning head start at age four.

Broekhuizen et al. (2016) suggested that the experience of high-quality preschool program facilitates effective transitions into kindergarten exhibiting "meaningful

executive function skills after completing two or more years of preschool instruction as opposed to one year” (p. 214). DeBruin-Parecki and Slutzky (2016) suggested that learning standards for pre-k provide programs for kindergarten readiness.

Literature Selection Strategy

A scholarly literature review of the topic included peer-reviewed scholarship mostly using Walden’s Library, SAGE, Google Scholar, Pro Quest, and EBSCO databases and books from Amazon online. Archived documents were retrieved from the Department of Education’s online database to examine the effectiveness of early childhood guidelines. The key words used in search of scholarly articles with information on early childhood education were *education, poverty, accountability, educational policy, legislature, disadvantaged students, cognitive development, high-quality education, alternative education models, traditional public schools, performance, executive function skills, constructivism, early childhood, trajectory, learning theory, socioeconomic, educators, preschool, kindergarten readiness, Montessori, and high/scope model*. Numerous articles, books, and journals were tagged with the key terms used, and appropriate selections were made to conduct the study.

The Theoretical Foundations

Cognitive Development and Social Construction

Two theories in this study are cognitive development and social construction that serve as the foundation for the NPF (McBeth et al., 2014). I selected these theories based on cognitive components essential to learning and the political process that targets the

underserved populations. Crotty (1998) as cited by Patton (2002) emphasized social construction as “the position our culture has on us, shaping the way in which experiences are seen and felt giving a definitive picture of the world” (p. 58). Social construction also provides awareness to empirical experiences that are a reality for underserved members of society. Piaget (1964) provided a lens into how early education is perceived from a child’s mind and what interests children accomplish at differing stages of their cognitive development.

McBeth et al. (2014) defined a policy narrative through four core elements generalizable across time and space to different contexts: setting, character, plot, and moral of policy. Narratives have a similar context in story formations for public policy and can recognize themes in a narrative statement. Piaget (1964) believed that cognitive development is cumulative, and the comprehension of new ideas or skills is derived from life experiences. Cronley (2010) explored social construction as an expansion of constructivism in a social context where individuals interpret their experiences; reality becomes subjective, and society, the media, and political forces frequently misinterpret it.

Cognitive Development Theory

Ackermann (2004) offered clarity of Piaget’s (1964) theory of cognitive development and explained Piaget’s concept of constructivism of what captures a child’s interest and ability to achieve during stages of growth. Piaget’s cognitive development theory (as cited in Pitts, 2013) explains the fundamentals of early learning and describes

the four stages of cognitive development as the following: sensory-motor, preoperational, concrete operations, and formal operations.

Halle et al. (2009) found that disadvantaged students with undeveloped cognitive abilities are at risk of academic underperformance involving multiple mediating factors. Lee, Brooks-Gunn, and Schnur (1988) outlined how the L.B. Johnson administration on Head Start programs seeks to provide gap cessation among disadvantaged children. Lee et al. (1988) discussed education gap comparisons and concluded disparities among low socioeconomic groups also exist in social, physical, and emotional aspects.

Piaget's (1964) theory supports the work of Montessori in cognitive development and is linked to academic performance. Lash et al. (2016) supported self-directed learning demonstrated in the Montessori model, which advances purposeful education for disadvantaged children and focuses on learning through creation and symbolisms. Masten et al. (2012) suggested that low socioeconomic environments impede the progress of cognitive development among underperforming students.

Social Construction Theory

Cronley (2010) described social construction as a theory of knowledge in sociology that examines the development of jointly constructed understandings of the world forming the basis of shared assumptions about reality. Ackermann (2004) and Berger and Luckmann (1967) asserted that social construction is information that transmits through a social process and is historically and culturally constructed having a social connotation as opposed to an individual focus. I chose this theory because of its

relation to this study's overarching and sub questions based on the NPF that political processes challenge disparities of cognitive development and social construction among economically disadvantaged populations. The theory selections in previous studies (Jenkins et al., 2014, Lash et al., 2016, Masten et al., 2012) showed the connection of cognitive development and its impact on academic achievement.

Schmitt et al. (2014) suggested that poverty adversely affects multiple aspects of a child's development, and socio demographic risk can be detrimental to self-regulation skills impacting academic performance. Jenkins et al. (2016) suggested that head start at ages 3 and 4 versus head start followed by pre-k yield better outcomes for kindergarten readiness.

Conceptual Learning Framework

Conceptual learning is reflected in SR and EF skills composed of three factors: working memory, inhibitory control, and mental flexibility. This concept is applied to scholarship promulgating early childhood education describing EF skills as components of a team working together developing cognitive capacities in children (Harvard Center for the Developing Child, 2016). Early childhood students prepared with EF skills outperform kindergarteners and first graders with premature cognitive abilities. Students obtaining all school adjustment criteria have improved working memory, peer acceptance, and pro social behavior.

Masten et al. (2012) stressed the importance of informed educators interacting with preschoolers and post-preschoolers. Lee and Bierman (2015) suggested that

children growing up in impoverished environments are at elevated risk of difficult adjustments at the onset of kindergarten entry. Masten et al. (2012) examined the importance of EF as a catalyst for academic success among economically disadvantaged students. McClelland, Tominey, and Acock (2013) argued for the development of EF during early childhood and agreed with Montessori practices that enable academic trajectory for preschoolers.

Literature Review

Kindergarten Readiness Concept

Kindergarten readiness is dependent upon the level of burdens placed on the child. The development required for the support of the child's mental, emotional, social, and physical readiness for kindergarten is also a factor. Jenkins (2014) suggested that the benefits of early education investments are critical to growth trajectory.

Klein (2015) outlined the state policy framework supporting the five principles, "early starts create the best outcomes; disadvantaged populations have greater benefits; best practice performance enlighten policy choices; implementation of policy choices demand adequate appropriation; and continual improvement and performance measurement foster better outcomes" (p. 4). Jenkins (2014) and Heckman (2008) suggested that the participation in high-quality education for all preschoolers is not beyond reach. Smith (2015) suggested, "the first five years of a child's life are critical for building the foundation necessary for success later in life" (p. 1). Harvard Center for

the Developing Child (2016) supported arguments of mental flexibility enabling children to learn rules that apply in grammar and comprehend academic activities and reasonably resolve conflicts among other students.

Cognitive development fosters learning; it encourages attendance and attention to directions, self-maintenance, and perseverance (Hughes, Luo, Kwok, and Loyd, 2008). Ackerman and Barnett (2006) reported that policy at federal, state, and local levels should mandate that all children would begin school prepared to learn. Zigler (1987) reported that children could not be held accountable for not understanding material only after one school term against the effects of a negative environment.

