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Perceptions of High School Principals about Improving African American Male Academic Outcomes

Andre Lavelle Credit
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Education

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Andre L. Credit

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the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. JoeAnn Hinrichs, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Celeste Stansberry, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Paul Englesberg, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2020

Abstract

Perceptions of High School Principals about Improving African American Male

Academic Outcomes

by

Andre L. Credit

MEd, Prairie View A&M University, 2003

BS, Alcorn State University, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Educational Leadership

Walden University

May 2020

Abstract

In this study, the African American male students' academic achievement gap and the principals' strategies to overcome this problem were investigated. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to assess the viability of the different strategies that principals have put in place in their respective schools with the aim of improving the academic outcomes of African American male students. The study was guided by the theoretical foundation of culturally responsive teaching, which ensures effective diversity management through the cultural resources of teaching. The research questions addressed 3 major components: the principals' self-perceived beliefs and attitudes toward enhancing the learning experiences of African American males, support practices for the academic achievement of African American males, and the experiences and outcomes of programs that principals have implemented for African American students. A qualitative research approach was utilized for this study, and purposive sampling was used to select the participants. A total of 6 principals from 6 campuses participated in this study. Interviews were used to collect data which were analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings indicated that principals believe that effective classroom management, financial support, and instructional leadership are strategies to enhance the learning experiences of African American males. Mentorship, student support programs, and corrective action practices were also found to be used to support the academic achievement of African American males. Finally, the findings from this study add to the existing knowledge of practice regarding the strategies used by school leaders to help African American male students improve their academic achievement.

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Dedication

It has been often said that we sit under shade trees we did not plant. That is not a truer statement for me. I am a product of two parents who made a decision to choose me over their own interest. If not for the decision to be parents, my course may have been different. This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, George and Debra Mercer. Dad, I want you to know you are my role model. In an era where African American Males were abandoning their families to choose other life interests, you decided early you were going to sacrifice your interests to make sure I had a father to lead and guide me. I am certain in the 70s it wasn't easy being a teenage African American male, add being a teenage African American male father to the equation, you are the true scholar to me. I wish I could be half the father to my kids that you are to me. All the lessons, directly and indirectly, you have taught me growing up are the very reason I achieved this accomplishment. This degree will never take the place of the life education you have shared with me. Mom, thank you for always being my cheerleader. At 15, you gave birth to your "one and only son," and you have continued to be a silent supporter of all of my endeavors, good and bad. I could never say enough words to explain what you mean to me.

To my sisters, Latorya, Tanesha, and Tasha, being the oldest I was not always the best role model growing up. Once I matured, I felt it a sense of responsibility to have each of you say that's my brother. I hope I have worked to be a better role model in my later years. I pray that each of you find the motivation and drive to achieve all you want to achieve in life. I was not the smartest of the group, but I hope my drive serves as an example of what perseverance and the will to achieve look like.

To Andrea, Joseph, and Jaden, I want you to know I love you. As your father, I work every day to be an example. I want you to be whatever you want to be in life. If you put in the work and not give up, regardless how meek it may look, you will achieve your goals. People will try to project their fears and lack of vision on you, but don't allow their lack of belief in themselves to be your responsibility. Stay focused and positive and good things will happen. Remember, there are no easy victories, everything worthwhile will come at a price. If you are willing to pay the price, it will happen.

To all my friends and mentors, thank you for pushing me. Iron sharpens iron and every one of you has truly kept my iron sharpened. Coach Roy, thank you for being a mentor that saw beyond my faults and was willing to pour into an African American male who was at crossroads in his life. Thank you for taking a chance on me. The wisdom you have shared with me will forever be engrained in my spirit.

Myles Munroe once said, "The greatest tragedy in the world is not death, it's living without a purpose." I pray every day that God allow me the insight to live a purpose-driven life. **TO GOD BE THE GLORY!**

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction to the study	1
Background	1
Problem statement	4
Evidence of the problem at the local level	4
Evidence of the problem from the professional literature	8
Purpose of the study	9
Research questions	11
Conceptual framework for the study	12
Nature of the study	13
Definition of terms	13
Assumptions	14
Scope and delimitations	15
Limitations	15
Significance	15
Summary	16
Chapter 2: Literature review	18
Literature search strategy	18
Conceptual framework	19
Literature review related to key variables and concepts	21
The role of principals in the academic achievement of african american males	21

Historical trends of african americans in the United States	22
African Americans in the U.S. learning institutions	25
Gender gap in American education.....	27
Roles of principals	28
Factors affecting academic achievement of african american male students	31
Implications.....	33
Summary and conclusions	35
Chapter 3: Methodology	37
Research design and rationale.....	38
Role of the researcher	40
Methodology	41
Participant selection	41
Instrumentation	42
Data collection process	43
Data analysis	44
Member checking.....	46
Data analysis and coding	46
Constant comparative method.....	47
Trustworthiness.....	48
Ethical procedures.....	49
Summary	50
Chapter 4: Results	51
Setting	52

Data collection	53
Results.....	54
Effective classroom management	55
Financial support.....	56
Instructional leadership.....	59
Mentorship and student support programs.....	62
Corrective action.....	63
Improved academic performance.....	65
Evidence of trustworthiness	67
Chapter 5: Discussion, conclusions, and recommendations	69
Interpretation of findings	69
Effective classroom management	69
Financial support.....	71
Instructional leadership.....	71
Mentorship and student support program	73
Corrective action.....	74
Improved academic performance.....	75
Summary	67
Limitations of the study	76
Recommendations.....	77
Implications.....	79
Conclusion	80
References.....	83

Appendix: Interview guide97

List of Tables

Table 1. Demographics of Participants53

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Current research has noted the perceived impact principals have on African American male students' academic success in high schools. The specific problem in the Cooperative County School Districts (CCSD; a pseudonym) is the lack of proper strategies among the school leadership (SL) towards improving the academic outcome of African American male students. This has led to the poor academic performance of many African American male students in the district. Considering the lack of academic success of African American male students, in this qualitative, exploratory, case study, I examined the impact that principals have in influencing the academic achievement of African American male high school students.

Background

According to Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013), principals are the most remarkable leaders in a school, and the position of *principalship* is the most engaged and empowered one in local and state-level policies. In this study, I synonymously viewed school principals as SL. It is also the position most responsible for student progress or absence of progress. School principals can have a significantly profound effect on curriculum, the school environment, and academic learning (Branch et al., 2013). The leadership style and skills of a principal impact the various characteristics of teachers, including efficacy, engagement levels, job satisfaction, and emphasis on academics (Allen, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015). Of all articulations, principals are aware of the extent of assets and liabilities, and they are best situated to advance and bolster school-level changes (Branch et al., 2013).

It is popularly contended that education is a basic factor that defines the culture and integrity of a society (Hollins, 2015). Every country needs proficient youth imbued with the thirst for knowledge and a conviction towards innovation to envision a culturally and scientifically advanced society. Students are the expectation and the future citizens of each country. Schools are a collateralized symposium of dynamic mental and cognitive frameworks: principals, instructors, staff, and students (Hollins, 2015). As a representation of the society itself, diversity exists in terms of gender, ethnic characters, and other socio-demographic factors, and it is the primary duty of SL to oversee student variety and forestall student dropouts. Allen et al. (2015); Branch et al. (2013); and Day, Gu, and Sammons (2016) recommended that unless propagated by the principals, the application of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) can never be actively implemented, given the risk of it becoming incoherent or dropping from the school environment itself. This supposition can become true, despite district-level orders, since district-level orders can become successful only after they receive local-level participation.

CRT draws on the social foundations and learning of students as resources in the classroom (Gay, 2013). CRT focuses on students' culture in academic practice through three essential approaches: applying exclusive standards, advancing social skills, and advancing basic cognizance (Dickson, Chun, & Fernandez, 2015; Schenke, Nguyen, Watts, Sarama, & Clements, 2017). As far as scholastic results are concerned, there exists proof that CRT advances scholastic accomplishment and engagement (e.g., Aguirre & Zavala, 2013; Christianakis, 2011). CRT additionally advances a feeling of basic awareness (e.g., Epstein, Mayorga, & Nelson, 2011; Stovall, 2006). In an investigation of

a middle-school science classroom, students talked about their inclinations in connection to science practice and associated bias towards science as a predisposition to bias across the larger society (Laughter & Adams, 2012). This finding indicates that the students' awareness of science promotes a predisposition of bias toward science, and therefore, they felt inclined to be in a science class. It is an approach of advancing basic cognizance where the students can understand what they learn and relate it to their practice.

Finally, CRT can advance a positive ethnic-racial personality and project inspirational demeanors towards others (Bertani et al., 2010). Therefore, through use of CRT, the male students can interact with each other regardless of racial factors making them successful through their diversity. According to Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2011), SL plays a significant role in managing diversity and facilitating the academic achievement of all the students. Teachers and principals can ensure that the teaching strategies they use are inclusive of the collective diversity (with differences in their ethnicities and cultures) of their students to encourage them to have academic achievement based on their learning abilities (Hollins, 2015). Some researchers (e.g., Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004) have shown that educational leaders often fail to recognize how their leadership can ameliorate some of the factors involved in poor academic performance, particularly for African American males; therefore, the need existed to conduct a study highlighting the role of SL in influencing the academic achievement of African American students.

Problem Statement

The specific problem in the CCSD was the lack of proper strategies used among the SL towards improving the academic outcome of African American male students. This has led to the poor academic performance of African American male students in the district.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Among the nine Independence School Districts (ISDs), High Island, Hitchcock, and La Marque featured under the improvement required index of the Texas Education Agency (TEA; 2017a). Considering the need for improvement, I focused on the two ISDs and five campuses of Hitchcock ISD and eight campuses of La Marque ISD. The problems associated with each of the three ISDs are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The Hitchcock ISD was featured in the improvement required index of the TEA (2017a) district-wide report. With five schools, the district is comprised of 44.1% African American students. The 2015–2016 performance report identified the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) Percent at Level II Satisfactory Standard or Above for African American students, which was at 50% only.

The disciplinary data trends of the African American, Hispanic, and White students belonging to Hitchcock ISD of Texas for 2013–2016 indicated a trend of increasing disciplinary issues associated with out-of-school suspensions for African American students (Texas Education Agency, 2017b). In the 2013–2014 academic year, there were 75 cases of out-of-school suspensions and 527 in-school suspensions for

African Americans and 29 and 207 cases, respectively, of Hispanics and no out-of-school suspension cases and 131 in-school suspensions being reported for Whites. In the recent 2015–2016 academic year report, there were 136 cases of out-of-school suspensions and 292 in-school suspensions for African Americans; zero and 120 cases, respectively, for Hispanics; and 41 and 98 cases, respectively, for Whites.

The La Marque ISD of Texas was featured in the improvement required index in the academic achievement of the TEA (2017a) district-wide report. With eight schools, the district was comprised of 66.7% African American students. The 2015–2016 performance report identified the STAAR Percent at Level II Satisfactory Standard or Above for African American students, which was 43% only. In addition, a 3-year District Level Annual Disciplinary Summary for the district highlighted a gradual increase in the in-school and out-of-school suspension rate for African American students in comparison with their counterparts. The disciplinary data trends of the African American, Hispanic, and White students belong to La Marque ISD of Texas for 2013–2016 indicated a linear trend of increasing disciplinary issues for African American students. In the 2013–2014 academic year, there were 784 cases of out-of-school suspensions and 944 in-school suspensions for African Americans; 78 and 125 cases, respectively, for Hispanics; and none of such cases being reported for Whites. In the recent 2015–2016 academic year report, there were 978 cases of out-of-school suspensions and 1,362 in-school suspensions for African Americans; 94 and 175 cases, respectively, for Hispanics; and 88 and 124 cases, respectively, for Whites. From these findings, it is evident that students need alternative modes of teaching and an education system that is culturally relevant.

This is significant for the current study because it gives evidence of the type of education systems and modes of teaching based on culture being used.

African American male students face challenges in schools owing to the historical propagation of racial discrimination amongst this group as well as poverty. To put it into perspective, African American male students have close to 5 times greater chances of being expelled or suspended from schools by the school principals (Dixson & Rousseau-Anderson, 2014; DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2010). Under such circumstances, the prejudice is commonly directed towards the students and seldom towards the academic institutions. For instance, Davis (2016) attributed to the mental framework or socioeconomic background of African American male students and failed to shed focus on academic institutions. Therefore, an interesting perspective would be to consider the academic institutions as plausible influencers of school dropouts and investigate the role of SL in preventing dropouts.

