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An Examination of Semester-Long Review of Behavior Referral Data at a High School in a Southeastern State

Shalanda L. Shuler

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AN EXAMINATION OF SEMESTER-LONG REVIEW OF BEHAVIOR
REFERRAL DATA AT A HIGH SCHOOL IN A SOUTHEASTERN STATE

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my mentor, Dr. Edthye Boyer Jones, who passed away unexpectedly in December of 2020. I appreciated the encouraging texts to keep writing and our Sunday pew sessions in which we would engage in deep discourse. Dr. Jones, I know you would be extremely proud of this accomplishment!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I want to thank my lord and savior Jesus Christ for providing me with the fortitude, tenacity, and wisdom to be able to start and complete this journey! I dedicate this dissertation to my support system that I have been blessed to have in life: my family, fiancée, and friends.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine semester-long referral data from a ninth-grade cohort in a public school in a southeastern state. The research question for this study was the following: What will the examination of semester-long referral data from the entire ninth-grade cohort of a public school in a southeastern state reveal? The problem that prompted this study centered around the ninth grade having the highest number of office disciplinary referrals (ODRs) in the Henderson County school district (pseudonym). Students who routinely receive ODRs run the danger of failing their classes and are more likely to have been disciplined with exclusionary measures like detention and suspension. Teacher training programs have not stressed the need to manage students who exhibit challenging conduct, and teachers have expressed a need for more direction. The excessive use of punitive punishment techniques that exclude students has raised concerns across the country, because it leads to negative student outcomes like dropping out of school and juvenile detention (Freisthler & Kepple, 2019). It is important to pay attention to student tendencies that emerge throughout the first year of high school, particularly for those who receive frequent referrals. The study's conclusions stressed how critical it is to comprehend the researcher's positionality, the effects of unconscious and explicit bias on disciplinary procedures, and the exclusion of certain cultures. An action plan for resolving disciplinary practices that negatively affect minority students is also provided as part of the study's conclusion, along with suggestions for future research.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The ninth-grade school year is a critical time for many students transitioning from middle to high school. McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) indicated that "researchers target ninth grade as a make-or-break year for completing high school" (p. 447). For example, Fritzer and Herbst (1996) noted that historically, "ninth graders have the lowest grade point average, the most missed classes, the majority of failing grades, and more misbehavior referrals than other high school grade levels" (p. 448). Moreover, McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) indicated that the ninth grade also has the highest enlistment rate in high schools, with nearly 22% of students repeating the ninth grade, and students who consistently obtain office disciplinary referrals (ODRs) increase the risk for academic failure (Fritger & Herbset, 1996; Marchbanks et al., 2015; Rumberger, 2011; Skiba & Losen, 2016). These students are also more likely to have been punished with exclusionary methods such as detention and suspension (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Skiba et al., 2003). Students suspended or expelled are more likely to lose instructional time, experience lower academic achievement, and are more likely to experience retention when compared to students who do not acquire exclusionary sanctions (Losen & Martinez, 2020).

Teacher training programs have not emphasized the need to manage students with challenging behavior, and teachers have reported a desire for more guidance (Almog & Shechtman, 2007; Greenburg et al., 2014; Melnick & Meister, 2008). Without such guidance, teachers may rely on punitive strategies for dealing with

problem behaviors, even though the use of negative approaches (e.g., exclusionary discipline and zero-tolerance policies) have been associated with increased discipline problems, teacher stress, and poor student outcomes such as dropout and juvenile incarceration (Clunies-Ross et al., 2013; Skiba et al., 2010). There is also evidence that such practices have contributed to disproportionate school discipline of students of color (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Tan et al. (2021) posited that it is noteworthy given that male students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and students with learning disabilities obtain many exclusionary discipline infractions in school (Girvan et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2011; Losen et al., 2014). Recent approaches to addressing school discipline problems emphasized the use of data to identify patterns at the school level (Blake et al., 2016; McIntosh et al., 2014).