Yazejian et al. (2015) stated that researchers found that more time spent in high-quality care during infancy improved developed language and cognitive skills. Fitzpatrick et al. (2013) applauded the recognition of early childhood education and development of EF skills necessary in retaining instructions and decreasing achievement gaps between economically disadvantaged children and their middle-class counterparts. Lee and Bierman (2015) explained how distractions from personal experiences create obstacles to classroom participation. In support of early education, President Obama's proposed budgets for 2014 contained matching grant funding, which provides essential high-quality preschool for all 4-year-olds over the next 10 years.

Executive Function and Self-regulation Skills

McClelland and Cameron (2011) suggested that EF and SR skills are key constructs for cognitive development and are necessary for early school achievements.

Lee and Bierman (2015) explored the socioeconomics of disadvantaged children and the effect poverty has on literacy development. The impact of poverty on education is addressed through a democratic policy design that is specific to the economically disadvantaged population. Masten et al. (2012) examined the importance of EF as a catalyst for academic success for marginalized students entering kindergarten and first grade. Mattix-Foster and Daly (2015) referred to the significance of inhibitory control, flexibility, respect, and trust as catalysts of character education. Fitzpatrick et al. (2013) concluded that the parents of economically disadvantaged children are less likely to enforce discipline and proper rearing practices conducive to developing self-control and attentiveness. The lack of parental guidance negates experiences that promote executive function skills. These factors support academic enthusiasm and the adaptation of social skills.

Early childhood students with developed skills outperform kindergarteners and first graders who do not have executive function and self-regulation skillsets. Hair et al. (2015) concluded that the effects of low socioeconomic status have negative influences on educational instruction and performance. Jenkins (2014) shared sentiments of Piaget (1964) that cognitive development is most susceptible during developmental periods in early childhood. Students having met all school adjustment criteria have improved working memory, peer acceptance, and prosocial behavior. These students also experience less issues of inattentiveness, inhibitory control, or cognitive flexibility. Broekhuizen et al. (2016) reported that the connection of high-quality childcare and

education is positively related to children's social as well as emotional development. Harvard Center for the Developing Child (2016) showed that children enrolled in high-quality preschool programs develop cognitive capacities enabling EF skills. Fuhs and Day (2011) suggested that age-appropriate receptive vocabulary has the potential to build EF skills through enhancement of a child's outer and inner speech.

Alternative Education Models

The Montessori Education Model

Montessori developed a teaching approach in early 1900s under the influence of Itard and Seguin's earlier experiments while working with cognitively challenged children. Montessori wanted to apply methods to mentally delayed children after previously working with nonmainstream students. Dogru (2016) reported on Montessori's learning program and the effects of an alternative model in contrast to current public education programs. Lash et al. (2016) suggested that Montessori's pedagogy is an approach to meaningful preschool programs. Ansari and Winsler (2014) agreed with the problem solving, creativity, critical thinking, time management, and environmental care included in Montessori's curriculum. Montessori's education model addresses research questions of best practices for education models appropriate for the economically disadvantaged.

Lash et al. (2016) shared the emphasis on the self-regulated, child-centered approach as it adopts a formula for inspiring early childhood students to reach full potential in four effectual areas: cognitive, emotional, social, and physical aspects of life.

Ravitch (2014) argued that a well-adjusted curriculum should include subjects such as the arts, social sciences, foreign languages, physical education, and core courses to enrich the learning experiences of all students. Dogru (2016) described the cluster of skills as the Montessori education model support tools; they are recognized for their academic performance among disadvantaged children. Montessori prepares its students as accomplished individuals in society, which explains Montessori's determination of the most beneficial effect on a human's life transpires during birth to 5 years of age.

High/Scope Education Model

The high/scope alternative education model (Hohmann and Weikart, 2002) is an educational model known for its child-initiated and teacher-directed activities.

High/Scope enables students born into poverty to achieve academic progress upon school entry and avoid classes for mental and emotional impairment. The High/Scope model contributes to the development of students from low-income and middle socioeconomic backgrounds. These student exercises are implemented and researched in curricula in early education programs. There are four principles that include positive child-adult interaction, child-friendly environment, active learning, and consistent routines.

Schweinhart (2003) defined the high/scope model of preschool education as an open framework of education programs having a thematic development for learning based on Piaget's theory. Students of high/scope participate in fewer juvenile crimes and other acts of misconduct throughout young adulthood.

Tools of the Mind Curriculum

The emphasis of Tools of the Mind is an intentional self-regulated learning and facilitating literacy and mathematics skills highlighting a balance with play. This approach allows teacher identification of explicit components in a child's development stage and plays to teach with those identifiers in mind. This method aids the creation of a calm classroom environment. A comparison of scores indicated that a developmental program with emphasis on play did enhance learning and improved social and academic performance in young children.

The Literature Conflict

Allan, Allan, Lerner, Farrington, and Lonigan (2015) assessment concluded EF as a *one-dimensional* construct resulting in a shallow or superficial person or thing; nonetheless, among preschool children, the study also found that only EF connects with all four early academic outcomes. In contrast, Gooch, Thompson, Nash, Snowling, and Hulme (2015) identify EF as a *multi-dimensional* construct exercising skills in attentiveness, behavioral inhibition, and working memory; supporting thoughtful control of purposeful activity. Harvard Center for the Developing Child (2016) examines the impact of limitations and effectiveness during daily classroom tasking explains:

“As essential as cognitive abilities are, we are not born with the skill to remember, effectively multi-task, or focus and make decisions during important moments; the development of executive function skills and employing its three major components are critical for

building the foundation for the early development of cognitive and self-regulating capacities.” (p. 3).

Weiland et al. (2014) conducted a study at the Institute of Education Sciences with specific educational interests. In opposition to early childhood education, Weiland et al. (2014) investigated the development of EF skills and receptive vocabulary in pupils. Pathways between EF and language skills were unclear; however, Weiland et al. (2014) goes on to suggest that EF during preschool years support the development of language skills as a probability is profound. Maria Montessori contributes to the education community and her education model was crafted to extend learning among disadvantaged students.

Ravitch (2000), a former educator and renowned author of America’s public schools and policies, expands decades on privatization, school reform, and school wars. Differing opinions believe disadvantaged students do not benefit from high-quality education. Local NPAs are staffed to reinforce classroom instruction among early childhood students. Public schools would benefit from before and after school services of an NPA.

Democratic Policy Design

The nature of this case study involves education inequalities among economically disadvantaged students and what are best practices to close academic gaps. Schneider et al. (2014) reiterated that public policy scholars recognize that the construction of the political world is socially biased. Schneider and Ingram (1997) suggest bias

policymaking systems characterize an unequal distribution of political power based on social construction.

Schneider and Ingram (1997) believe public policies are framed to meet interests of those with political savvy. Lawmakers must consider each group's social construction if the goal is to provide equitable classroom instruction for all students. Schneider and Ingram describe social construction in four different types of policy targets: The *advantaged* are those with power and are firmly constructed. *Contenders* are the powerful but described as negatively constructed and seen as undeserving or excessive. The *dependents* described as positively composed individuals and seen as decent people; however, with the perception of relatively needy or helpless with little or no political power. Lastly, the *deviants* are described as having no political power, negatively constructed as undeserving and destructive.