The general problem highlighted in the current study is in line with the arguments of Ushomirsky and Williams (2015) who argued that districts with the most students of color tend to get less state and local financing in comparison with regions serving the fewest. This reflects the differences that exist in the quartile of districts where most children live in poverty or in districts where they are students of color. Inequalities are more predominant and more considerable when viewed from a racial bias perspective than those based on the lines of poverty (Brooks, 2012). The problem under study is also aligned with the findings of Berliner (2013) who highlighted that school funding plays a crucial role in the academic achievement of African American students.

In past studies, ethnicity has been identified as an influencer of students' learning experiences (Gregory et al., 2016). The position of the school principals in their schools make them highly responsible for mitigating the crisis facing African American male students in terms of their academic achievement. However, when leadership fails to acknowledge cultural diversity, the academic performance of the students is adversely affected (Gregory et al., 2016). The low academic achievement of non-White students can be straightforwardly correlated with the SL (Gregory et al., 2016). School expectations are frequently lower for non-White students than for their White counterparts (McKeon & Weinstein, 2008). The culture of the students constructs the perception that the students have about their identities and culture through the experiences they get about other races, socially constructing their literary experiences for better SL (Davis, 2016). Students' race, dialect, social practices, and characteristics define SL's expectations for and from the students (Brooks, 2012).

Since low expectations happen on the grounds that SL makes the students feel they are insufficient based on their practices or appearances, the inevitable occurs: the underestimation of students' social and cultural potential (Brooks, 2012). This clearly demonstrates that the discriminating SL either does not esteem or perceive the value of these African American male students (Khalifa, 2010; Theobald, Eddy, Grunspan, Wiggins, & Crowe, 2017). Strategies that require SL to address the scholastic performance and train incongruities have not been enough to address the issues, and in various examples, racial gaps keep on worsening (Ford & Moore, 2014).

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

According to Darling-Hammond (2010), there are many gifted African American students; however, many African American male students tend to perceive academic success as a trait of the Whites (Moore & Lewis, 2012). Ethnicity has been demonstrated to a profound effect upon students' learning experiences, which can compound the impact of gender upon performance levels (Moore & Lewis, 2012). Moore and Lewis (2012) have shown that there is evidence of African American male students experiencing lower academic achievement than their female counterparts as a result of the negative attitude and racial stereotypes. This was significant to the current study for establishing the need to improve the academic achievement of African American male students.

Moore and Lewis (2012) demonstrated that African American male students in the United States face a high rate of school dropping out, a rate reaching as high as 36%. There are more African American males in prisons today than in colleges (Nellis, 2016). African American male students seem to be at the risk of extinction in U.S. higher learning institutions if no thorough mitigation measures are taken to curb the situation. With the increasing dropout rate of African American male students, there is a need for teachers to use a project-based approach when teaching to incorporate every student (Busby, 2016). This approach ensures that the students are integrated into the learning system instead of dropping out.

McFarland et al. (2018) indicated there are fewer African American male students than their female counterparts enrolling in postsecondary learning institutions with

African American males comprising only 12.7% in 2012, while the African American females had an enrollment of 16.6%. From 2000 to 2015, the male dropout rate for Black youth decreased from 13.1% to 6.5% (McFarland et al., 2018). The high rate of dropouts is determined by the race of the students and the institutional culture in accommodating them into the learning system. With such dropout rates, the performance levels of these African American students tend to be low, an aspect that can be influenced by the leadership of the principal in the school (McFarland et al., 2018).

The leadership approaches that are adopted by the principals in learning institutions may affect social relationships within the institution between teachers and the students as well as within the students themselves (Howard, 2016). Since diversity is not a choice in classrooms, it is crucial for school principals to be aware and acknowledge the principles of CRT. A visible difference exists in the normative and formative integration of measures in governing students based on their skin color across the systems that govern the students (Lewis, 2016). It is important to note that awareness and acknowledgement of CRT principles will provide a unique opportunity for the SL to create a paradigm shift in increasing academic achievement in male students. Further study is needed to identify the causes of such negativity and to subsequently establish mitigation strategies to curb the possible impact on the academic achievement of male students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the viability of the different strategies that principals have put in place in their respective schools to help improve the academic

outcomes of African American male students. In this study, I looked at the strategic plans that guided the principals of the selected institutions when dealing with challenges experienced by African American male students. By looking at the different strategic plans in every school, I aimed to uncover the strategies that are working well and those that need reforms in order to produce better academic outcomes. Since this study was informed by the concept of CRT, the strategies that principals use were evaluated to determine the extent to which CRT had been applied to those strategies. In the end, the evaluation of the relationship between the different strategies used by principals and CRT revealed its importance in maintaining discipline and promoting academic achievement in schools that have students from different cultural backgrounds.

To achieve the stated purpose of this study, I employed the qualitative method to ensure that the data collected did not just focus on numbers but rather on the outcome of the teaching methods used in different schools. The data collection method used to complete the process was structured interviews. The collected data were then analyzed to find out the most viable strategies that principals can use to help improve the academic outcome of African American male students.

The concept of interest in this study was the schooling of African American male high school students. This group makes up the most affected group by the current curriculum since they record the highest dropout rates in high school along with low enrollment rates in higher institutions (Wright, 2011). The data collection process ensured that the answers of the interviewees focused on data concerning African American male students based on suspensions, cultural relevance, and low expectations.

Research Questions

In this qualitative, exploratory, case study, I focused on discerning the perceived impact principals have on African American male students' academic success in high schools. Through gathering the perceptions of school principals on African American male students, I aimed to explore the belief systems, attitudes, and practices of the principals toward CRT. In order to establish a more focused approach towards the research problem, the following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

RQ1: What are the principals' self-perceived beliefs and attitudes toward enhancing the learning experiences of African American males?

RQ2: What are the principals' practices and improvements to support the academic achievement of African American males?

RQ3: What have been the experiences and outcomes of programs that principals have implemented for African American students?

White, Bay and Martin (2013) reported that school principals have the greatest impact on the academic achievement of African American males because they are responsible for promoting an institutional culture that encourages cultural diversity valuing, enhancing equal learning opportunities for both African Americans and Whites in the learning institutions. African American males are experiencing a high rate of dropout from schools, leading to very low graduation rate from one level of education to another (Moore & Lewis, 2012).

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The basis for this study was drawn from the concept of CRT as a major component of learning, especially in an environment comprising multiracial students. CRT is important in enhancing both the communication and reception of information in addition to shaping the process of thinking in learners from different backgrounds (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). According to Aronson and Laughter (2016), CRT has the capacity to connect the cultural knowledge of students, their past experiences, and their performance to academic knowledge in such a way that they appreciate and embrace socio-cultural realities they already know. Ideally, culturally responsive teachers aim at teaching a classroom with the consideration of different cultural communities where every student has grown (Spence, 2016). In order to become a culturally responsive institution, both teachers and students have to come to a consensus on new norms and standards that acknowledge the similarities and differences that exist between different cultural groups (Samuels, 2018). Therefore, in a culturally responsive classroom, teachers are also viewed as learners because they have to learn and understand some concepts from students' cultures (Samuels, 2018). To bring the idea of CRT into perspective, African American male students, in most cases, feel excluded because their cultural references are usually ignored in the teaching process. By mastering CRT concepts, teachers can ensure that learning takes place in the context of all cultures, thereby creating an engaging learning environment for students from different cultures.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative research approach in this study. This method was chosen because it is able to present the data without ignoring the context in which the data were collected. Therefore, in this study, the results not only indicate the rates of school completion in different schools but also indicate the conditions that the students were exposed to through the teaching methods used. I used interviewing as the method of data collection to ensure that the participants gave context relevant to the information they shared. This involved recruitment of principals in schools that use CRT with African American male students. Meeting these specifications while identifying the right participants was important for the study since its focus was on identifying the effects of using CRT in schools on the inclination to learn in African American male students by factoring in their school dropout rate and enrollment rate in higher institutions.

Definition of Terms

In this section, I present definitions of the key words and phrases critical to understanding this qualitative case study:

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT): This type of teaching draws on the social foundation and learning of students as resources in the classroom (Gay, 2013). CRT focuses on students' culture in academic practice through three essential approaches: exclusive standards, advancing social skill, and advancing basic cognizance (Dickson et al., 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Institutional culture: The core values, beliefs, attitudes, and guiding behaviors upheld within an organization that determine the nature of interrelationships within the institution (Nieto, 2015).

Learning environment: The conditions or setting in which students acquire knowledge by study and experience, whether phenomenological or by being taught (Carbonara, 2005).

Racial factors: Factors that affect the learning experience of a student based on the real or assumed characteristics of people with whom the student shares history, culture, and language (Nieto, 2015).

School leadership (SL): According to Nieto (2015), SL involves the social influence that an individual exerts over a group of stakeholders within a school setting in order to coordinate and guide relationships within the group members in the school.

Assumptions

The primary assumption in this study was that the school principal is responsible for providing a favorable institutional culture, student-centered learning, culturally relevant pedagogy, and a diversity-valuing environment. Based on the existing literature and past studies, I assumed that school principals play a critical role in influencing the school environment for African American male students, which in return affects the students' academic achievement. My secondary assumption laid in the theoretical foundation of the study in that CRT ensured effective diversity management as opposed to other strategic modes of planning for effective teaching.

Scope and Delimitations

In terms of scope, this was a qualitative study that was focused on identifying the problem; however, the findings cannot be generalized to the whole population because the sample was not representative. As such, I investigated the belief systems, attitudes, and practices of the principals to ensure the academic success of African American male students. Consequently, further study may be needed to identify the factors that impact the academic success of African American male learners using qualitative methods.

Limitations

The study was limited to the determination of the impact of principals on the academic success of male African American learners. The study did not include the perceptions of teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. Another limitation of this study was that it was time restricted and did not allow for thorough exploration of the research problem. With limited periods of conducting research, it became difficult to focus on deeper details of the research problem; however, I expected to overcome this limitation by focusing on a few participants in order to allow enough time for detailed data collection.

Significance

The participants of the study included multiple stakeholders: principals, teachers, parents, students, and the society. Identifying the leadership practices of principals provided insights into their predisposition, beliefs, and attitudes toward African American students in relation to CRT. Reducing the gap between White and Black students because of their ethnic backgrounds ensures that students of color are motivated to improve their

academic achievement and broaden their career aspirations. This reduced gap was used to develop strong interventions to reduce the cognitive biases and their impacts and ensure the closing of ethnic divide (Gregory et al., 2016) leading to the need for diversification of the teaching force to ensure that students are encouraged to work hard in their academics.

African American males experience a myriad of challenges ranging from negative ethnicity perceptions to negative attitudes from Whites. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that 13.1% as the highest dropout rate of African American students and 6.5% as the lowest between the years of 2000 and 2015 (McFarland et al., 2018). The learning environment of African American students has remained unfavorable for sustained learning and, therefore, has contributed to the high dropout rate of these students. These unfavorable conditions can be influenced by the principal. As a result of these social challenges, different social problems have been facing the minority African American community in contemporary learning institutions (Buckelew & Fishman, 2011).

Summary

I designed this qualitative, exploratory, single case study to examine the lack of proper strategies among SL towards improving the academic outcomes of African American male students. In Chapter 1, I presented the definition of the problem and the rationale for the study with evidence of the problem at the local level and from the professional literature. The significance of the study, the research questions used to guide the study, and key terms and their definitions to help explain and clarify this study were

also included. Finally, I also provided assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations.

In Chapter 2, I will provide a review of the extant literature on the topic. Section 3 will contain an in-depth description of the methodology used in the study, including the rationale for the research design. In Section 4, I will present the findings of the study based on the collection and analysis of data. Section 5 will include my conclusions based on the findings from the study, the implications for practice and social change, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I provide a review of the literature, giving an overview of the historical trend of African Americans in the United States followed by the role of school principals in enhancing academic achievement of marginalized groups in the schools. I then narrow the focus to the trends of African Americans in U.S. learning institutions and gender imbalances that have existed between African American males and females in U.S. learning institutions. The factors that affect African American male academic achievement in U.S. learning institutions are also reviewed.