Schools often adopt exclusionary discipline practices to address student behavior concerns, including verbal violence, truancy, and theft (Jones et al., 2018). Yet, there is a national concern regarding the excessive use of such practices as a form of disciplinary action (Morgan et al., 2014; U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2014). According to Losen and Gillespie (2012), more than 3.45 million students are suspended from school, which equates to 12 million days of lost instruction per year. Even though school administrators use zero tolerance policies, research has indicated that it is not efficacious in decreasing student behavior concerns (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Civil Rights Project, 2000).

A frequent consequence for classroom misbehavior starts with an ODR, which is defined as an event where “(a) a student engaged in behavior that violated a role or social norm in the school, [and] (b) the problem behavior was observed or identified by a member of the school staff and administrative staff delivered a consequence

through a permanent (written) product that defined the whole event" (Sugai et al., 2000, p. 96). An ODR is frequently used to identify and screen students who need behavior intervention through documentation of their disruptive or violent behaviors. Additionally, ODRs can be used to track and target the most undisciplined students and develop ideas for handling them. For example, teachers and administrators need more strategies for disciplining students in the 9th grade to avoid increasing the number of ODRs. The information gained is therefore used to help improve the school's overall climate and ensure that students are safe and supported. It is proven to be effective in maintaining order in schools. ODR data is cost-effective (Predy et al., 2014), easily collected (Irvin et al., 2006; Wright & Dusek, 1998), and readily available (McIntosh et al., 2012).

An area that needs more attention in the ODR research is the need to examine trends (e.g., common types of referrals, time, and season of referrals) during students' first year in high school. As previously noted, extant literature emphasized the importance and significance of the first year of high school (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010; Phillips, 2019). Similarly, this is a critical juncture when a student's behavior problem can spiral (McIntosh et al., 2008). However, research on averting and decreasing ODRs tends to focus on the elementary and middle school years (Freeman et al., 2016). Thus, this study's analysis of patterns of ODRs (e.g., type, frequency, time, and location of offenses) focuses on first-year students at one high school in a southeastern state.

Problem of Practice

This study focused on a public high school in the Henderson County school district in a southeastern state where the total enrollment was 415 students. For the fall semester of 2021, the total number of referrals for each grade level were as

follows: 9th grade totaled 123, 10th totaled 63, 11th totaled 44, and 12th totaled 18.

The problem of practice that prompted this study was that the ninth grade had the highest number of referrals in the district. Thus, the need to understand the reason for so many referrals for this grade level and how that number can be reduced has become apparent. Three schools comprise the Henderson County School District, serving approximately 1,500 students from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. Elementary-aged students are divided among the primary school, which serves pre-kindergarten through second grade, and the elementary school serving third through eighth-grade students. Additionally, there is a high school and an alternative school within the district. The Henderson County School District serves most of the school-aged students within the county.

The student demographics of Henderson County School District include 58% African American, 31% White, 8% Latinx, 1% two or more races, and less than 1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Asian, or American Indian students. However, with respect to the demographics of the high school being studied, the demographics are 67% African American, 24% White, 7% Latinx, 0% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Asian or American Indian students. As like any large school district, Henderson County schools have their share of discipline and behavior management challenges that extend from students not staying on task, to disrespect, to verbal and physical violence, theft, and truancy.

In my role as the district-wide school psychologist, I am quite familiar with the district as I regularly visit schools and engage with both teachers and students. During these visits, it appeared that students found it hard to appropriately express their needs and frustrations without causing distractions and inappropriate behavior, leading teachers to write referrals. Moreover, because it appears that there are large of

referrals being written that the teacher may need additional strategies to assist students with challenging behaviors. With this in mind, therefore, it is essential to examine the “who, what, where, when, and how” relative to the referral-writing process as engaged by teachers in the Henderson County School District.

Research Question

What will the examination of semester-long referral data from the entire ninth-grade cohort of a public school in a southeastern state reveal?

Purpose of the Study

The researcher aimed to understand the reasons for most referrals for this grade level and further suggest how that number can be reduced. The study considered the “who, what, where, and how” relative to the referral writing process as engaged by teachers in a southeastern state.

Theoretical Framework

According to Charlton and David (1993), the behavioristic standpoint concentrates on concrete specific observable behavior, that is being manifested by students. An analysis of the behavioral models helps to understand whether students' behavior is determined largely by their environment and in making sense of how educators' life experiences might have influenced their stance. A behavioristic framework of thinking looks to depend on step-by-step procedures for managing school discipline. The social reconstruction theory is explored in the study to understand students' behavior.