Summary

This chapter reveals the problem of the study that brings awareness to failures among preschool and post-preschool students from economically disadvantaged communities. The speculation of classroom exercises, if implemented, may capitalize on cognitive development. The improvement of self-regulation and executive function skills is innovative practices to begin cognitive development. This chapter also brings awareness to the components of executive function and self-regulation skills that support the learning process. Policymakers, the education community, local leaders, and stakeholders share a responsibility in understanding academic impacts among low-

socioeconomic students and the development of executive function and self-regulation skills.

The theoretical foundations, cognitive development, and social construction outline the importance of learning with the right tools and having academic equity to successfully participate among peers. Conceptual learning is one of the keys that enable preschoolers and post preschoolers to benefit from social equity, academic performance, physical endurance, and emotional stamina.

In addition to cognitive skills, kindergarten readiness encompasses the social, emotional, and physical aspects of a child's character. Kindergarten readiness is a level of burden that can become daunting for an unprepared child. Alternative education models provide opportunities to deliver programs and practices that support cognitive development. A conflict of literature on the assessments of EF and SR skills is reflected in Allan et al. (2015) and Gooch et al. (2015) debating a one-dimensional and multi-dimensional construct within EF skills. The democratic policy design provides insight to the biases of how policymakers influence social construction by identifying the advantaged, the contenders, the dependents, and the deviants.

Considerable literature has been reviewed; however, the search is not exhausted. The selected literature adequately serves research on the focus of the study to explore recommendations on the perceptions of best practices and the impact of policy for the economically disadvantaged student population. Chapter 3 reveals the matters of methodology. The qualitative methodology of this research is a case study approach to

describe the phenomena of kindergarten readiness and the impact that low socioeconomic environments have on readiness among the economically disadvantaged preschoolers and post preschoolers.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The rationale for a qualitative study was based on the NPF of McBeth et al. (2014). NPF gives power to the narrative role in the policy process. Social construction and cognitive development were the theories that provided the foundation for the study. Founders of NPF had an interest in postpositive work with social construction and policy narratives. The NPF provides a storyline into social construction and offered the framework for kindergarten readiness. An ontological question addresses the reality of the known, in this case kindergarten unpreparedness manifesting early childhood failures. Cairney and Heikkila (2018) suggested that the elements of NPF's objective is to measure the effectiveness of narratives while policy focuses on opportunities that have varying approaches to impact effective policymaking.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify preschool practices that mentally, physically, emotionally, and socially prepare economically disadvantaged students to enter kindergarten and meet performance standards academically. A purposeful sample was selected from Region 1 elementary schools partially accredited or an equal or lesser-accredited rating during the 2013-2016 school terms. Each school's overall accreditation report was reviewed to determine the annual measurable objectives (AMOs) scores of each of the GAP groups for terms 2013-2016. The data collection methods included individual interviews with administrators. The data collection process

also included content reviews of archived data on the Virginia Department of Education website. This information included guidelines for preschool and post preschool students and report cards for all districts in Region 1.

Research Design and Rationale

The qualitative approach typically employs the philosophical assumption of constructivists in which it is believed that learners actively build their own knowledge from personal experiences. This assumption supports the learning disparities of economically disadvantaged students living in adverse environments. The use of in-depth interviews and questionnaires were the main data collection process, and archived data provided a portion of the data collection methods. Creswell (2013) described interviewing as a series of steps in a process. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) outlined an interview's seven stages beginning with thematics of the inquiry and ending with the report of results.

Research Setting

The research setting was located in the respective community partner's work environment where the administrators and teachers were in their natural work setting.

Role of Researcher

Creswell (2009) suggested that qualitative researchers collect data in multiple forms using interviews, questionnaires, archived documents, and observation. The qualitative researcher's strategy is an instrument and observer. The researcher provides literature in opposition to featured education models to mitigate biases. Frankfort-

Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) believed that simple observation of the exterior body and other nonverbal signs of participants might occur, providing the observer with additional research data. No personal relationships existed with any of the participants, and this study was not conducted at my place of employment. There were no incentives or power differentials in existence.

Methodology

During the school terms from 2013-2016 in Region 1, there were 43 schools receiving a less than full accreditation based on a cumulative annual school report card. Region 1 is comprised of 15 school districts of which six districts, or 40% of districts, had schools with a less than full accreditation. From the 15 districts, five districts or 33%, had greater than three schools with less than full accreditation. Of the six districts, there are two districts with 15 or more schools with less than full accreditation. The six elementary districts with partial accreditations represented the units of analysis for this case study in the 2013-2016 school terms. The units of analysis for this study's findings included those districts with less than full accreditation at the end of the 2018 school term reexamination.

Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) suggested that an inference could be implied based on a small number of units or subset when there is sufficient representation of the entire set. The objective of this study was to conduct semi structured, face-to-face interviews and examine secondary published documents in the data collection process.

These documents included current Department of Education of Virginia guidelines for preschool and post preschool students.

Participant Selection Logic

The contribution of all participants was completely voluntary. If for any reason a participant decided to end his or her participation prematurely, he or she would discontinue, and all information previously provided would be destroyed. Participants in this study were selected based on their affiliation with early childhood students in a classroom setting and/or having knowledge of the type of programs in which the students participate. The participants had experience with the economically disadvantaged preschoolers and post preschoolers. There were three administrators representing three different districts.

There are categories identifying GAP groups, each group composed of student classifications based on academic performance levels and demographics. GAP 1 consists of students with disabilities, English language learners, and a breakout GAP for economically disadvantaged students; GAP 2 includes African American students; and GAP 3 includes Hispanic American students. To avoid participants of a protected group, I elected to include adult participants who had knowledge and affiliation of the target student population. Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested that a failure to reach data saturation impacts the quality of the study. Price and Murnan (2016) suggested that too few subjects might posture an inadequate limit to the scope of analysis. Representation of the units of analysis was 67% of the sample size among four of the six districts.

Instrumentation

Instruments included the crafting of interview questions that would provide responses to the research questions to reach a desired outcome. All other data collection was comprised of archived information collected from the Virginia Department of Education, The Virginia Initiative Preschool site. The instruments created for interviews were based on the policy that McBeth et al. (2014) defined through four core elements in the narrative framework policy generalizable across time and space of different contexts: setting, characters, plot, and morals.

The main character was the economically disadvantaged student surrounded with a cast of characters with differing views comprised by lawmakers, teachers, superintendents, and administrators. Views may include an appropriate age for preschool entry, the determination of eligibility, education models and practices, and the level of resources required.

Data Collection

The data collection included archived and unobtrusive data of current policies and guidelines crafted by federal, state, and local level agencies on early childhood education. Unobtrusive measures are a method of data collection that removes the researcher from direct interactions, events, or participant behaviors and is absent of participant influence in the data collection process.