Literature Search Strategy

To minimize bias for literature sources while enabling optimal coverage of the research problem, I adopted a search protocol method that defined the steps taken in identifying and selecting sources of literature as recommended by Boland, Cherry, and Dickson (2014). The relevance of the literature sources to the research problem was my main consideration when selecting the literature sources. This review of the literature comprised the exploration of primary and secondary resources from databases accessible through the Walden University Library and Internet resources, such as Google Scholar, and other search engines. The search and review were guided by seven domains relating to the conceptual framework of the study: (a) African American males, (b) the academic achievement of African Americans, (c) racial factors in U.S. learning institutions, (d) the role of school principals, (e) CRT, (f) school leadership, and (g) gender gaps in African American academic achievement. The inclusion criteria for sources that I adopted in this

study involved the use of only peer-reviewed journals and books. By adopting these criteria, I ensured that the literature sources in this study were valid and reliable.

Conceptual Framework

This study was built on CRT, where the key role of SL in ensuring equitable learning in schools is brought into focus. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2016) pointed out the importance of SL in developing pedagogy. Given the influential nature of principals, their role towards influencing the educational development of African American students remains critical. In this study, I aimed at discerning the perceived impact principals have on African American male students' academic success in high schools. This study was specifically aimed at exploring the belief systems, attitudes, and practices of the principals toward CRT (see Figure 1). Figure 1, developed by Ladson-Billings and Tate identifies the relationship of the presumptive impact of principals (i.e., SL) and their beliefs, attitudes, and practices on the academic achievement (i.e., dropout rates) of African American male students.

In this chapter, I review the perspectives of principals regarding aspects, such as communication of high expectations, learning within the context of culture, student-centered instruction, culturally mediate instruction, reshaping the curriculum, and the role of teachers as facilitators. The plausible impacts these perspectives have on student achievement is eventually discerned. The importance of CRT as a conceptual framework for this study stemmed from the fact that it has a strong influence of culture on the attitudes, values, and behaviors of the students, the teachers, and the SL. Therefore, I

believed that culture could be used as an indicator of identifying the root cause of the problems associated with underachievement and solve them accordingly.

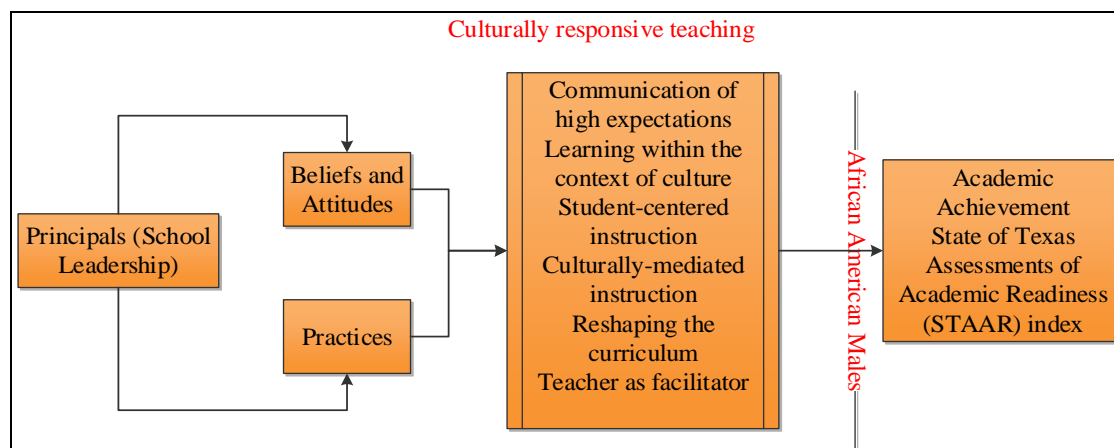


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of culturally responsive teaching (developed by Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2016).

Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) elucidated the importance of culturally responsive school leadership to reform not only the teaching practices but also to create reform in the school environment towards the African American students. The authors eventually implied the need for SL to focus on critical self-reflection, CRT, and curricula as well as promote environments that are culturally responsive. From this recent study, two aspects have been highlighted: the role of culture in influencing the attitudes, behaviors, and belief systems of the SL and the role of the SL in creating CRT and school environments. Consequently, the impact of principals in influencing the academic achievement of African American male students was investigated in this study.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

The Role of Principals in the Academic Achievement of African American Males

The school principal is presumably the ultimate leader in the school and is expected to guide and lead the other stakeholders in the school in running the school (Godfrey, 2016). The school principal, as the leader, is expected to perform various roles in the school to ensure that every activity and process within the school runs as expected. In contemporary learning institutions, principals have faced increasing diversity among the students as various races and ethnic groups try to coexist. In the United States, for instance, the historical trends of African Americans and Asians, among others, have continued to increase in the U.S. learning institutions over the past decade (Gasman, 2013). This trend of continued treatment of African American males places principals on the verge of increasing responsibilities and roles in order to manage the increasing diversity in the contemporary schools and higher learning institutions.

Leadership in the education system plays a central role in facilitating equal grounds for all the learners to achieve their academic potential (Cooper, 2013). According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (2016), the immediate SL at the school level is among the key factors that determine whether the learners achieve their optimal academic achievement. The principal is, therefore, a key determinant of learner performance because they are the immediate leaders in the school who are expected to show outstanding leadership qualities in the school. When the school principal shows impartiality in making decisions, where they favor some students while oppressing others, then the oppressed students tend to develop negative attitudes toward the school,

which further negatively impacts their performance (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016).

Grissom, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2015) considered the school principal to be the ultimate school leader whose influence on the performance of students cannot be underestimated.

Vanblaere and Devos (2016) explored the structural relationship between principals' leadership styles, teachers, and peer influences and concluded that the principal's role in affecting student learning is critical through communicative, collaborative, and instructional components of the teaching process. Nieto (2015) also revealed that a leader's socialization orientation strategy has a long-term impact on the perception of followers who are culturally, ethnically, and socially diverse. Exploring the extent to which school principals affect the success of the African American male learners is necessary to provide guidelines and frameworks for the formulation of long-term strategies that may help in optimizing these effects for the best interest of the students.

Historical Trends of African Americans in the United States

African Americans in the United States can be traced as early as the mid-1500s when Africans taken to the United States as slaves started to increase in numbers (Mauk & Oakland, 2013). As slaves, African Americans were denied any possession of valuables because their masters limited their actions and freedom of movement. African Americans were not considered citizens; hence, it was forbidden for anyone who was considered a slave to be educated, to work for the government, or to own workers (Mauk & Oakland, 2013). In the 1800s, several regions started to allow African American children to acquire education, which was met by severe objections from other parts of the

slavery-practicing regions in the United States (White et al., 2013). People considered educating Africans would mean that they were free from captivity, and this would prevent them from working in the plantations and fields of the Whites (White et al., 2013). Considering that agricultural plantations were sources of income and food for Americans, inhibiting Africans from accessing education assured Americans of the continued supply of labor from the Africans.

Because of the oppression encountered by Africans at the hands of the White Americans, many Africans were deprived of their rights to education, leaving only a few of them who got the opportunity to get educated so that they could read and write (Spring, 2016). Despite their freedom from slavery, African Americans' civil, freedom, and economic rights were denied; therefore, the White Americans continued to dominate in both political and economic spheres, thereby exposing African Americans into, yet another form of slavery, called *mental slavery*, which made African Americans feel inferior towards the Indians (Marable, 2015).

In some of the workplaces in the early 1800s, African Americans were subjected to violence and abuse from their masters and associates, their children were forbidden from some of the public schools, and their places of residence were secluded from the White Americans' residences (Wallenfeldt, 2011). Most of the African Americans lived in groups to be able to support and protect each other (Wallenfeldt, 2011). In U.S. learning institutions, teachers inflicted mockery on African American children, which was further reinforced by the entire White society (Wallenfeldt, 2011). In addition, legislation was created to inhibit African Americans from ascending to any form of

power and, perhaps, remain as slaves (Kolchin, 1994). African Americans were encouraged to achieve success in education in order to liberate their fellow African Americans from economic, political, and civil oppressions (Kolchin, 1994). After a long struggle, African Americans succeeded in pushing for their economic, civil, and political rights.

Despite the freedom from mental slavery, African Americans have continued to experience stereotyping and prejudice in the U.S. education system, which makes African Americans still face challenges in coexisting with the fellow Whites (White et al., 2013). Since 2005, the issue of academic achievement among African Americans has become a central issue of discussion with trends indicating that very low rates of African Americans graduate in various levels of the U.S. education system (Ford & Moore, 2014). Though various legislations have been established to safeguard African Americans from any form of oppression by their fellow Whites, cases of unfair treatment of African American students in various levels of education have still been reported (Wang & Gordon, 2009). Nevertheless, the number of African American teachers and principals has been on the rise since the onset of the 20th century (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins, 2013). African Americans are excelling in education to secure positions in the teaching profession. For example, African Americans in various learning institutions have been found to be more academically competitive than their White counterparts, securing positions as principals, superintendents, head teachers, and university chancellors among other top positions in the educational system (Wichman, 2017).

Moreover, a proportionately smaller number of African Americans in various professions compared to native White Americans show that there is a continued discrimination of African Americans from joining lucrative professions in the United States (Bowen, Bok, & Loury, 2016). Though the trend of having few African Americans in various professions may not be attributed to the education system, there is likelihood that the environment in the learning institutions and the leadership in schools still impact the performance of African Americans (Bowen, Bok, & Loury, 2016). Despite the historical background of African Americans in the U.S. education system, some U.S. educational leaders have continued to exercise equality in the treatment they give all students.

African Americans in the U.S. Learning Institutions

Despite the establishment of regulations and social structures that provide equal opportunities for both African American students and their White American counterparts in U.S. learning institutions, studies have shown that African Americans continue to face challenges of discrimination by the White, Hispanic, and Asian students in their various learning institutions (Darling-Hammond, 2010). As indicated by Ladson-Billings (1995), the high level of discrimination of African American students by other races negatively impacts the social and academic lives of African American males most greatly, which reflects the alarmingly high rate of discrimination in the U.S. education system. The National Education Association (2017) reported that African Americans in some of the U.S. regions are discriminated against, humiliated, embarrassed, and in some cases,

accused of crimes that they did not commit. Because of these mistreatments, some of African American students are forced to drop out of school.

African Americans lived in poverty conditions implying that students from these poor families could not have been able to afford basic learning facilities like books that could have contributed toward their discrimination in the learning institutions and their further poor performance. For this reason, the African Americans are discriminated in accordance with their social status, which is reinforced by their African American color (Coakley, 2014). Past studies have shown that socio-cultural and personal factors have largely contributed to the low academic achievement of African Americans (Jonassen & Grabowski, 2012). A study conducted by Lewis (2016) utilizing an online survey to assess the attitudes of adults belonging to various demographics revealed that African Americans are more influenced by the product placement than their White American counterparts. This behavioral characteristic of African Americans demonstrates that the materialistic elements of the African American culture can be attributed to the low educational development of the African American students.

A key concept is the negative peer pressure among the African American students, which has led to the deteriorating academic achievement over the past few years. Based on a survey conducted by Edwards, McMillon, and Turner (2015), the pressure among African Americans to *act African American* by shunning education is a key factor contributing to the poor academic achievement within their community. As a result, African Americans' social attitudes might be holding them back in this respect. The historical background of the African Americans is also a key setback what makes

them to be less accepted by their counterparts in the learning institutions (Buoncrisiani & Buoncrisiani, 2012). Due to their skin tone, African Americans face stereotypes in learning institutions, which is further reverberated by the teaching staff as pointed out by Coakley (2014). As a result, the African American students continue experiencing declining morale in learning because of the stereotypes that they experience in the institutions dominated by Caucasians.

Howard (2016) observed that some of the African American students are gifted and thus, exposing African American male students to the negativity embedded on their race could end up ruining very good talents that could be very useful to the society. The poor treatment of African Americans by their fellow students and the teaching staff in some of the American learning institutions have largely impacted not only the academic lives of these African American students, but also their social lives (Fisher, 2015). Because of the poor social orientation within the social institutions, which are expected to foster positivity and good accepted values in them, some of the African Americans have turned into criminal activities (Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, & Brown, 2014). While ethnicity has been demonstrated to have profound effects on African American students' learning experiences; some of the inequalities that African Americans experiences have been compounded to gender aspects within the African American community, which will be discussed in the next section.