Schools can be organic locations as it relates to the fostering of equity, equality, and culturally relevant pedagogy. To state differently, a social justice lens will guide the theoretical framework in which this research is conducted, emphasizing

a commitment to respect, dignity, decency, equality, equity, and the maximization of opportunity (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Finally, reconstruction theory will also be a lens to guide this research, which posits that society can be repaired by discussing moral dilemmas to understand individual actions, fostering a more just world. The model focuses on addressing social questions and highlighting social reform as the aim of education. The reconstruction theory can be vital in effecting social change; thus, educational institutions should strive to encourage critical thinkers to resolve social problems. Particularly influenced by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and his concept of conscientization in which students are in process of being aware of their sociocultural realities, the notion of reconstruction looks to change and transform lives (Mitchell et al., 2016). In short, students are taught to embrace the challenges and resolve their social and political struggles as viewed from their lived experiences.

Methodology

Levitan et al. (2020) outlined a model for action research that focuses on practitioner-based research, also known as accidental ethnography, which is the systematic study of past practitioner experience, including the collection of data and analysis of extant literature to serve an ethnographic purpose in reporting on educational experience, culture, innovation, of significant merit and contributions to the field (p. 337). Practitioner-based research or accidental ethnography involves the following six stages: initiation, reflection, reexamination, collecting data, coding, and recursive consultations. These six stages provided a framework for conducting and explaining this action research study. Levitan et al. (2020) summarized practitioner-based research characteristics that delineate it from other traditional forms of scientific research. These characteristics include providing a specific methodology

and allowing the practitioner to collect data within the daily processes in a workplace or organization to present their findings that enhance educational practice within an organization (Levitan et. al. 2020).

According to Levitan et al. (2020), another characteristic of accidental ethnography is focused on the learning of a group, community, or organization. It utilizes practitioner-researcher experience as just one part of the research process, relying on extant data from the organization to test memories and corroborate findings. Lastly, accidental ethnography allows the practitioner-based researcher to connect theory with practice and to present his/her findings in such a way that enhances the credibility of their research through scholarly inquiry and engagement (Levitan et al., 2020).

As the researcher for this study, I utilized data from one school district to examine discipline referrals. Examining the discipline referrals allowed me to understand why teachers wrote discipline referrals and to understand any possible trends. This research study incorporated ninth-grade archival discipline data, collected during the first semester of the 2021-2022 school year, from one particular school. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Qualitative Data were collected from the individual referrals and teacher interviews; information was coded, organized, and presented in the research study. Quantitative data were collected from a student information database system known as PowerSchool.

While this student information database system stores all student information, access was granted to me to query de-identified suspension data. The data collection steps were as follows. First, all ODRs leading to out-of-school suspensions during the first semester of the 2021-2022 school year were printed. Next, each ODR was coded according to specific demographics and pattern variables such as time, place, and

location. In addition, grade level, incident data, gender, race, disability status, and referral teacher codes were used. The type of discipline referral was coded numerically into one of 102 offense types, as listed in the district's information database system (PowerSchool, 2021). Suspensions were categorized into one of four categories: in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, out-of-school suspension for the remainder of the year, and out-of-school suspension for 365 days.

Significance of the Study

With the increased number of ODRs and suspension among students due to inappropriate behaviors, the study results will provide critical information on why referrals keep increasing, leading to possible solutions, especially for the ninth-grade class. Meanwhile, the Payton (2012) and Unal and Unal (2012) studies examined the classroom management styles of several groups of teachers. They recommended the need for more research that examines how classroom management influences teacher behavior. The current research study focuses on why teachers write ODRs and looks specifically at the teacher motivation behind writing ODRs. Studies associating the strength of classroom management and ODRs will also expound on why teachers write ODRs. However, despite the use of 350 elementary schools in the two studies mentioned above, more research is needed to address the correlation between classroom management style and ODRs.