This study was bounded by the location of the schools in Region 1 district and the participants who worked within said region. Anderson (2010) suggested that the strength

of qualitative research involves interviews that are not restricted to specific questions and can be redirected by the researcher in real time, allowing the researcher to probe the interviewee for additional information and provide an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the subject. Patton (2002) suggested that qualitative findings grow out of empirical experiences.

Maxwell (2012) identified discrepant cases to be a technique that increases validity testing in qualitative studies. Wolcott (1990) claimed that the researcher may report the discrepant evidence and allow readers to evaluate and draw their conclusions. When findings in data collection methods prove consistent, the validity is elevated above personal biases that exist in single-use methodologies. I anticipated needing 2 months to collect the data collection.

Data Analysis Plan

The questions were based upon McBeth et al. (2014) policy narrative process and the four core elements and its differing contexts. A list of preset codes was developed for the interviews. Categories and identification of larger themes for each of the preset codes was created. An extractive process was used to identify significant statements and themes collected from interviews and all archived and unobtrusive data. The researcher-developed instruments were designed to address issues associated with policy, best practices, education models, early childhood education, and economically disadvantaged students.

Next steps included the interpretation and analysis of information obtained from archived documents and participants. Responses were collected and coded, and interviews and researcher interpretation followed. The interviews were conducted at the school location in the participant's work environment. Transcripts underwent multiple reviews to grasp a complete understanding of the participant's lived experiences among the economically disadvantaged students. Lastly, the interpretation of data collection from administrators and the archived data from the units of analysis underwent an in-depth review and analysis to identify themes and emerging data.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Hadi (2016) suggested that qualitative research is a collection of interpretive methodologies seeking to explore, explain, and understand the people's individual life experiences. Moreover, it is suggested to employ a minimum of two of the following strategies in a qualitative study. The inclusion of thick descriptions, researcher bias, credibility and triangulation, the indication of trustworthiness exists. I stopped reviewing here due to time constraints. Please go through the rest of your chapter and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at Chapter 4.

Credibility

Hadi (2016) states "triangulation is widely used to confirm conformability and credibility in qualitative methods and utilizing at least two related data sources and collection methods to lessen inherent bias connected to a single source, researcher, or method" (p. 4). Van den Hoonaard (2017) suggests intra-coder reliability infers that

research codes are found useful to analyze interviews. Triangulation will be employed to create a sense of data credibility in using multiple methods in the study. Patton (2002) goes on to discuss the credibility of the researcher and comments that trustworthiness of the researcher is one dimension of rigor.

Transferability

Rudestam and Newton (2015) suggest regarding making inferences; actions rely on the emphasis of how information is learned in one context can be applied to alternate context. Hadi (2016) suggests providing rich and thick description is used to obtain external validity also known as transferability and promotes credibility. Simply stated, the researcher must provide in-depth details on settings, data collection, and analysis methods.

Dependability

Hadi (2016) suggests strategies to establish dependability form audit trails enabling readers to conclude on the quality and value of the study. Displaying the findings as consistent for future research is suggested as dependability per Lincoln and Guba (1985). In this study, interviews, research questions, and archived data will be filed with the appropriate agency to protect information received. Rudestam and Newton (2015) suggest the ability of an instrument to deliver consistent results is to be present in existing literature for replication of future study.

Conformability

Patton's (2002) combinations of an observer, theories, methods, and data sources suggest research can be persuaded to overcome bias arising from single-method instruments. The participants, in the absence of researcher bias, will construct the fact-finding. It is intentional to collect portions of data from archived and unobtrusive sources to minimize researcher bias. Details of the research steps will be noted to provide transparency in auditing the entire process.

Ethical procedures

Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) share that reasonably informed consent guidelines require research to communicate basic elements of information and for the participant to be reasonably informed. Creswell (2009) suggests the importance of sponsorship and establishing trust and credibility with participating institutions are healthy activity in the research process. Participant awareness at any time during the interview or questionnaire may decline to continue the process as expressed by Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008). This acknowledges the participant's rights and confirms protection during data collection processes. Letters of cooperation, data collection coordination request, and confidentiality agreement are necessary to meet the requirements of informed consent and satisfy ethical processes.

Frankfort-Nachmias warns researchers to consider three aspects during collection: sensitivity of information, the setting for observations, and extent of the dissemination of data collected. Creswell (2009) shares the anticipated confidentiality of some participants that desire to conceal their identity; in this instance, the participants will

retain their ownership and exercise their independence throughout the study. Proper treatments of participants are important in maintaining the integrity of the study.

Janesick (2011) suggests, “Conformed consent is at the center of the research matter” (p. 199). The presentation of data and the usage of language are discussed to include “values associated with qualitative study foundations is comprised of informed consent and the use of language” (p. 199).

Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) state individual agreements require an informed consent signed by the participant in addition to consent for adults, letter of cooperation, and data collection coordination request as required for IRB approval. Although this study does not include any protected population or group, Walden’s IRB Department reviewed and provided prior approval of all materials used to recruit participants for this research.

Data collection will be stored in individual envelopes and locked files for protection of participant’s responses and confidentiality; however, data will be limited to Walden University Research Department. Destroy date shall not exceed a five-year period to avoid possession into inappropriate hands (Creswell, 2009).

Summary

This chapter entails descriptions of methodology to be employed in response to the associated research questions for this study that are based on the McBeth et al. (2014) NFP. This foundation will also include questions from the democratic policy design.

The key focus of informed consent among study participants is the sole implication of ethical standards. Chapter 4 will present the results of data collection.

Chapter 4

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand if change in current classroom practices and education models would impact academic performance among economically disadvantaged students in preschool and post-preschool. The exploration was concluded with analysis of cumulative school report cards, Virginia Accreditation Ratings, Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) archived program documents, VPI preschool attendance documents among low-socioeconomic students, and individual in-depth interviews.

Brownstein (2016) defined a concept inherent to implicit bias as “an art referencing unconscious and impulsive traits of prejudice and social behaviors” (p. 1). In the literature review, there is historical research that emphasized the idea of implicit bias conducted by Yale University. Preschool educators may anticipate disruptive behavior among a specific group of children. The idea of implicit bias was considered in the beginning of this case study and pondered as a suspected action among teachers amidst minority and or Black students or students identified as low socioeconomic status.

The study evolved differently from what was originally perceived. The conclusions collected from all administrators were not inclusive of identifying students with a negative perception. There were positive perceptions received of all students;

however, it was said that there are students who require behavior correction, but without judgment of the student or the reminder of past behavior.

In this study, a group of themes offered interpretations among preschool and post-preschool students and the role of executive function and self-regulation skills. Initially included in this myriad of variables, alternative education models, kindergarten readiness, age of entry, and low socioeconomic status were at the crux of underperforming early childhood students. Themes were the significance of rich background narratives shared during interviews and data received from archived documents and what those documents presented in similarity to the descriptive gathered from interviews of administrators in Region 1. Perceptions concerned early childhood students and positive implementation of best practices capitalized on self-regulation and executive function skills, which are vital in the development of cognitive abilities among the economically disadvantaged (Harvard Center for the Developing Child, 2016).