Gender Gap in American Education

There is evidence that male African American achievements are at a lower level than their female counterparts due to negative attitude, behavior, discipline, expectations,

and perceptions by principals. Strayhorn and DeVita (2009) indicated there is a significant difference (27.2%) between the overall enrollments of female African Americans compared to their male counterparts, with females being the largest population in terms of enrollment in the U.S. higher learning institutions. According to Brooks (2012), there has been an increase in the overall female enrollment over the past few years compared to that of males in the African American community. Fisher (2015) reported that from the mid-1970s up to 2013, the African American female enrollment in higher learning institutions has increased about 126%, whereas that of their male counterparts has not even reached half of the females with only 51%. Moreover, the graduation rate of African American males has even been very low with many of them staying in the universities for longer periods than expected. A bachelor's degree, which is expected to be completed within a 4-year period, requires an average African American male student 6 years or more (Wright, 2011). Among the key factors, which contribute to this trend, include frequent suspensions of African American male students, which in return, prolong their studying period. Based on the way more males are reportedly more affected by school suspensions, African American male students are experiencing more hardships and challenges as they struggle to complete their higher education.

Roles of Principals

From a generic perspective, one of the key roles of the principal as suggested by Fullan (2014) is to influence policies coming within and outside of the school. The principal is expected to work closely with the superintendent and other officials from the U.S. Department of Education, in order to come up with the best policies that enhance

learning within the school (Howard, 2016). As suggested by Bowe, Ball, and Gold (2017), the principal should have the interests of each student within the school covered in every decision taken.

Principals should also act as the role model for not only the students, but also the teachers within the school to emulate (Whitehead, Boschee, & Decker, 2012). Being the leader in the school, the principal should possess the qualities and characteristics of a good leader by acting as the role model for all the values promoted within the school (Bowman, 2012). The school principal is expected to ensure that the institutional culture is safeguarded and upheld. In cases of oppressive institutional culture, Shatzer et al. (2014) suggested that the principal has the ultimately responsibility of changing the culture to suit every stakeholder within the school. In this case, the principal should ensure that the necessary values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors exercised within the school are accepted on social and legal spheres. The principal is expected to be a role model in upholding cultural values, which do not oppress some of the stakeholders. The principal should, therefore, uphold an institutional culture that values diversity.

Another key role of the principals is to manage diversity and provide an effective learning environment for all the students (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). Principals are expected to be impartial in all the decisions they make by acknowledging diversity within the institutions and work forward towards achieving a common goal for all: academic success (Shatzer et al., 2014). Robbins and Alvy (2014) claimed that some school principals go to the extent of treating African American students differently from their Caucasian counterparts and some principals who practice this behavior do not value

diversity. Since school principals are expected to give the students equal learning opportunities favoring some, while oppressing others. When the students notice lack of impartiality in principals' decisions, they tend to develop negative attitudes toward learning (Nieto, 2015). Moreover, many African American students tend to drop out from school as a result of mistreatment by the principals, teachers or their fellow students. By considering the diversity needs of the African American students, the principals will be able to foster the school completion rate of African American male students.

Considering that the principals are responsible for the availability of the learning resources within the school, they should ensure that the pedagogy adopted in the school is relevant to the students regarding their culture (DuFour et al., 2010). Through applying a culturally significant pedagogy for a highly diverse pool of students is challenging (Thompson & Campbell, 2013); a study conducted by Hardy and Tolhurst (2014) suggested that adopting simple standards in the learning environment where fairness is exercised is an important factor that contributes toward effective learning despite the cultural diversity among the learners. As such, the role of the principal is to ensure that the pedagogy adopted by the teachers is culturally relevant to all the students regardless of their race, gender, or ethnicity as a way of promoting cohesiveness in the school.

Moreover, the school principals are responsible for ensuring student centered learning in their schools. Similarly, Nieto (2015) argued that since the school must be able to meet the specific learning needs of the students, the ultimate role of the principal is to ensure that the diverse learning needs of the students are catered for within the school (Lonergan, Simmie, & Moles, 2012). As such, adopting effective teaching

strategies that meet all the needs of the students ensure that diverse needs of the students within the school are catered for. Considering that most of the African American students are brought up in poor social and economic backgrounds, the role of the school principal is to ensure that such students are socially oriented into the society, with consideration of the poor economic backgrounds. From this, it can be deduced that, school principals, their belief systems, attitudes and practices play an important role in the academic success of students.

Factors Affecting Academic Achievement of African American Male Students

Based on the past studies conducted by various scholars, the learning environment and the school leadership play a central role towards influencing the academic achievement of African American male students (Tatum & Muhammad, 2012). The learning environment is considered by Tatum and Muhammad (2012) to be one of the key factors that determine the academic achievement of students. When the school environment is unfavorable, and stressful, then the learner ends up performing very poorly in his or her academic work. A continued trend of Academic American students facing stereotyping by their fellow students, but also by some of their Caucasian teachers has affected the quality of learning that African American males get in school (Shatzer, et al., 2014). Some of the African American students are mocked by their fellow Caucasians based on their skin color with allegations that they are unfit for quality education and that they should go back to their native lands. A study conducted by Fisher (2015) indicated that their fellow Caucasians, to an extent that they are put in separate classrooms with

separate dining facilities, mock some of the African American students in middle-learning institutions in the United States.

Further, a study conducted by Codrington and Fairchild (2012) indicated African American students aged between 6 and 21 years were 2.28 times more likely to look for services of counseling out of emotional disturbance than their fellow counterparts of similar age. As a result, many of the African American male students are in constant pressure within the learning institutions arising from harassment and mockery by their fellow students. Past studies have shown that some of the teachers consider male African Americans as mentally retarded to an extent of referring them to special education, with chances of an African American student being referred to special education program being 2.86 times more likely than their fellow students from other ethnic/racial groups (Codrington & Fairchild, 2012; Mullen & Robertson, 2014).

The institutional culture has also been pointed out as a factor of school management that contributes to low academic achievement among African American male students. Bowman (2012) described cultural aspects like value for equality among others plays a central role in determining the success of students in an ethnically diverse learning environment. According to White et al. (2013), some of the school cultures show preference for Caucasians while offering some discrimination to African Americans. Buckelew and Fishman (2011) found African American male students are 2.3 times more likely to receive punishment from either teachers or the principal than the other students. Regarding the way more African American males are prone to dropping out of school, the culture of looking down upon the African Americans in some of the schools plays a

critical role in developing negative morale among the African American students towards academic activities (Howard, 2016).

Another aspect of learning environment, which plays a central role in influencing the academic achievement of students is the availability of learning resources (Fuligni, 2007). Based on a study conducted by Moore and Lewis (2012), many of the African American students attend learning institutions which face the problem of resources scarcity including learning materials and under-qualified teachers (Nieto, 2015). The unavailability of learning resources can be used to explain the high level of low academic achievement among African Americans. The learning environment of African American students can be unfavorable for high academic achievement because the enabling factors like quality learning resources are lacking. Theoharis and Brooks (2012) revealed that some of the schools that are dominated by African Americans have limited learning resources like books, while some of the teachers are under qualified which further compromises the quality of education they receive. The high level of low academic achievement among African American students can be attributed to poor and unfavorable learning environment. The role of school principals, therefore, remains fundamental in facilitating an equitable learning environment where all learners are given fair treatment regardless of their gender or ethnicity backgrounds.

Implications

The implications of these project findings were to shed light on the evolving role of principals in managing diversity in the contemporary learning environment. The findings obtained in this study are expected to act as a policy development guide to

enable African American students to be able to achieve their academic goals through a favorable learning environment and a supportive school principal.

Student achievement is one of the main goals of every learning institution where the role of the school principal is fundamental in facilitating a favorable learning where every student's needs are met. Based on Nieto's (2015) ideas, students are motivated to learn when they perceive an equitable learning environment where no group of learners is more favored than another based on racial factors. Studying the role played by school principals is expected to have various implications both at practical and theoretical realms. The results obtained in this study may have direct impact on how school principals should promote academic achievement of African American males by providing a favorable learning environment where equity is promoted. As such, the findings are expected to establish a framework for policymakers in schools where principals are expected to facilitate the implementation of effective administrative practices, which promote equity access to learning both to Natives and the non-Natives.

Conducting this project is expected to shed light on the evolving role of principals in managing diversity in the contemporary learning environment. The findings obtained in this study are expected to act as a policy development guide to enable African American students to be able to achieve their academic goals through favorable learning environments and supportive school leadership through the principal. At the conclusion of the proposed study, I anticipate establishing long-term and short-term strategies to mitigate African American males from low academic achievement by exploring the role of school principals towards achieving this goal.

Summary and Conclusions

In this literature review section, the key issues outline the possibility of significant level of discrimination across the African American male student population at a relatively higher level than other students, especially the Caucasian students, in various learning institutions in the country. The discrimination faced by African American male students is demonstrated in the way they face various challenges including corporal punishment, higher chances of being suspended or expelled, and very high chances of engaging in criminal activities because of low academic achievement, reinforced by their poor social orientation and low economic status.

According to the literature, there is a gender gap among the African American students in terms of college completion rates where a larger number of females has been completing their postsecondary level education than their male counterparts. However, the learning environment for African American male students can be considered as unfavorable for them. Regarding the conceptual framework adopted in this study, it was revealed that assessing the behaviors, attitudes, and practices of principals toward CRT is important, since CRT ensures effective diversity management and principals have the required power to create and manage CRT. As such, the school principals are expected to ensure that African American male students do not experience discrimination in their learning institutions, which could adversely affect their academic achievement. This study may contribute to social change by shedding light on the perceived impact of school principals in promoting academic achievement of African American male students.

This qualitative case study will be organized into five sections. The organization of these chapters reflects the research process that involved formulation of the study topic and objectives, background study on the topic of interest, data collection, data presentation, and discussion of study results to answer the research questions and draw conclusions respectively. Section 3 presents the proposed methodological approach to investigate the perceived impact principals have on African American males in the context of the conceptual framework in this section.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present the methodological approach to the research problem and discuss the research design, participants and demographics, instruments and materials, and data collection procedures adopted. The choice of research design and data collection tools were guided by the nature of the research problem where much of the focus in this study was given to the perceived impact principals have on African American males' academic achievement. My choice of research design was guided by the historical trends of low academic achievement of African American learners. The data analysis techniques adopted and ethical considerations employed in dealing with human participants are also detailed before the chapter concludes. The purpose of Section 3 is to provide justifications for the various research data collection methods employed in this study.

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the principals' self-perceived beliefs and attitudes toward enhancing the learning experiences of African American males?

RQ2: What are the principals' practices and improvements to support the academic achievement of African American males?

RQ3: What have been the experiences and outcomes of programs that principals have implemented for African American students?

The use of a qualitative research method was considered to be the most appropriate for this study based on the nature of the research problem. As described by Jackson (2010), understanding social phenomenon experienced by human beings are best explored using qualitative methods. In order to evoke the experiences of school principals with African

American male students, I used qualitative data collection procedures in this study, which allowed for the immersion into the participants' experiences. Considering the research question underpinning this study, adopting qualitative data collection methods helped me comprehensively gather the perceptions and experiences of school principals with African American male students.

Research Design and Rationale

For this study, I employed a qualitative method because this approach allows for the study of the subjective experiences of participants in a research study to provide in-depth exploration of a research problem (see Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). In a case study research design, smaller units are considered for analysis (Yin, 2018). In addition, since the context of the study was in its natural setting (i.e., schools in this current case) and given the aim of the study was to apply and understand constructs of the study (i.e., CRT in this case), the case study design was used (see Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000). According to Yin (2018), a case study is an empirical method that “involves a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 15). In this study, I could not make a separate distinction between the impact of principals on African American males' achievement (i.e., the phenomenon) and context (i.e., the school setting). The aim of this study was to understand the impact of principals on African American males' achievement in the high school environment.