Understanding why teachers write office referrals can help school administrators understand the precipitating factors for writing office referrals, address the problem behavior, increase academic achievement and teacher retention, and create a positive school culture (Etheridge, 2017). Furthermore, identifying the factors contributing to the writing of office referrals can provide educational leaders with knowledge on how to best support teachers in the classroom (Etheridge, 2017; Linsky,

2017). Finally, this research may help provide a window into classroom management, helping teachers understand their perceptions of classroom management and their actions related to those perceptions, specifically with the writing of office referrals.

Limitations

The study was limited in that it just examined existing data, which included a select number of referrals for ninth grade students during a one-semester period. Clearly, as is the nature of action research, generalizations cannot be made with the limitations on the number of referrals examined and with a single focus on ninth graders. However, with respect to the particular school district from which this study emanates, the results of this study can be helpful regarding the study's transferability with other educators in the district.

Summary of Findings

The chapter mentions that traditionally, compared to other high school grade levels, ninth graders had the lowest GPA, the majority of missed classes, the most failing grades, and the most misconduct referrals (Jackson, 2018). With roughly 22% of students repeating the grade, ninth grade also has the greatest enrollment rate in high schools. The study's findings will be important in understanding the reasons for the rising number of referrals for office discipline and suspensions of children for inappropriate activities. The current research study examines the motivation of instructors who make ODRs in order to better understand why they do so. Studies linking classroom management effectiveness and ODRs will also explain why teachers submit ODRs. The chapter also emphasizes the need for increased instruction for teachers on how to handle pupils who exhibit challenging conduct and avoid punitive measures. It states that the application of unfavorable methods, such as exclusionary discipline and zero-tolerance policies, has been linked to an increase in

discipline issues, teacher stress, and subpar student outcomes. The chapter concludes by highlighting the significance of statistics in identifying behavioral patterns and effectively managing student behavior difficulties. The chapter closes by suggesting that more focus should be placed on analyzing patterns in ODRS made during students' first year of high school.

Positionality

The term positionality describes an individual's worldview and position on a research topic including its social and political factors (Baden & Major, 2013; Creswell, 2014; Foote & Bartell, 2011; Savin-Rowe, 2014). It is important to understand the effect of the researcher as the investigator, interpreter, and reporter of the data. The impetus for this study stemmed from my interest in learning effective strategies and interventions to address inequities and inequalities as they relate to disciplinary practices. Both are important and, while often confused, are not the same thing. Inequity is synonymous with injustice or unfairness and stems from things such as cultural exclusion, corruption, and political practices. Inequality stems from having a lack of resources. The two are not interchangeable.

As an African American female who serves as a Lead School Psychologist and Special Education Coordinator in a small, rural school district, I help to analyze both academic and behavioral data, assist with developing interventions, and provide staff development trainings on various topics. Additionally, I am involved in many discipline decisions as a member of the Manifestation Determination Team. This team is responsible for reviewing discipline incidents for students who receive specialized education through the special education department. The following two items are clarified during these meetings: “(i) If the conduct in question was caused by, or had a direct and substantial relationship to, the child’s disability; or (ii) If the conduct in

question was the direct result of the LEA's failure to implement the IEP"

(§300.530(e)(1)-(2) (p. 1).

For more than 19 years, I have worked in the public school system as a classroom teacher, school psychologist, and contract psychologist. Moreover, I have attended both national and state conferences on issues related to equity, cultural competence, implicit bias, social justice, restorative practices, and racial disproportionality. To that end, my position as a school psychologist requires me to examine discipline referrals, understand why teachers at one high school write discipline referrals, and provide ways to support staff members and school administration with academic support and behavior management. I grew up in a household with both parents, a brother, and a sister. My interactions with non-Blacks were not a common occurrence, except for a teacher every so often. I attended a predominately Black school from preschool through 12th grade. The curriculum was embedded with traditional curriculum as well as a blend of life lessons and experiences of a teacher who promoted positive racial identity. This experience deepened my current perspectives about social justice and equity issues, which are firmly linked to social reconstructionism.

I have experienced challenges associated with racism, implicit bias, and explicit bias. These experiences furthered my interest and commitment to examine and explore solutions that impact educational experiences for children of color, especially those who identify as Black. I am indeed a vocal advocate for equitable educational opportunities, especially for marginalized students. Finally, I grew up in an education-focused family where getting a good education was highly emphasized. Now, as an educator, I continue to be a life-long learner and advocate for equity and equality for all students, encouraging them to complete school and stay on a path

toward good physical and mental health. The hope is that this research will be a catalyst for change around inequities and inequalities as it relates to the discipline of Black students.