Research Setting

Participating in the study were three administrators from three different districts. The interviews were conducted in the offices of the participants. Region 1 elementary schools initially had six districts that were rated with less than full accreditations during the 2013-2016 school terms. The six districts were reexamined during the 2018 school term, and it was found that two districts improved with full accreditations; however, four districts remained with multiple schools without full accreditation.

Demographics

The analysis was based on information, inclusive of information only associated with economically disadvantaged students. Due to the nature of this study, no student or his or her individual academic work or scores were reviewed. The study included the cumulative report cards for economically disadvantaged GAP group in Region 1 elementary schools that received less than full accreditation during the 2013-2016 school terms. These schools are disproportionately comprised of economically disadvantaged student groups that averaged 65% of the total student population. Moreover, the failed schools had preschool programs on site and still faced less than full accreditation among kindergarten through fifth grade. The target grades were related to the Economically Disadvantaged GAP group on the school's cumulative report cards submitted annually to the Virginia Department of Education. The economically disadvantaged category may include different ethnic backgrounds, diverse cultures, and multiple genders but all included were categorized as economically disadvantaged.

There were multiple student eligibility areas that VPI employed to support their enrollment criteria:

- Poverty (at or below 200% of poverty)
- Homelessness
- Students parents or guardians were school dropouts
- Family income were above 200% but at or below 350% of federal poverty guidelines in the case of students with special needs or disabilities
- Local criteria (Limited to 15% or less of total actual slots used)

- Parent had not completed high school
- Physical abuse and neglect, family abuse, substance abuse
- One parent home
- Foster or substitute care
- English as second language
- Incarcerated parent
- Deployment with military
- Raised by relatives
- Other (submit in 30 characters or less).

I examined the perceptions of three administrators representative of three districts and their perception of best practices and classroom activities promoting cognitive development among preschoolers and post-preschoolers. The purpose was to understand if a change in current classroom practices and education models impacted academic performance among the economically disadvantaged students.

Data Collection

An unobtrusive measure is a method of data collection that eliminates the researcher from direct interaction or behavior being investigated (Frankfort-Nachimias and Nachmias, 2008). In the beginning of the study, there were six districts that had multiple agencies with less than full accreditation. The grades from archived data from 2013-2016 were compared to year 2018 grades among the target students. As of the 2018 term there were four districts remaining that had four or more schools with less than full

accreditation. Participants included three administrators who were interviewed for this study from three districts. They were all found valid due to extensive tenure and previous teaching positions held among economically disadvantaged within varied school systems. Signed consent forms were obtained from participating administrators. The data collected during the interviews were consistent with underperformance among a low-socioeconomic population. The themes emerged during the interviews and information analyzed from achieved data had a common consensus among the economically disadvantaged preschool and post-preschool students in relation to kindergarten readiness.

Region 1 was comprised of 153 elementary schools; of the 153 schools, there were 43 elementary schools' representative of six districts with less than full accreditation during 2013-2016. Six failed districts in 2013-2016 terms were explored at the onset of the study. In the 2018 school term, the scores of the initial six districts were reexamined. Two districts improved with full accreditation. Four of the six districts remained with less than full accreditation and one district with 11 schools with no accreditation.

Four of the failed districts remained in the 2018 school term with 25 schools across all failed districts received less than full accreditation and 15 of the 25 elementary schools received a rating of Denied Accreditation; Seven schools were rated Partially Accredited: Reconstituted School; One school was rated Accreditation Withheld-Board Decision; and two schools were Partially Accredited: Warned School: Pass Rate.

Multiple districts had stand-alone facilities located in close proximity, and other districts had preschools located in their respective elementary schools and still experienced academic underperformance among preschool students entering kindergarten and post kindergarten. There were differing levels of accreditation in the Virginia Department of Education school system.

- Full Accreditation: Schools with all school quality indicators at either Level I or Level II. In addition, high-performing schools with waivers from annual accreditation authorized by the General Assembly were rated as Accredited. Schools meeting the previous standard for full state accreditation were also rated as “Accredited” for 2018-2019.
- Accreditation Denied: Schools that failed to adopt or fully implemented required corrective actions to address Level III school-quality indicators.
- Partially Accredited-Reconstituted School: Reconstitution was a process to improve instruction by restructured school’s governance, faculty, instruction program and/or population. This process is a highly controversial practice that required a school’s entire staff, as a remedy for failure, to be replaced (doe.virginia.gov (2018)).

An examination of the VPI preschool attendance focused on the four failed districts. The average attendance for the summer programs during the 2013-2016 terms were:

District X enrolled an average of 509 preschoolers per year. In 2016 the math cumulative score was 67 among the eight schools examined and by the end of 2018, math score dropped to 66. English score in 2016 averaged 65 but by end of 2018 score increased to 67.

District Y enrolled an average of 574 preschoolers per year. Math scores in 2016 were 67 and by end of 2018 math scores increased to 75. English scores for the 2016 term was 73 and in 2018 the term was finished with a score of 65.

District Z enrolled an average of 184 preschoolers per year. Math scores in 2016 were 100 but in 2018 the math score dropped to 57. English during the 2016 term the score was 73 and in 2018 the score dropped to 67.

District A enrolled an average of 657 students per year. This district registered math scores of 67 with a slight increase in 2018 to 75. In 2016 the cumulative English score was 66 and in 2018 the score was improved to 74.

Yazejian et al. (2015) suggest that one year of preschool may not be adequate for students of low-socioeconomic households; suggesting longer durations in preschool programs were more sufficient than in a single year.

Data Analysis

Identifying Themes

Administrator thought patterns across the districts were similar when describing perceived reasons for underperformance among the economically disadvantaged and behaviors that caused classroom disruption. Best practice methods among the

administrators exercised an approach that corrected behaviors at the time of occurrence. Themes emerged from data collection indicated behavioral issues were a systemic issue in the school environment. With each interview there was evidence of the gap. Each administrator led to the assumption, in one way or another that there were problems that had to be addressed before the expected outcome of academic achievement were possible.

The purpose of this study was to understand if a change in current classroom practices and education models would impact academic performance. With this purpose in mind, the constructs of executive function and self-regulation skills play a major role in a governed classroom environment allowing children to learn what is presented. Next, there were examples of codes used to identify a more accurate thought process among the administrators and how these codes related to the target student population.