Unlike quantitative research design, which mainly focuses on scientific measurement of the collected data (Saunders et al., 2009), a case study approach was

selected for this study because it allows for in-depth analysis of beliefs, attitudes, and practices of principals regarding CRT. McGee (2013) found an academic performance gap exists in the U.S. higher education system between African American males and their White American counterparts. Addressing the needs of African American male students using effective diversity management practices may help in tackling the academic achievement gap between African American males and their White American counterparts.

In the context of the chosen methodology for this study, much of the focus was given to the opinions of school principals regarding CRT. Lonergan, Simmie, and Moles (2012) revealed that becoming culturally proficient educators is a contemporary issue facing school principals where students from diverse cultural backgrounds are dominating learning institutions. As a result, adopting a qualitative case study methodology for this study enabled me to investigate the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of principals pertinent to CRT. Considering that the case study design is based on the subjectivity of reality while also indicting the need to understand how humans view themselves and the world within them (Saunders et al., 2009), my adoption of a qualitative case study approach in this study helped me understand how principals view the problem of African American male students' academic underachievement. By using a qualitative research approach, I expected to establish evidence concerning the role school principals play in enhancing the learning experiences of African American male students (see Kumar, 2010).

Role of the Researcher

I acted as researcher-as-instrument (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2012) for the collection and analysis of data in this study. Before the actual interview process, I obtained consent from each participant in the study (see Appendix B). A total of six respondents were selected to participate in this study. I distributed the informed consent form to the selected participant a week before the actual data collection process began. In the interviews, notes were taken on the key issues highlighted by the participants. Consent was also obtained from the participants to audio record the interview sessions, which were also corroborated with the notes taken during the interviews for clarity during the data analysis stage. By focusing on the data collection and analysis, I was able to deduce the impact principals have on African American male students' academic success in high schools in this study.

I examined the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of principals pertinent to CRT and impacting the academic achievement of African American male students. I also focused on building a relationship of trust with the principal participants by developing a rapport with them. I primarily allowed the participants to discuss generic topics of interest, the highs and lows of their professional lives, and their connection to student diversity. Eventually, I connected the discussion to the research phenomenon without creating an obvious bound within the strict boundaries of data collection or the semi structured interview process. I understood that principals are human beings and would provide honest opinions only when a conducive and friendly environment prevailed. Such flexibility within the boundaries of research ethics facilitated the acquisition of the

required information from the participants (see McBurney & White, 2009). Highly reliable and valid data were collected on the research problem, which contributed towards enhancing the reliability and validity of the entire research.

Methodology

Participant Selection

I employed a purposive selection strategy in which participants were chosen based on certain criteria (see Saunders et al., 2009). A total of six participants were selected for interviewing. The six campuses across the Hitchcock ISD and La Marque ISD constituted the research setting this study for three reasons:(a) the two ISDs were featured under the improvement required index of the Texas academic performance report for 2015–2016 (TEA, 2017a); (b) the six schools consisted of African American male students that featured below the Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance based on the STAAR index for any of the 3years:2013–2014, 2014–2015, or 2015-2016; and (c) the schools also reported disciplinary issues associated with African American male students for 1 of the 3 years of 2013–2014, 2014–2015, or 2015–2016. Since this was a study of the opinions of principals belonging to schools with African American male students that featured below the Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance based on the STAAR index, the perspectives of the principals helped understand the root cause of the failure of African American male students from a CRT perspective.

The principals constituted the sample for this study. Irrespective of their race and gender, principals and assistant principals who worked within their current school district for more than 2 years and had instituted a new PD or CRT program or started a new

student program for African American students were considered as a data source. The fundamental idea behind this decision was to ensure that the selected principals were aware of the dynamics and trends in their schools.

Based on purposive sampling methods, I aimed at incorporating the opinions of the principals and assistant principals belonging to the two ISD in this study. A purposive sampling method was preferred in this study because of its ability to ensure that only the most suitable participants with the best understanding of the research problem are incorporated in the data collection (see Saunders et al., 2009). My selection of the participants was guided by the nature of the high school campuses based on the three criteria discussed earlier in this section.

Instrumentation

Data collection for qualitative studies is commonly in the form of interviews, and the researcher is the primary instrument (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). I was the sole researcher for this study. I conducted six, face-to-face, semi structured interviews using an interview guide approach. The interview guide approach is intended to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee (Seidman, 2013). The researcher-designed interview guide was based on Merriam and Tisdale's (2016) recommendations for conducting effective interviews for qualitative research. Merriam and Tisdale recommended the following techniques for conducting good interviews:

- Interview guide includes a mix of more and less structured interview questions.
- All questions used flexibly.

- Usually specific data required from all respondents.
- Largest part of interview guided by list of questions or issues to be explored.
- No predetermined wording or order.

In-depth interviews were preferred in this study because such interviews enabled for the deeper exploration of a research problem where I engaged the participants in one-on-one exchanges of information. Moreover, semi structured interviews were appropriate for this study because interviews ensured that I not only collected comprehensive qualitative information on the research problem but also got an opportunity to acquire expressed information from the participants (see Crowther & Lancaster, 2012; Kumar, 2010).

Though interviews are time consuming (Saunders et al., 2009), they were preferred in this study because it aimed at collecting comprehensive information regarding the perceived impact of principals on the academic achievement of African American males. Much of my focus during the interviews was based on collecting the existing belief systems, attitudes, and practices of the principals toward CRT. During data collection, I used an audio recorder as well as a pen and notebook to record the responses given by the interviewees.

Data Collection Process

I collected the qualitative data from a sample of high school principals who serve as instructional leaders. The use of in-depth interviews with the principals was a holistic approach towards getting deeper insight into the perceived impact principals have on African American male students. Before the actual interview process, the participants

were provided with copies of informed consent forms by e-mail to demonstrate their willingness to participate, which was also part of ethical considerations in this study. The informed consent forms were sent to the participants through their personal e-mail addresses to foster their confidentiality. After the participants agreed to take part in the study and, consequently, filled out the informed consent forms, I sent the interview protocol to them for preview before making an appointment to meet at a mutually convenient, comfortable location (i.e., the principals' offices). To protect their anonymity and avoid possible distractions, I posted a *Do not disturb* sign outside the principals' offices. The interviews lasted approximately 1 hour. I mentioned the possibility of a follow-up interview just in case I needed clarification from one or more participants.

The interview process involved asking participants general, open-ended questions, and audio recording their responses. Audio recording helped ensure that all responses were available for analysis. I used a digital recorder and took handwritten notes. The audio recorder was tested for sound quality prior to each interview. The research questions which guided this study can be found in the researcher-designed interview protocol (see Appendix C). Recordings of anonymous interviews were transcribed by third-party. No identification of the person being interviewed was in the transcript. This allowed me to have time to review the transcripts for analysis.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted for data analysis of the data collected. Considering the purpose of this study was to assess the viability of the different strategies that principals have put in place in their respective schools to help improve the academic

outcome of African American male students, I believe that using thematic analysis enabled a critical establishment of the discourse connections that exist between the school principals and the academic achievement of the African American male students.

Thematic analysis strategy utilized coding to identify the various themes and patterns that emerged from the data in order to provide an understanding of general perspectives of the participants with African American male students. After data collection, the interviews were compiled and transcribed for easier analysis. I used the transcribed data and used statistical data analytic techniques to code the interview data into themes. These themes were assigned codes through open and axial coding as representatives of the significant insights under consideration. The recurring patterns and themes then were triangulated and deduced from the qualitative data and developed as a presentation of the extracted information.

In addition, certain strategies, specified by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) are used to generate meaning from the collected data. For instance, strategies such as noting patterns and themes, observing plausibility and clustering the data into categories or classes, making metaphors, integrating and counting the data, making contrasts and comparisons, dividing the variables, factoring the variables, identifying the relationship between the variables, assessing the presence of intervening variables, developing a chain of evidence and creating a conceptual or theoretical coherence from the collected data, were used while analyzing the data.

The data analysis methods that I used to analyze data from the semi structured interviews were thematic analysis and the constant comparative method. The analysis

was done manually rather than using electronic data analysis software, although consideration was given to the use of electronic data analysis software. The rationale for conducting the analysis manually was the small number of participants hence manageable amount of data for manual analysis. According to Harding (2019), thematic analysis “involves identifying themes that emerge from the data” (p. 104). Gibson and Brown (2009) noted that there are three aims of thematic analysis: examining commonalities, examining differences, and examining relationships.

Member Checking

Transcribed data were presented to participants for member checks. Participants were afforded the opportunity to review their responses at the end of the interview sessions, Participants were also given the opportunity to review their respective transcriptions and add or delete entries in the transcript to accurately reflect their intended responses to the interview questions. Once the participants returned the transcripts with his or her amendments, the actual thematic analysis process began. None of the participants had issues with the accuracy of transcriptions. Thus, all responses were used during the data analysis process.

Data Analysis and Coding

Harding (2019) argued that a thematic analysis involves making summaries and comparisons. According to Harding (2019), the process of summarizing usually involves the following steps:

1. Identify the research objective(s) that the section of the transcript is most relevant to.

2. Decide which pieces of information or opinion are most relevant to the objective/s and which are details that do not need to be included in the summary.
3. Decide where (if at all) there is repetition that needs to be eliminated.
4. On the basis of these decisions, write brief notes (p. 12).

Harding (2019) suggested that codes can help to identify commonalities and differences in the data. Codes are notes in the margins of an interview transcript. I reviewed the notes and transcripts of the individual interviews and identified categories for coding. I carefully listened to each audiotape and compared it to transcriptions for accuracy. I read the transcripts, and phrases of content that is similar were marked. Gibson and Brown (2009) made a distinction between a priori codes and empirical codes. Prior codes are created to reflect categories that are already of interest before the research has begun; empirical codes are derived while reading through the data, as points of importance and commonality are identified (Gibson & Brown, 2009).

Constant Comparative Method

Harding (2019) explained that a thematic analysis also involves using the constant comparative method to identify similarities and differences between cases in a dataset. Based on statements made by study participants, I identified three types of codes. The first types were codes that were repeated and applied to enough participants to be considered an emerging theme. The second types were codes that stood out because they did not apply to enough participants to constitute a theme. The third types were codes that

applied to a good number of participants but could not be included in any of the initial categories.

Trustworthiness

Data collected in this study were stored in print and recorded media. The notes taken during the interviews were transcribed and securely stored on my personal computer, which is password protected to prevent third parties, other than the transcriptionist, from accessing the data. Moreover, since I also recorded the interview sessions, the recorded interviews were also stored on the computer's hard drive. The original notebooks and recording tapes were stored in a locked file cabinet and destroyed after the completion of this study. A backup copy of interview transcripts was stored in my password protected iCloud account in case my personal computer breaks down before the completion of the study. This strategy ensured credibility and maintained privacy with a belief that the data were not going to be accessible to third parties.

In this study, I adhered to rigor in this qualitative research, which may be prone to preconceived ideas by me. In order to reduce researcher bias in this study, I employed bracketing strategy which is considered by Creswell (2012) to be associated with setting aside all preconceptions and personal beliefs about a research problem. By adopting the bracketing strategy, it is my belief that credibility issues associated with researcher bias was avoided.

To ensure trustworthiness and validity of the findings, representativeness of the chosen sample was primarily checked, which was followed by checking for any bias (researcher), triangulation of CRT theory and the method (semi structured interviews),

weighing the evidence, identifying any unpatterns or outliers in the collected data or the source itself, identifying extreme cases or surprises, identifying negative evidence and conducting if-then tests and ruling out non-conforming relations, identifying rival explanations and getting feedback from the participants. To get feedback from the participants, avoid researcher bias, and ensure the validity, I decided to contact two principals once the analysis was conducted. The primary assumption in the study is principals are concerned with the best outcome for all their students regardless of their socio-economic and cultural class. The assumption is the basis on which the study was conducted, whereby all principals were assumed to act to promote learning and only their extent of involvement and approaches differed.

Ethical Procedures

With human participants being involved in this study, I first ensured the safety of the participants (physical, emotional, and psychological). The Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved my doctoral project before proceeding to the actual research process. The IRB approval number is 10-26-18-0040609. Adherence to ethical treatment of the participants is a key measure that Walden University IRB stipulates. With full understanding of the implications of research ethics in any research, I made sure the participants have informed consent during the data collection process.