Dissertation Overview

Chapter One of this dissertation introduced the reader to the identified problem of practice (PoP), research question, purpose statement, and research design. This research study focused on a systematic semester-wide examination of behavioral referrals from a high school. A review of the related literature is included in Chapter Two. The following chapter, Chapter Three, provides an in-depth summary of the methodology of the research studies. This consists of the purpose statement, problem of practice, research question, action research design, methods, procedures, and data analysis strategies. Chapter Four organizes and discusses the research findings concerning the research study question. Chapter Five concludes this report as the implications for future studies and an action plan are discussed.

Definitions of Terms

accidental ethnography: Accidental ethnography is the systematic analysis of prior fieldwork. It utilizes actual data "accidentally" gathered (i.e., the data were not collected as part of a predesigned study) to provide insight into a phenomenon, culture, or way of life (Levitan et al, 2020).

classroom management: Classroom management involves a variety of skills and practices teachers use to maintain appropriate student behavior and increase engagement and motivation (Scott et al., 2017).

exclusionary discipline: Any disciplinary practice that separates students from their **classroom environment:** includes in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion.

high school student: Students between grades 9 and 12, ages 14-21.

office discipline referrals (ODRs): representing an event in which "(a) student engaged in behavior that violated a rule or social norm in the school, (b) the problem behavior was observed or identified by a member of the school staff, and (c) administrative staff delivered a consequence through a permanent (written) product that defined the whole event" (Sugai et.al., 2000, p. 96).

suspension: a disciplinary action in response to student behavior that requires removal from the school or classroom for an exact time.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

School discipline plays an important part in an educator's role. Students and teachers should be granted the opportunity to study and work in surroundings free from harm. Teachers present significant concerns when their students exhibit hostile, aggressive, or rebellious behaviors, which can signify academic disengagement. These students not only cause disruption in the classroom, but they are also more likely to develop behavioral and educational concerns in the future (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In-school and out-of-school suspensions are typical forms of school discipline. Unfortunately, this approach is often criticized for being too aggressive, unsuccessful at shaping behavior, and is adversarial to students' educational development (McIntosh et al., 2018). According to a study by Greenburg et al. (2014), teacher-training programs have not emphasized the need to manage students with challenging behavior. Teachers have reported a desire for more guidance in handling students' behaviors.

The content of this literature review will discuss the following: literature review methodology, theoretical framework vital in addressing students' behaviors, historical perspectives that contextualize the studied problem, and assessment of previous studies addressing discipline approaches for students displaying conflicting behaviors, disparities, and behavior referrals.

Methodology

The literature review methodology is vital because it ensures the researcher obtains relevant research findings to describe the primary issue in this study. In this case, I obtained journal articles from databases including Google Scholar, PsycINFO, and JSTOR. I also included information provided by peer-reviewed journal articles, websites, and relevant textbooks describing the research question. As the researcher, I focused on specific key phrases such as “behavioral referrals” and “student behavior” in any research field. Other vital terms include “public schools” and “student behavior” or “behavioral management” in any research field. Publications from this period established plausible parameters to analyze classroom organization and school discipline for students with behavior referrals from the school sample used.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework highlights a particular type of discipline and provides a systematic process for managing it in the school system. Facilitating an assessment may provide results that help determine if students’ misconducts are significantly influenced by their environment. It will also assist in exposing how an educators' life experiences may influence their discipline procedures. A social justice lens proposes that injustices affect respect, dignity, and decency; thus, it shows the need to propagate self- development. It is critical to ascribe social positions to distribute opportunities based on individuals' ambitions, abilities, and efforts. An essential part of this perspective is providing a link between learning in the schools and social justice in the community. School systems should promote social justice by offering students substantial prospects for their future beyond high school, regardless of their social standing, to help them become successful (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Various studies indicate that out-of-school suspension (OSS) is not effective and often a result of social injustice. According to findings of various studies, social injustice that characterizes disciplinary approaches in schools could be triggering indiscipline and ineffectiveness of OSS. For instance, in a study by Hernandez-Melis et al. (2016), the suspension rate of Black students is three times that of their White counterparts. At the same time, Bell (2019) found that Black students account for about 39% of all suspended students in America, yet they only make up 15% of all students in public schools. Consequently, Hernandez-Melis et al. (2016) concluded that OSS is disproportionately utilized, with Black students being the main victims. As a result, Bell (2019) found that punitive punishment approaches could be causing Black students to engage in undesirable behaviors because they do not believe in the desired punishment or suspension systems in schools.