An example for the code: “best practices” was presented in a statement such as: “Helping students understand logical consequences for unfavorable actions.” For the code: “alternative model” was presented in conversation as, “Learning should be innovative and more hands on.” As we consider statements making inference to “The more children act out is evident of structural foundational issues” instigates the construct of self-regulation skills. Self-regulation is said that children who are successful and maintained positive and compliant control of their thoughts, emotions, and actions are more successful in navigating social and learning environments (Blair and Diamond, (2008); McClelland, Ponitz, Messersmith, and Tominey, (2010); McClelland and

Cameron, 2011). Statements that instigated inference of the construct “executive function” were derived from administrator input on the basis of “...students being able to determine what steps are needed for each activity and the order in which they are to be carried out.” Executive functions encourage components of working memory, inhibitory control, and mental flexibility (Gooch et al., 2015). These components are vital in developing cognitive ability to learn, recall information, and make a change to a previous response.

An administrator stated that numerous low-socio economic students were often withdrawn in a school environment because of their underperformance and economic status. Many of these students were ill treated by other students because of the struggle with low self-esteem and embarrassed with their academic performance. Schmitt, et al. (2015) shares the ability to foster connections among withdrawn students and encouraging them into class participation is key. It is determined that if a student does not participate in class, the learning becomes more difficult. Children who were from low-income environments struggle along side parents with low levels of education attainment and these students may be at greater risk for low math outcomes and other core courses in academic performance.

An administrator says, “Children need a prep rich environment with books in the homes and reaching them in a way to encourage counting and writing their names...” Administrators also shared how structured and unstructured time along with choices played an important role in a child’s learning process.”

Theme: Best Practices

McClelland and Cameron (2011) admit that self-regulation is a vital component for successful learning as it permitted the opportunity for classroom learning. All administrators shared the idea of safe environments and the comfort level it provided for students that experienced a fragmented home environment.

In two districts teachers implemented a responsive classroom approach and guided the student into being apologetic when a mistake or mishap had occurred. Administrators recommended implementation of this practice as early as pre-kindergarten. Administrators also agreed when students were found to be in a comfort zone, they were more inclined to grasp what is taught. An administrator goes on to share “the importance of allowed choices taught certain applicable standards.”

Additionally, it is shared that “direct interaction improved learning processes and encouraged the student to verbalize their thoughts and feelings, also designating created periods for a mixture of structured and unstructured time.” Administrators believe that crafting situations intentionally creates a learning experience for the child and encourages the child to become more acceptable to classroom participation (Lash et al. (2016).

All administrators highlighted the significance of not showing anger with students or reminded them of past offenses but more importantly to use corrective action when students were unkind to others; furthermore, an administrator expounded on “helping students understand logical consequences for unfavorable actions make expectations clear.” All administrators agree that clear instructions are given for class activities

required verbal confirmation from students. Administrators agree that all children must completely understand the instructions before the task is started.

The financial and socio-economics premise on which enrollment into VPI programs were driven disqualified numerous children who could equally benefit from the preschool programs just as most disadvantaged children; if there were no obstacle of *income eligibility*

Theme: Executive function and Self-regulation skills

Administrators suggested that students benefited from experiencing choices at learning centers as well as making decisions on their own, which helped to develop EF skills. In making choices children were able to determine what steps were needed for each activity selected and the decision-making impacted the learning process.

Administrators agreed that consistent misbehavior is evident of foundational issues, and an indicator of little or no structure in the home environment. One administrator shared that unruly children drove choices and value in the classroom. In other words, they were allowed to do a certain activity if they behaved while engaged in that activity. Masten et al. (2012) suggested children who had developed executive function skills performed at a higher level in early childhood academics in reference to the five school adjustment elements; academic performance, peer acceptance, social behavior, and less infractions of inattentiveness, disobedience and aggression.

Theme: Montessori Model

The Italian doctor and educationalist Maria Montessori created the Montessori pedagogy in the early 1900s in a low socio-economic district in Rome. The classroom of Montessori education offered a variety of resources that target sensorimotor, language, math, practical life, and cultural capacities. This child-centered methodology targeted independence and self-regulation and devised to encourage students in full potential cognitively, emotionally, socially and physically.

The majority of administrators agreed that there were components of the Montessori education model that can be integrated in the classroom and also believed that “learning should be innovative and more hands-on with students as they reach their own conclusion.” However, an administrator shared the reality, “You can not remove accountability measures linked to SOLs.” The majority of administrators perceived that individualized learning paths would play a major role in meeting the needs of a vast variety of diverse students.” One administrator viewed Montessori as a removed accountability measure based on SOLs and further explained “Students must be ready at a certain point for increased academic skills.”

Theme: Age of Entry

All administrators agreed that the best age-of-entry for economically disadvantaged preschoolers should begin at three or four years of age, as learning from a structured environment is beneficial. An administrator shares, “If a student is living in an illiterate household, they should begin high-quality preschool as early as 3 years of age.”

Another administrator shared, “If an ESL learner is experiencing a multi-generational household and learning from a literate family member then allow that child to grasp the knowledge of their first language and they can be taught English when they arrive to kindergarten; however if they were not learning in a multi-generational home, then the child should enter pre-kindergarten as soon as possible.” Yazejian et al. (2015) shared that federal and state agencies focused on preschool education for four-year olds; however, it is suggested that learning processes serving the economically disadvantaged, required more than one year of structured activities to become sufficient for kindergarten readiness.

Theme: Policy mandates

One Administrator agreed, “Conversations among policymakers at the division level representatives should occur, based on conflicting policies and guidelines within the current processes as it pertains to early childhood education.” Research had also concluded that policy implications were vital in the collaborations of early childhood education, specifically, programs and age of entry for the economically disadvantaged (Yazejian et al. 2015). All administrators are unanimous on the role of policy to secure guidelines that are beneficial for the economically disadvantaged student.

McBeth et al. (2014) advocated for the understanding of NFP associated with the economically disadvantaged. There were four essentials to this policy, the character, the setting, the plot, and moral. The life experiences of the economically disadvantaged and

its plight must be properly identified coming into the education system that they may receive the attention they need, in the beginning of their enrollment, to be successful.

The democratic policy design offers a perspective from a differing set of lenses on which to view the target population and how they are interpreted. The inequalities in which early learners experience underperformance, social withdrawal, low self-esteem possibly carries over into the policy world as suggested by Schneider, Ingram, and de Leon (2014) as being socially biased in the construction of public policy. Schneider and Ingram (1997) go on to share the policy targets in four typologies: the advantaged, the contenders, the dependents and the deviants. These groups are presented in depth earlier in this study.

VPI requires the personally identifiable information of these students to properly allocate funding. A growing body of knowledge has suggested the achievement gap starts in children before kindergarten entry (DeBruin-Parecki and Slutzky (2016).

Theme: Outside resources

The participants all agreed that nonprofits and college students would benefit the economically disadvantaged students as well as the teachers due to the extra manpower and the opportunity to gain real-life experience working among low socio-economic children. One administrator stated, “There should not be too much time spent with an uncertified teacher” and suggested that “Nonprofit personnel should be limited to no more than three times per week,” while another administrator stated, “The unpaid help would resolve budget cut issues.” Each administrator agreed that the environment in

which low socioeconomic students reside is a primary contributor to their academic performance. Additionally, the environment also affected their socialization skills, which may be improved when time is spent with mentors.