Another key ethical concern that I implemented was to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the participants was safeguarded (Yin, 2018). This was accomplished by assuring them through the concept of anonymity. The names of principals, students or the

schools that are involved will not be published in this paper to maintain their anonymity and thus pseudonyms were used. Moreover, I did not compel the participants to participate in this study; instead, they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time. They were informed of this through the consent forms. This ensures voluntary participation. Additionally, the actual raw data collected through the transcription of the interviews was protected through a strong password. I will solely have access to these data and the original data will be produced to the supervisory panel only upon request. The data stored in my PC will be deleted after a period of five years. The following chapter discusses the findings of the current study. By employing these ethical considerations, I was able to conduct a credible study whose findings had high external validity.

Summary

This section includes an overview of the research methodology adopted in executing the current project where the research design, methods of data collection, data analysis, evaluation, and ethical issues involved in this study were presented. As is evidenced in this section, this is a qualitative case study; the purpose of this qualitative case study was to assess the viability of the different strategies that principals have put in place in their respective schools to help improve the academic outcome of African American male students.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this chapter, I present the setting of the study, the demographics of research participants, the procedures that I used to collect the data, the process of data analysis, and the results. The purpose of this qualitative study was to assess the viability of the different strategies that principals have put in place in their respective schools to help improve the academic outcomes of African American male students. To accomplish this purpose, I employed an exploratory, single case study design. According to Yin (2018), a case study is an empirical method that “involves a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 15). Through use of this design, in semi structured, in-depth interviews, I asked open-ended questions that permitted school principals, who volunteered to participate in this study, the freedom and liberty to share their beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and practices. The purpose of the study gave rise to the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the principals’ self-perceived beliefs and attitudes toward enhancing the learning experiences of African American males?

RQ2: What are the principals’ practices and improvements to support the academic achievement of African American males?

RQ3: What have been the experiences and outcomes of programs that principals have implemented for African American students?

Chapter 4 contains the results of this single case study. The research setting for participant selection, participant demographics, and data collection procedures are

described. In addition, specific data analysis procedures are described. Evidence of the trustworthiness of this qualitative research is presented relating to the constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally, the results or key findings are analyzed in relation to the research questions.

Setting

I purposefully selected the two Texas ISDs for this single case study based on their Improvement Required school district accountability ratings (TEA, 2016). The six campuses across various ISDs comprised the research setting. In addition, the six campuses consisted of African American male students that were assessed below the Level II: Satisfactory Performance based on the STAAR index for any of the following 3 years: 2013–2014, 2014–2015, or 2015–2016. The six campuses also reported disciplinary issues associated with African American male students for 1 of the 3 years of 2013–2014, 2014–2015, or 2015–2016.

Potential participants were purposefully selected based on the following criteria: (a) they (i.e., principals) must have worked in the current school district for more than 2 years and (b) must have instituted new PD or CRT programs or started a new student program for African American students. Purposeful selection of the case study and participants was appropriate because the goal of case study design is to inform researchers about the experiences of a population and to obtain the richest data possible (see Maxwell, 2013; Saunders et al., 2009).

Table 1 shows the demographic makeup of the participants, all of whom were present at one of the two Texas ISDs where Improvement Required TEA accountability

ratings were assigned. Six participants volunteered for this study: five male principals and one female principal. Their years of experience ranged from 7 to 25 years. I conducted interviews with the participants beginning in November 2018 and ending January 2019.

Table 1

Demographics of the Participants

Participant identifier	Gender	Ethnicity/Race	Years of experience	Position	Interview date
Participant 1	Female	African American	22	Principal	November 6, 2018
Participant 2	Male	African American	19	Principal	November 15, 2018
Participant 3	Male	African American	18	Principal	November 19, 2018
Participant 4	Male	African American	25	Principal	November 19, 2018
Participant 5	Female	White	7	Principal	January 7, 2019
Participant 6	Male	African American	8	Principal	January 11, 2019

Data Collection

I collected the interview data as planned in one-on-one, audio-recorded interviews with the six principals. I acted as researcher-as-instrument (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). The initial step in the data collection process was obtaining Walden University IRB approval. Data collection began once IRB approval was granted by Walden University.

The participants met the criteria set forth at the beginning of the study. Principals were interviewed in their individual offices. I used semi structured interviews with open-ended questions. Participants were given pseudonyms, such as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, etc., to keep their personal information private. The one-on-one interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes. I also took field notes during the interview process.

Upon gaining consent, I audio recorded and later transcribed the data from the six interviews, comparing results with the notes taken during the interviews.

In qualitative research, it is important to identify and analyze discrepant cases in order to test the validity of the data (Wolcott, 1990). Some instances are such that no particular interpretation can be drawn from them. These instances usually call attention to important defects on that particular account. To deal with discrepant cases, I rigorously examined both supporting and discrepant data in order to assess if it was reasonable to retain the conclusion. In addition to that, I also reported discrepant evidence to the readers so that they evaluate it and draw their own conclusions about it (see Wolcott, 1990).

Results

In this section, I examine the results, specifically organized by research question. Each interview question was organized and aligned appropriately with each research question. The analysis of data included verbatim passages and direct quotations from participants, as described by Creswell (2009). I include verbatim passages as illustration, evidence, and to give participants a voice. I chose to display the most common and the most discrepant responses rather than all participant quotes that emerged from the data. I also chose excerpts that were noteworthy but not enough to be a theme. Participant numbers were used as identifiers to protect respondents' identities.

Research Question 1

Regarding Research Question 1, the following general themes emerged: (a) effective classroom management and (b) financial support.

Effective classroom management. Effective classroom management was found to be critical part of helping African American male students cope with class activities. In a class with students from diverse backgrounds, disruptions are a common occurrence due to their differences. For instance, Participant 4 mentioned that African American students normally cause distractions in class because they have many more needs than the others. In many instances, they are the ones who are always in need of additional explanations from the teacher or additional reading and writing materials. This calls for teachers to be understanding and supportive of African American male students to help them be at par with the others. For example, Participant 4 said, “These Black boys need additional support. Once you started talking about it and put it out there and give them support that they, I know this is what’s going on.” This is what translates to effective classroom management. Participant 2 talked about his strategy of classroom management, which involved grouping students into homogeneous classrooms so that their needs are addressed as a single issue affecting all students in that class. Participant 3 had used a similar approach of classroom management as that presented by Participant 2 only that in his method, instead of grouping students into homogeneous classrooms, he clustered them into small groups of different cultures within the same no homogenous classroom. This method did not involve permanent groups; instead, the groups were temporary and were allocated different tasks such that students were to shift groups several times, completing different tasks each time in the process. On the other hand, Participant 1 expressed the opinion that effective classroom management techniques were essential in enhancing the learning experiences of African American male students by stating,

As a principal, I meet with new teachers who struggle with classroom management. When I observe their classrooms, many new teachers show fear in the classroom which often creates an imbalance of power with any student, especially males regardless of ethnicity. Typically, the new teacher that struggles will be a female teacher.

Simply put, Participant 1 believed that poor classroom management by some teachers was the genesis of bad learning experiences among African American male students. In contrast, Participant 4 provided his beliefs about what teachers can do to effectively manage their classrooms. He said that teachers needed to walk more in classrooms in order to reduce the disruptions and understand the needs of African American male students.

Participants 5 and 6 expressed variations regarding this theme. For Participant 5, instead of having teachers manage their classrooms, a disciplinary team including the principal makes frequent visits to classrooms to help teachers handle discipline cases. Similarly, Participant 6 reported visiting classrooms to help teachers manage behavior issues. This type of classroom management makes teachers less involved unlike the other participants who reported teachers to be primarily involved in classroom management.

Financial support. Even though not all participants mentioned the lack of financial support, it still emerged as an important theme from two of the responses. Both Participants 1 and 4 were concerned with the amount of funds they receive from authorities. Apparently, the funding is not evenly distributed among the schools in different districts. This leaves some schools with little money to hire more qualified

teachers while giving other schools with more funds a competitive edge. For example,

Participant 4 stated:

The number one issue with the rules sector is funding. We border two large suburban districts that are middle-class suburban districts. One is the third largest district in the state, and I think the other is about the seventh largest. It's a magnet for people moving into the area. The biggest thing is we don't get the funding that those districts get because we basically are a rooftop agrarian society, which means a lot of our tax base comes from land, but a lot of their land is exempt due to the fact that we were never designated as an agrarian culture. They don't have to pay as much land-based taxes as, say; you would on a rooftop, per se. There are a few businesses in the area that support the district, but the biggest thing is the funding that we don't get. That is paramount to the children that we serve.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Participant 1 who said, "As the principal of an inner-city high school, with a decentralized budget, it is difficult to hire qualified teachers for our population." The lack of proper financial support cripples the efforts of principals to provide quality education to their students. Participant 1 went further to say, "To be quite honest, teachers with the most talent are highly sought after, and more times than not, choose to work at more affluent campuses. Primarily because of resources and class sizes." Issues of finances were also addressed by Participant 5 when she mentioned her goal of providing quality student instruction. According to her explanation, this goal needed a lot of funds. She said,

It is also a goal of mine and that of the district to hire the strongest teachers in the region. This is done by offering outstanding new teacher employment packets, visiting colleges to recruit excellent teachers, offering signing bonuses in hard-to-fill areas and providing a strong mentor program for first- and second-year teachers.

Clearly, to have all these plans put in place requires heavy financial support from relevant authorities.

Research Question 2

In regard to Research Question 2, all principals reported to be working positively towards improving the academic achievement of African American male students in their schools. The themes that emerged regarding this research question included mentoring, student support programs, and corrective action.

To begin with, Participant 6 mentioned that he, apart from having teachers track students, uses student tracking charts that help students own their scores and set goals for their achievement. In this way, students knew what they needed to study and learn at any particular time. Participant 2 also had the same practice as a core element of a mentorship program. He said that he had been tracking African American male students on their weak academic, social, and emotional and helping them get where they needed to be in those weak areas. Notably, Participant 1 reported that she used student activity pictures in the hallway to highlight the achievement of students in different activities so that all students could be motivated to work hard. At the end of the year, students who performed well have the privilege to take their photos home and it makes them proud. Participant 5,

on the other hand, discussed that she had recorded improvements in extracurricular and leadership activities. She said that African American male students are now well represented in these areas as opposed to earlier times. She also added that African American male students nowadays enroll in a local junior college in larger numbers when they graduate from high school.

Participant 4 talked about using kinesthetic, differentiated instruction, which allows teachers to get students moving as they teach. This kind of practice ensures the constant monitoring of students and helps them maintain alertness in classrooms. In a statement, he said:

Even with math we will, they had one of our teachers found or something. Kids were able to do math problems at different positive hallways. She could stand at the hallway, in the hallway it was so long they will do math problems on walls like they will go, but it was getting them moving, getting them out. Kinesthetic learning, which was huge for us.

Still in terms of improvement, Participant 3 cited that he had seen a rising level of accountability as students made more advancements in class on their own. In other words, through instructional leadership, students work to achieve the expectations that teachers have for them with less trouble.

Instructional leadership

All six participants believed that leadership based on instructions, otherwise referred to as instructional leadership, is the leading approach to support academic achievement of African American males. Some participating principals shared their

instructional school improvement plans. For instance, Participant 1 mentioned that her goal as a principal was to oversee and monitor the school's instructional program which she initiated herself. On the same note, Participant 4 also identified how important it is to have a solid instructional leadership for remedial lessons with the target to meet the needs of African American male students. He said:

And so that was the biggest thing we had was that one-hour lunch to be able to connect with those African American male students. What we did too is that during those PLC's, we list them by name, they started to target tutorials and bring them in five students at a time...It was five teachers per area, so each one of them had about 30 kids that we serve and then we were targeting them like that small group instruction is targeted interventions to be able to meet the needs of those kids. And that's what we did to help those African American male students.

Further, Participant 6 said that his instructional goal was to lead students into reading and performing mathematics at grade level as measured by the SAT-9.

Participant 5 mentioned that she utilized instructional strategies that were beneficial for all students from all ethnicities including African American male students. In the interview, she said:

We also have implemented the Fundamental 5 Instructional Model developed by Sean Cain throughout the school. We track academic achievement on state tests by subgroups and we closely monitor the success or lack of success by each group. Basically, we offer interventions such as specially designed tutorials and small group instruction for students who are not achieving well.

Similarly, Participant 3 had developed instructional leadership practices that he said needed consistency to work well. In the interview, he reported that one of his top priorities for academic improvement was developing instructional systems. He said:

So right here we'll use what we call best practices and we're coaching the teachers on how to deconstruct the TEKS and then also then how to properly plan and then also definitely be able to align the work that they give students to be a student centered, student created that also have a real world application.

Participant 2 reported to have made available a number of resources such as books and computers to the teachers in order to support their instructional strategies. He mentioned that in his school, teachers ensure that they keep track of every student under their care.

Mentorship and Student Support Programs

Mentorship and student support programs were implemented for different groups of students. Although Participant 6 said that he used mentors on and off campus as well as accountability partners to help African American male students improve their academic achievements. He also added that he provided them with a teacher to report to for assistance when needed to give them “a feeling of consecutiveness.” In his response on how he helped students improve in academics, Participant 2 said “Putting in tutorials, increased the rigor in the classroom. I have also pushed for more of the AP courses. I have also brought in dual credit courses to help my students be successful.” Participant 2 said that he kept good track of African American males by assigning them specific students to help them. He did so by first identifying students who are at risk of failing or dropping out of school and then pairing them up with mentors to help them manage their problems. He claimed that he had used this program for the past 3 years and the first group of African American male beneficiaries had graduated in 2018.

The mentorship and student support programs have also played a role in helping teachers identify the concerns of minority students including African American male students. Participant 3 reported that there was one unique Assistant Principal on campus—a male teacher out of prison. Thus, he has a vantage or viewpoint of properly assessing a student simply by looking at him or her and his or her choices. The teacher is thus capable of having real conversations about their unruly tendencies. Having those real conversations with the students enables the students to talk about their issues while

enabling them to reach out in an open manner. This helps teachers provide support necessary for African American male students to perform well in school.

One discrepant case was reported by Participant 5 who talked about intervention programs to help struggling students including Special Education and English Language Learners (ELL) students. This research was specifically looking for strategies that involved helping African American male students. Notably, Participant 5 did not report any specific program for African American males. She instead said that she could only begin a program for African American males under conditions that if their academic achievement level falls far behind the state, other subgroups on the campus or below the academic levels of other subgroups of students in their sister high school.

Corrective action

The principals reported different means by which they used to instill discipline to students or to correct the indiscipline cases. Regarding indiscipline cases, Participants 1 and 4 had focused on corrective actions involving conversations rather than suspensions. For instance, Participant 4 said,

So keeping that academics, we have to differentiate how we teach kids, but we're still teaching them is behavior, behavior and not instruction. So you have to do the same thing. We just have real conversations and not skirt around the issue when we have conversations.

Participant 4 said that as the principal, he puts focus on African American students by rarely sending them home due to discipline issues. He added that there were

disproportionate amounts of referrals regarding discipline of African American males which means that if he decides to send them home for this reason, then there will be imbalance in the application of disciplinary action. Therefore, he suggested that it was better to not send them home but rather look deeply into why they violated a certain code of conduct while keeping them monitored under the school instructional setting. Moreover, Participant 1 mentioned that corrective action involving yelling at kids does not work effectively. Instead, she believed that the best way to deal with indiscipline is to use a gentle approach with a firm stance. In fact, newly recruited teachers in her school are trained on ways of utilizing their voice with appropriate tones to avoid instances of yelling at students.

Significant variations among participants regarding corrective action were also reported. For instance, Participants 1 and 4 applied disciplinary action focusing on dialogue rather than sending students home. They believed that talking to students about their indiscipline actions was a better way of having them acknowledge and correct their mistakes as opposed to sending them home or yelling at them. Participant 3 on the other hand said that he increased the structure of the pamphlets that stipulate the code of conduct for the school. This means that he had discipline controlled by giving students direction they needed. He also encouraged students to avoid truancy and stay disciplined. Participant 5 contacted students with chronic absenteeism and made them attend school. Finally, Participant 6 was of the idea that focusing on teaching students how to conduct themselves was the best way of instilling discipline in them. His teachers taught students life skills such as how to manage money, how to apply for a job, and how to get a side

hustle as part of helping them stay disciplined. Lastly, Participant 5 did not share her ways of combating indiscipline cases as the others did.

Research Question 3

All principals reported positive outcomes after the implementation of programs and strategies aimed at improving the academic achievement of African American students. The theme that emerged regarding RQ3 was improved academic performance.

Improved academic performance

Five principals interviewed in this study reported different degrees of academic improvements for African American male students as a result of strategies they had implemented. One strategy reported by Participant 5 included frequent visits to classrooms with an aim of identifying and assisting teachers with discipline issues. Participant 5 said that in her last 7-year tenure as a principal, she has seen numerous positive changes in academics. She said:

During that time our campus has exceeded the academic levels of the other high schools in most academic areas (based on End of the Course Exams and AP scores). Additionally, when compared to our 40 comparison schools, we normally are in the top 2 quartiles. Additionally, in 2017, our advanced placement scores were above the district and above many of the schools in our 40 comparison groups.

Participant 4 also agreed that after implementing the one-hour lunch program, there has been an overall improvement in the academic achievement scores. He said that the school has now met the achievement standards even though it has not gone from

bottom to top school. He also mentioned that African American male students had improved in science, math, and social studies. Additionally, he stated that African American male students did not have difficulties in class after they reached 11th grade due to this one hour remedial lessons during lunch time. Participant 2, on the same note, reported that since the implementation of Read 180 and System 44 programs, African American male students have improved their literacy levels because the deficiencies they had were met through these programs. As a result, the entire school has achieved the highest graduation rate in the greater Houston area and it is something he is proud of. He mentioned that in his time as a principal, he has had students admitted, go through school, and graduate. It is a great achievement and it shows that the programs are effective. Participant 1 was ill-informed about the programs she implemented citing that she was not sure how they were doing. However, she reported that biology scores had improved and the gaps are closing in for African American males. Therefore, the different programs implemented by all participants resulted in an overall improved academic performance in their respective schools.

One discrepant case about the outcome of implemented programs was reported by Participant 3 who felt that African American males were still performing poorly in academics. He said:

The majority of our varsity football team is African American males and for us we did not have a warning when they fail. African American student fell off the team and then their class attendance decreased. We have to do a better job with our African American male athletes and ensuring we are tracking their success.

This was the only case among the participants that showed African American students' performance not improving despite having measures to help them out.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility of the data is maintained, I was objective throughout the study. Therefore, no personal feelings about the subject were used to inform the study. Additionally, I used triangulation which involved using multiple schools in order to gain deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. Regarding transferability, I recruited participants from several campuses across a wider region hence making sure that the results become a representative of a wide range of population. I sought principals of different schools from a specific area; it means that the results obtained from this study could be used to inform different schools that have diverse learners around the area. The collection of data involved me and the principals hence ensuring dependability. In other words, another researcher can repeat the inquiry by reaching out to the principals of the schools and obtain similar results. To ensure confirmability, I adopted reflexivity technique during data collection and analysis. Through this technique, I developed a reflexive journal in form of a diary where I reflected on the progress of the research process in regards to my personal values and interests. Then, using the diary, I understand that the decisions I made during the research were not biased.

Summary

In this chapter, I summarized the findings gathered from the analysis of the responses to the interview questions. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to assess the viability of the different strategies that principals have put in place in their

respective schools to help improve the academic outcomes of African American male students. Six themes emerged from the analysis of the interview questions: effective classroom management, financial support, instructional leadership, corrective action, mentorship and student support programs, and improved academic performance.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Interpretation of Findings

Based on the results from the respondents, I categorized the main outcomes of this study into the following themes: effective classroom management, financial support, instructional leadership, corrective action, mentorship and student support programs, and improved academic performance. When studied, these themes could help principals develop a better understanding of the academic development and performance of the African American male students in accordance with CRT.

Effective Classroom Management

The principals generally held the opinion that for African American students to record good performance in their academics, they needed to have teachers with excellent classroom management skills. Furthermore, principals believed that for any teacher to make an academic impact on the students in his or her class, he or she must have good classroom management skills. Participant 5 shared that new female teachers were noted to have the most difficulty in managing the classes that have male students and that the students' performance in these classes deteriorated. However, as the teachers mastered the art of classroom management and showed confidence while handling the students, an improvement in the academic performance was noted. Therefore, teachers in charge of African American male students should work to ensure that their classroom management skills grow to make a positive impact on the academic performance of their students. This finding is like those of past researchers, such as Watson et al (2014), who reported that

classes that have teachers with effective management skills record an improvement in students' performance and discipline.

The idea of walking around the class, as reported by Participant 4, aligns with the concepts of CRT because it increases the interaction between the teacher and students, allowing the teacher to understand the needs of students from different backgrounds. For instance, Participant 4 said that teachers needed to walk more in classrooms in order to reduce distractions and have a better understanding of the needs of African American male students.

Another concept of CRT used in classroom management was put forward by Participant 1 who said that she worked with teachers to help students possess the ability to handle failure from the classroom level to life in general. She was worried that students treat failure as the end of the world, which makes them develop even bigger problems like stress; therefore, she teaches them aspects of perseverance and resilience in their day-to-day activities. Effective classroom management goes hand in hand with CRT. According to Johnson (2011), students usually need high-interest materials reflecting their life experiences in order to become actively engaged in their learning. The reason is that students find it interesting and engaging when integrating and reconciling newly acquired knowledge with an already existing wealth of knowledge from their background (Johnson, 2011). This concept of CRT was implemented by Participant 2 who had developed writing and reading comprehension programs. These programs could be appropriate in addressing cultural diversities in classrooms by integrating it with

historical documents and pictures from different cultural backgrounds so that students can read and learn about other cultures.

Financial Support

The results of this study also indicated that the African American schools suffered due to the inadequate funds that they receive from the government. The government determines the amount of money that each school will receive by assessing the amount of taxes collected from the district. The poorer the neighborhood, the lower the taxes that the government receives and the smaller the finances that the schools receive to run its functions. For example, Participant 3 shared that his school does not receive enough funding from the government. The number of business organizations in these areas were also few, which further lowers the taxes raised. The funds received by the schools are, thereby, much lower than the amounts required to run the institutions. These results align with those of past studies that pointed out that some African American schools lack the necessary resources to run effectively (Moore & Lewis, 2012).

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is vital in shaping the curriculum activities to meet the academic needs of the students. When teachers develop and used well-coordinated classroom instruction, chances are they will register better academic results (Bertani et al., 2010). Some of the crucial interventions that produce positive results in academic performance include designed tutorials and small group instruction for students who are not achieving well (Bertani et al., 2010). It is important to note that the implementation of CRT heavily relies on the instructions that teachers give to students, which in turn creates

a conducive classroom climate for improved academic performance (Bertani et al., 2010). Participant 1 acknowledged that the most effective way of implementing CRT is through instructional leadership. As leaders, teachers can utilize culturally responsive instruction by introducing high interest learning materials in classrooms (Samuels, 2018). Having a diverse staff is already an added advantage to dealing with students from diverse backgrounds. For example, Participant 3 said that before training teachers on CRT, he made them aware that diversity amongst them could help them work more effectively than they could without being from different cultural backgrounds. One of the programs he had implemented consisted of one African American man, one Hispanic woman, one White man, and one White woman. This combination formed a diverse instructional staff that was able to help African American male students interact with other cultures. Participant 6 reported to have been using PLCs to strategically provide resources to teachers for instruction as well as to provide embedded training and coaching. This particular tool enables teachers to address the different needs of students regardless of their background, making it a successful CRT tool.

Furthermore, Participant 4 stated that his strategy to help teachers build relationships with African American male students was to ensure that he scrubs off the idea of African American teachers for African American kids. However, there was a problem in that most teachers were homeland homogeneous. Therefore, he brought an outside agency on board to help teachers and students from different schools connect during lunch hour. He gave a description of how it all worked as follows:

Some of my male teachers went down there, not only African American teachers, but all my male teachers went down: Hispanic, White, and Black teachers would go down there 2 days a week to meet with that group of male students. And what we found out, it just wasn't that the African American students, it was the children of color, Black and Hispanics. Um, we found out that our White students went out to the CTE building, um, and Hispanic and Black students, the few that assimilated would do that was mostly African American students. But once we connected with them during that period, with that outside agency, we were able then to find out what was going on.