Themes that emerge in the data collection process are the underlying experiences described by administrators that interact with the economically disadvantaged students.

The following themes of the gap exploration are presented:

Responses from the participants describe the economically disadvantaged as experiencing a lack of social skills. Social skills are essential to learning because it creates a connection between teacher and student. A participant shared that the comfort level is important to facilitate the child in classroom participation and fosters direct interaction among low socioeconomic student. Another participant shared the importance of a safe environment where kids are comfortable with taking risk. Administrators share that “It is important for kids to have access to a prep rich environment where they have books in the homes and they are read to, taught to write their names, and practice counting.” The absence of social skills greatly impacts emotions; Piaget (1964) identified the development of social skills by the preschool stage. Recognizing that the importance of a dual environment is necessary to be socially and emotionally motivated. Kids should be socially engaged and emotionally stable both at home and school. “Often times the home setting and school settings are different,” says an administrator, “as the structured environment does not transfer from one setting to the other.”

McBeth et al. (2014) revealed thematic descriptive that provided a significant balance in understanding the four core elements of narrative policies as it presents the context of a disadvantaged group of individuals juxtapose the democratic policy design that brought awareness to the impact that poverty has on education. This balance provided a compelling lens in the awareness of kindergarten readiness among the economically disadvantaged preschoolers and post-preschoolers.

Summary

In conclusion, this chapter provided an inside view of the underperformance among the economically disadvantaged students. These students are not difficult to identify. Plant and cultivate the seed of hope and encouragement and watch the economically disadvantaged student grow into someone more competent, capable, and beautiful than the heart might imagine. McBeth et al. (2014) gives a great scenario in which to prepare and empower low socioeconomic students into adults managing growth trajectory. Policy possibilities require vital roles in the mandate of high-quality early childhood preschool programs. Virginia Preschool Initiative provided benefits to qualified early childhood students. When expansions of programs start and the acceptance of three-year-olds are received into preschool programs; all children will benefit from structured learning resources regardless of income eligibility.

Preschool agencies should ensure children from economically disparate backgrounds should be cognitively, emotionally, physically and socially ready for kindergarten. The major themes in this study represented underperformance of the

economically disadvantaged preschoolers and post-preschoolers in mainstream education. The data collection gathered from the administrators clearly identifies themes of best practices activities that capitalize on the development of cognitive capabilities and creating an environment to address self-regulation skills. The progresses toward academic trajectory among the economically disadvantaged students are reachable when the responsibility is shared among parents, school, and community.

Chapter 5: Discussions and Recommendations

Introduction

In this qualitative case study, I explored, described, and examined the underperformance among early childhood preschool and post preschool students. The intended purpose was to understand if a change in current classroom practices and education models impacted academic performance among the economically disadvantaged students. I explored best practices that cultivated learning methods that manifest growth trajectories in preschool and post preschool students, which are vital to cognitive development for future growth paths.

Interpretation of Findings

Included in the chapter are the findings from analyzed interviews, archived school report cards, VDOE accreditation reports, and the VPI. In addition, VPI were reviewed for an understanding of the registration process and the guidelines governing enrollment into early childhood preschool programs. The themes that emerged during data collection and analysis of data provided a clear understanding of the ubiquitous themes supporting the NFP of McBeth et al. (2014). The findings of this case study resided with themes resulting from the data analysis method employed. The VPI was designed to prepare preschool children for entry into kindergarten; however, this program also has an eligibility requirement based on household income known as income eligibility. This financial constraint may serve as an obstacle to the affordability factor. Region 1 is

comprised of 15 districts, and there were six districts during the 2013-2016 school terms that demonstrated less than full accreditation. Each of these schools represented an average of 65% of the complete student body with economically disadvantaged students.

The six Region 1 districts in 2016 with failed schools were down to four districts at the end of the 2018 school term. Of the initial 43% of Region 1 elementary schools in 2013-2016 that did not obtain full accreditation among all of its learning centers, 25 schools did not obtain full accreditation by the end of the 2018 school term. There remained a total of four districts desired to reach full accreditation among all students, specifically the economically disadvantaged student group.

All participants in this study presented a desire to contribute to the success of their underperforming students. Administrators suggested that it would be a benefit to each district if there were one facility where all preschool students would attend prior to kindergarten entry. I also found income eligibility as a negative impact among these disadvantaged students because it denies entry to students who would benefit from the participation of a structured classroom environment. The administrators demonstrated no biased thoughts or feelings to any particular ethnic group. Based on personal interviews, all children received similar correction for undesired behaviors.

Limitations of the Study

Qualitative research is often associated with social construction's nature of reality and often requires a smaller participant pool. It was not the intent to make generalizations from the findings in this research. I collected data from six districts that

either failed during 2013-2016, improved by the end of the 2018 school term, or maintained full accreditation during terms explored. Qualitative studies require a smaller sample size than that of other research methods; however, the sample size among administrators met the requirements of generalizability. Despite efforts to inform potential participants of the confidentiality factor and Walden's Masking of Partner Organizations, participants were reluctant to agree to an interview or questionnaire.

Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand if change in current classroom practices and education models would impact academic performance among economically disadvantaged students in preschool and post preschool. Historical research efforts of fostering awareness of the obstacles that affect the academic performance of this group of students continue to grow. Effective preschool decisions do not begin with the students, but they begin with parents and education agency officials with solutions that provide the best resources for all children to academically thrive.

I encourage the exploration of future policy concerns on early childhood education, along with education models proven successful among children with delayed learning not related to birth defects. Moreover, the curriculum should include quantifiable participation in the classroom as interns. A longitudinal study to determine the trajectory of the economically disadvantaged student with participation in high-quality preschool programs should be conducted. Future scholars may also measure the concepts of EF, self-regulation skills, and demonstrated improvements overtime among

the economically disadvantaged. This information would add value to studies on economic development.

Currently, the impoverished population presents a financial burden upon society into adulthood. If investments are made in early childhood education, it may mitigate or eliminate the financial liability that society (Jenkins, 2014). A future educational study is encouraged to compare elementary schools in other Regions in Virginia to the outcomes among the economically disadvantaged, to include existing education models and age of entry.

Community nonprofit agencies have qualified volunteers and staff certified to support target students and offer resources to local school districts in need of services to provide an ongoing learning environment for the economically disadvantaged; these agencies add value to the school system and to families unable to meet income eligibility. Future qualitative research should be conducted among nonprofit agencies that would extend a structured environment to further learning by providing remedial programs that mirror classroom environments.