This program was founded on CRT framework because it was geared towards helping African American students meet their needs amidst diverse cultures. However, the instructional strategies utilized should maximize benefits for all students in every ethnic group.

Mentorship and Student Support Program

Among the several issues that were noted, mentorship and the need for support of the African American male students emerged as a crucial component towards improving their academic outcomes. The results of this study established that it is crucial to identify and support the academic affairs of African American male students through special programs. CRT can be incorporated into mentorship and student support programs through culturally responsive mentoring. Participant 2 held the opinion that a good method of addressing the needs of African American male students in a diverse cultural environment was to establish positive relationships with them. In his school, African

American male students were grouped, then paired with a mentor to help them overcome culture-related obstacles. In many cases, the culturally responsive mentoring of African American male students involved focusing on pervasive problems faced by mentees, sharing of lived experiences of their problems, and creating a collective voice that will easily be heard (Han & Onchwari, 2018). This program can be helpful in improving the academic performance of African American male students. The students' learning needs are diverse, of which some are discipline related and, therefore, the mentorship programs shape the students' attitudes and efforts to concentrate on the academic activities.

Corrective Action

Principals need to have a strategy for corrective action as a way of rectifying the undesirable behavior of students. In a school with diverse student backgrounds, these corrective actions should be such that they apply across all races and ethnicities indiscriminately. However, if principals decide to send students home based on discipline issues reported to them, African American male students could face a higher rate of suspensions (Dixson & Rousseau-Anderson, 2014; DuFour et al., 2010).

The results of this study also revealed that corrective action involving talk rather than sending African American male students home was ideal in promoting high discipline levels in the schools. Although the option to send the students home is available, Participant 4 shared that he intentionally decides not to send the African American students home due to discipline-related issues. He reported that this would often cause an imbalance in the school. The best disciplinary method was speaking with the student and finding out the underlying issues that were influencing the students into

violating school codes. Participant 3 made a similar observation, stating that the most effective corrective actions involve the use of friendly approaches that involve the teachers interacting with the students while maintaining an open mind to help the students overcome indiscipline tendencies. It is, therefore, more effective for teachers to identify and deal with the root causes of indiscipline amongst African American male students to reduce unruly behavior.

It therefore, corrective action practices should begin with teachers even before reaching the principals. Creating culturally responsive classrooms through CRT programs could enable teachers to reduce disproportionality in disciplinary cases (Bertani et al., 2010). For instance, teachers need to avoid being judgmental and consider cultural communication differences when dealing with reported disciplinary cases. Additionally, teachers need to develop personal relationships with students and instill for mutual respect in their interactions.

Improved Academic Performance

The results of this study also showed that the use of different programs that are designed to bring changes in the school's performance made positive impacts. According to Bertani et al. (2010), CRT interventions help teachers recognize appropriate ways to respond to behavior outbursts that frequently occur in classes. For example, the idea of increasing the rigor in classrooms utilized by Participant 2 helps teacher have more control over the class activities because they monitor students from all over the class. In this way, the classroom becomes less disruptive to students, creating a conducive environment for improved academic performance.

Embracing CRT could also enable teachers to disregard the otherwise common misconception of having lower expectations of African American male students in academics. The manner in which a teacher conducts himself or herself in the classroom, for example, the way he or she acknowledges students during classroom activities, could show bias or lack thereof. The overall outcome of using CRT is improvement in academic performance (Bertani et al., 2010). Although different levels of academic improvement were recorded, the participants unanimously agreed that the use of the programs led to an improvement in the performance of the student. Although one of the participants noted that the improvement exceeded that of other schools in the same category, another noted that there was improvement in ranking; although, it was not the top performer yet. Therefore, the use of improvement programs is recommended in other African American schools.

Limitations of the Study

One of the key sources of limitations in the study is bias. This is a common limitation in interviews, which may arise from both the interviewer and the interviewee (Costa, Miriam & Stephen, 2014). The bias of the interviewer arises in the form of restriction of questions asked, which may leave out other key factors and crucial information that is essential to the proper understanding of the issue of principals affecting African American male students. Additionally, any bias from the interviewer may further impede on the analysis and consequent presentation of the findings.

The bias from the interviewee would result in collection of incorrect information, which essentially impedes on the overall trustworthiness of the study. Another limitation

to the trustworthiness of the study is untruthfulness of the interviewees. Any dishonesty from the interviewed individuals impedes on the overall reliability of the study, as it leads to collection of inaccurate data (Hamza, 2014). The dishonesty may arise from embarrassment, shame, discomfort or general oversight of the interviewee. This can be mitigated by observance of visual cues of the interviewee. However, the study did not entail visual records of the interviews, which may lead to potential loss of information that could be amassed from the visual cues.

Restriction presents another major limitation to the study. The interviews were conducted over a single sit-in period, which may be inadequate to capture all the essential information. This time restriction inhibits the thorough assessment of the deeper details and aspects of the research problem. Additionally, the interviewee may feel uncomfortable due to lack of proper prior interactions with the interviewer (Hamza, 2014).

Reliance only on interviews presents another limitation for this study. Because qualitative interviews require respondents to recall everyday experiences on the questions being asked, it becomes difficult to reproduce an accurate narrative about their life experiences. That said, reliance on interviews only reduces the accuracy of the responses because some respondents may be biased or may intentionally hide some feelings or opinions about the subject.

Recommendations

The poor academic performance experienced by many African American male students emerges from a variety of factors which include poor curriculum integration,

lack of mentorship and support, poor classroom management and the negative perception which devalues the needs of the students.

The first recommendation for the principal is the selection and recruitment of top talented teachers who understand the culture of African American males in a proper manner. Research shows that teachers with the best skills can manage the students well in and outside the classrooms. The teachers' professionalism should be demonstrated by the ways they undertake classroom activities as well as how they interact with their students.

The second recommendation for the school principal is the implementation of mentorship programs for nurturing talents of the African American students. This will help the students identify their desired career path and avail the relevant professional support. Such a program can entail observance of extracurricular activities in order to fully understand the students' capabilities, motivate them accordingly and avail the necessary counseling.

Additionally, teachers should be encouraged by the school principal to develop positive attitudes and inclusivity when dealing with minorities especially the African Americans. Discrimination has devastating effects that can severely lower the student's learning morale. Besides, when students realize that they are being profiled in the classroom, they tend to act defiantly and aggressively. However, in such cases, the students should never be misunderstood as unruly, but instead, the reasons for the behavior should be understood as the first step for offering positive help.

Finally, all subjects in the curriculum can be integrated with historical facts and figures across all ethnicities. For example, teachers teaching mathematics and science can

develop lessons that recognize minority figures in history that had huge impacts in those fields. By so doing, learners will identify with the characteristics and experiences and in turn feel motivated to work hard and achieve their goals (Bertani et al., 2010).

Implications

The results of this study highlight the significant role of school principals in improving the academic performance of African American male students. For instance, measures that increase the academic outcome for the male African American students will resolve the growing tension and disparity between the female counterparts and other Caucasian students. Improved academic performance for African American male students implies that they have significant opportunities for the university and college entry.

Additionally, increase in the number of African American students in higher education institutions will introduce more diversity, which contributes to social change and balance in educational achievement. This will produce a diverse skill set for the market, while providing the African American population with the opportunity to contribute to the lowering of poverty experienced among various communities (Tesfai, 2017).

Nationally, the positive social transformation that can result from principals offering academic improvement pathways for the African American male students has a positive impact on the national economic development. The primary goal for every country is to provide a quality education for all students. Graduating from high school would be a positive step toward helping its citizens to be globally competitive.

Conclusion

The findings from this study adds to the existing knowledge of practice regarding the strategies used by school leaders to help African American male students be at par with their female and Caucasian counterparts in terms of academic achievement. For a long time, African American males have faced discrimination in schools which leads to a high dropout rate and poor academic achievement compared to other students (Moore & Lewis, 2012). Additionally, many of African American male students are sent home for discipline issues that could easily be contained and corrected while keeping them in school. This situation makes it difficult for African American male students to perform well in school or even graduate from school in the first place.

The study of educational disparity especially among this minority group continues to receive much attention. This research is fundamentally important because it sheds light on the degree by which African American male students have been left behind. If more African American males received a high school diploma, they would be better placed to continue their education and/or attend a vocational focus to better support themselves and their families.

The effect of the school principals is amplified by the positive leadership outcome that encourages the recruitment of qualified teachers, performance appraisal, student mentorship and development of student-centered curricula. The most compelling idea obtained from the findings of this research is that in most cases, the students' academic performance is determined by the teacher more than the learners' abilities (Bertani et al., 2010). As noted by Khalifa et al. (2016), the improvement in academic outcomes of the

African American male students depends heavily on effective leadership. It is worth noting that CRT is a product of effective leadership whereby teachers as leaders work to develop trusting relationships with their students that will allow students to challenge or give different opinions about the perspective of others regardless of their race or ethnicity.

Therefore, CRT is closely related to the themes identified in this study. By using CRT, teachers can help all students to develop a positive ethnic-racial personality and project inspirational demeanors towards others regardless of their backgrounds (Bertani et al., 2010). Therefore, students can interact with each other regardless of racial factors making them successful amidst their diversity. In every education system, leadership plays a crucial role in promoting equal grounds for all learners to achieve their academic potential. As explained by Day et al. (2016), the immediate school leadership is among the primary factors which determine whether the learners achieve their optimal academic achievement. Principals are, therefore, key determinants of learner performance because they are the immediate leaders in the school who are expected to show outstanding leadership qualities within the school.

Over the past few years, principals across many schools have made efforts to address the academic underperformance of African American males through several strategies. Strategies such as cultural sensitivity, implementation of rigorous academic curriculum, and the use of empirically validated instructional strategies have produced positive results in schools where they have been implemented (Gardner, Rizzi, & Council, 2014). The use of mentorship programs has also proved to be a success in

improving the performance of African American males. Mentors provide superior guidance to the students and are a good resource to help the students achieve their desires. Apart from just assigning students mentors, it is important to encourage the formation of strong interpersonal bonds between the mentor and the mentee so that there is the sharing of deeper concerns that may be hindering some students from performing well.

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Appendix

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Location of Interview:

Date of Interview:

Start Time:

Finish time:

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. The interview process will take between 45 to 60 minutes. I will be asking questions relating to your time as a principal/assistant principal at the selected research site (campus and ISD). The purpose of the interview is to gain understanding relating to your experiences, perceptions, and practices while serving as principal. Please note, I will be taking notes throughout the interview to allow me to capture important answers and information you share with me.

Questions:

- Do I have your permission to record the interview to allow me to obtain an inclusive record of your responses?
- Are there any questions or items that I can clarify before we begin?
- You may stop the interview at any point based on the consent agreement you signed? Are you ready to begin?

Research Question 1: What are the principals' self-perceived beliefs and attitudes toward enhancing the learning experiences of African American males?

Interview Questions:

1. What are some current issues and problems that are paramount as the building principal? Explain.

2. What are your goals and objectives for the programs and strategies that you have implemented?
3. Tell me your top priorities for improving academic performance of students in your current role of principal. Explain why these were these your priorities.
4. Tell me your perspective on supporting teachers and improving academic achievement.
5. Of all things you discussed pertaining to students' academic achievement, how do you see them affecting African American males? What are some strategies you implemented to assist teachers to build relationships with your African American male students?
6. Tell me your outlook on academic achievement of all students. What specifically is the impact you see on African American males?
7. In what ways has your perception changed as it pertains to African American males' academic achievement?

Research Question 2: What are the principals' practices and improvements to ensure academic achievement of African American males?

8. Describe what you have done to improve academic achievement for the general population of students?
9. Based on what you have put in place for the general population of students, what specifically has been your focus for African American males?
10. How have you worked with the teachers to differentiate instructional strategies to meet the needs of the general population of students?

11. How have you worked with the teachers to differentiate instructional strategies to meet the specific needs of your African American male students?

Research Question 3: What have been the experience and outcomes of programs that principals have implemented for African American students?

12. What have been the student outcomes after implementation of programs and strategies to improve student academic achievement?
13. What have been the outcomes for African American students?
14. What were the specific components of the program that teachers felt had the biggest impact on the general population of students?
15. What were the specific components of the program that teachers felt had the biggest impact on African American students?
16. Describe other strategies that might prove effective when working with African American male.