A longitudinal study of economically disadvantaged early childhood students would afford knowledge in understanding trajectory of economically disadvantage students as they advance through school and grow into adulthood. The longitudinal research would provide trajectory from early childhood cognitive development and improvements in EF and self-regulation skills from program implementations. A study of this sort would also measure the long-term performance and the impact that grass root

nonprofit agencies have on the low socioeconomic students, the parents, the community, and the stakeholders in education. The findings of this study may add knowledge and awareness that may encourage the educational community to make efforts in crafting policy to support the education programs of children.

Social Implications

A change is needed in education among the economically disadvantage to improve the negative experiences they endure during formative early childhood years. Children require a strong foundation to develop EF and self-regulation skills that enable support of positive cognitive ability. The constructs of EF and self-regulation skills, when positively developed, provide influence and empower children to positive outcomes. The classroom environment should be a setting of purposeful development of pursued goals amid innovative activities. Problem solving often transfers from the classroom to the boardroom.

The fruit of social change among early childhood students fosters positive end results in social acceptance, academic achievements, emotional stability, and increased social connections. The ability to influence a level playing field among students of all cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds is beneficial from an individual stance as well as a societal viewpoint. Unified efforts in early childhood education are the foundation for economic development, growth trajectory, and self-stability. An educational attainment affects more than one individual.

Policy Implications

During this study, literature did not reveal any existing policy directed at the attention of economically disadvantaged children. This population of children, in every way possible, needs the essential resources, instruction, and daily academic exercises that capitalize on cognitive development. The criticality of remediation and age of entry are substantial factors; however, not all inclusive of the necessary procedures required to cognitively develop, increase physical stamina and emotional stability to build a foundation in support of an environment for learning. Policy mandates will support narratives attention to obstacles that impede their classroom performance.

McBeth et al. (2014) suggest the economically disadvantaged are a population of undeserving individuals and policy should ensure the protection of this vulnerable group of citizens. Additionally, McBeth et al. (2014) suggest four core elements generalizable across time and space with different contexts including setting, characters, plot, and morals. The purpose of this research was to understand if a change in current classroom practices and education models will impact academic performance among the economically disadvantaged students. This encompasses actions to explore, describe, and identify the obstacles that manifest underperformance among economically disadvantaged preschool and post preschool students. Moreover, underperformance is prevalent among preschool and post preschool students particularly among the economically disadvantaged students. Failures among the elementary schools continue to exist and there is a need for early childhood students in first-grade through fifth-grade to become proficient in core subjects. The low socioeconomic post preschoolers are in an

underperformance continuum and mandated policy should support the “income eligibility” statute obstructing the enrollment of these post preschoolers from entering high-quality preschool programs.

Conclusion

A sound education is the responsibility of every society to its children and of each child to its society—even those children who are economically disadvantaged. Society and student alike are indebted to the educators who commit themselves to this imperative task. Perhaps a primary reason a majority of educators are so successful in commitment is because for them the job moves from mere task to a labor of love.

To encourage social change toward economically disadvantaged students there must first be change in the classroom among the economically disadvantaged. First, there must be a close examination of public policy that manifests policy realities supporting the underserved students. Secondly, there must be an expansion of funding specifically for preschool programs for the economically disadvantaged that include students at an age that provides a minimum of two years of preschool before entry into kindergarten. Thirdly, the pedagogy for the target student population should be compiled of building blocks that capitalize on developing cognitive ability to enable the demonstration of executive function and self-regulation skills among target students. Moreover, teachers that facilitate learning among the target student population should have a four year degree and require special training in cognitive development among students with delayed development in cognitive, emotional, physical, and social skills.

Lastly, the implementation of a proven education model designed for students with delayed learning not associated with mental defects would be sound policy and a timely implementation at the preschool level.

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Appendix A: Confidentiality Agreement

Name of Signer: Virginia H. Byerson

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: “Economically Disadvantaged Children: An Exploration of Public Policy, Education Models and Kindergarten Readiness” I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant’s name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I’m officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature:

Date:

Appendix B: Data Collection Coordination Request

June 2018

Dear Teacher,

I have obtained the principal's support to collect data for my research project entitled *Disadvantaged Preschool Children: An Exploration of Public Policy, Education Models, and Kindergarten Readiness*.

I am requesting your cooperation in the data collection process. I propose to collect data beginning 15 July 2018 through 15 August 2018. I will coordinate the exact times of data collection with you in order to minimize disruption to your instructional activities.

If you agree to be part of this research project, I would ask that you please be aware of the data collection process that will not include any student or require their participation directly or remove them from the classroom experience. This data collection process will only include you, the teacher. It is a voluntary participation in an interview to discuss matters relative to my project previously provided. You will only be involved in the process of data collection for approximately one hour maximum. There will be approximately five to seven questions on the questionnaire. A brief follow-up may occur the subsequent next week if additional information is forthcoming from your viewpoint.

If you prefer not to be involved in this study, that is not a problem at all.

If circumstances change, please contact me via email at virginia.byerson@waldenu.edu

Thank you for your consideration. I would be pleased to share the results of this study with you if you are interested.

I am requesting your signature to document that I have cleared this data collection with you.

(For email versions of this letter, I am requesting that you reply to this email with "I agree" to document that I have cleared this data collection with you.)

Sincerely,

Virginia Byerson

Scholar Practitioner
Walden University

Printed Name of Teacher

Date

Teacher's Written or Electronic* Signature

Researcher's Written or Electronic* Signature

The Uniform Electronic Transactions Act regulates electronic signatures. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix C: Questionnaires

Teachers

1. From a teacher's viewpoint, what is an example of effective exercises to develop the cognitive abilities among the economically disadvantaged preschool and post-preschool students?
2. What age do you identify as effective for economically disadvantaged preschoolers to enter high-quality preschool programs?
3. Knowing that the majority of economically disadvantaged students enter kindergarten unprepared based on school report cards, why are children underperforming at this level?
4. During the registration period, is testing available prior to kindergarten enrollment to identify students enrolling unprepared? If so, what kind of testing is available at the local level?
5. What practice might you implement in the classroom to aid in the development of cognitive abilities among economically disadvantaged students?

Principals

1. What registration activity can be implemented to identify economically disadvantaged preschoolers and post preschoolers?
2. As a senior administrator, should policy support nonprofit agencies to facilitate students demonstrating a gap in academic performance, if found qualified?
3. Student education majors are prime candidates to assist in facilitating classroom activities. Is there opportunity to pursue policymaking for pro bono community hours with target populations?
4. Is there appropriate education and specific training among teachers to engage proper interaction with disadvantaged students and foster academic growth?

Superintendent

1. As the Superintendent, would the possibility of entertaining ideas of district wide preschool and post-preschool programs that meet the need for students experiencing an academic gap?

2. What are your perceptions on growth trajectory in education and its impact on economic development?
3. What is your perceived vision to implement preschool programs that benefit students inclusive of the economically disadvantaged students not meeting the income eligible requirement?
4. What would be an educational motivation that would justify Superintendents working closely with policymakers for inclusion of economically disadvantaged preschoolers and those post-preschoolers to support academic achievement?