Moreover, it was specifically found that Black students believe that schools are based on an inequitable system of punishment, leading to an unfavorable learning environment. Therefore, as Bell continued, the punishment approaches in schools should be based on social justice to boost their effectiveness, arguing that schools should adopt restorative justice practices in their punishment strategies. In addition, Melloy and Murry (2019) stated that schools should be socially just to all students by treating students equitably regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds.

The concept of social reconstruction is one of the vital educational philosophical ideas that has considerably impacted western higher learning institutions. Social reconstruction is among the possible methods for addressing social catastrophes triggered by social, economic, and technical innovations (Esmaili et al., 2015). Esmaili et al. (2015) further argued that the premise of the social reconstruction concept states that humans turn into social engineers who can program

the developmental trajectory and apply science and technology to achieve the best results. Therefore, schools should be question-driven and mindful of societal issues. Addressing social questions and highlighting social reform should be one primary goal for educators. This role necessitates the analysis of a society's vulnerabilities, equipping students to tackle these challenges through social reconstruction responsibility.

Reconstruction theory is rooted in Paulo Freire's notion of conscientization, which is defined as a process in which students realize awareness of the sociocultural reality that forms the ability to change facts and transform their lives (Morrow, 2021). The students are taught to embrace the challenges and resolve their social and political issues in society using their experiences, feelings, and problems. The reconstruction theory is premised on the understanding that students' behavior is shaped by the reinforcement they receive from the social environment. Therefore, in this case, the social reconstruction links the students' behaviors to their surroundings, which shapes their conduct (Mitchell et al., 2016).

Historical Perspectives

Historical perspectives are vital in providing insights into students' behaviors that necessitate discipline referrals. Teacher-student relationships were often a battle of the wills (Cheruvalath & Tripathi, 2015). Over the last several decades, some students have been considered slow, incapable of studying, and perceived as delinquent. Over time, teachers have identified and labeled groups of problematic students, including those who were delinquent or misbehaved, dropouts, and those with unfavorable educational attainment (Deschenes et al., 2001, p. 529). While whipping is no longer an acceptable form of punishment, these students had been

exposed to strict disciplinary consequences to get them in line with what the teacher required.

Review of Studies

Discipline of Students Displaying Adverse Behavior

A study by Degroote and Houtte (2022) provided more insights on whether students with negative attitudes towards the educational system are disciplined. This research was consistent with the objectives of Welsh's (2020) research that aimed to address disciplinary actions in elementary, middle, and high schools. In this case, Degroote and Houtte (2022) cited approaches to disciplining students, including expulsion, suspension, and office referrals by school administrators. While these punishment methods seem feasible, Welsh (2020) stated that these approaches are applied differently in elementary, middle, and high schools. In primary schools, OSS occurs at a relatively lower rate, while both in-school suspension (ISS) and OSS are prevalent in middle and high schools. According to Degroote and Houtte (2022), labeling student misbehavior is a necessary punitive action and is a helpful technique that teachers take into consideration. Furthermore, students with a strong feeling of futility are found to be punished more frequently than those who seem to have a more optimistic outlook on their prospects of achievement in the educational system.

Hernandez-Melis et al. (2016) found that Black students are disproportionately referred for various behavioral problems compared to their White classmates. They are two times more likely to be referred than White students. As a result, Hernandez-Melis et al. (2016) observed that most discipline referrals in schools are characterized by racial disparities. In addition, Bryant and Wilson (2020) found that Black male students from low socioeconomic settings are at a higher risk of receiving referrals than other students. Furthermore, Black students who are referred

are more likely to be subjected to OSS. Concerning the effectiveness of referrals, Rusby et al. (2007) found that they negatively relate to academic performance, and they create problematic behavior in the future. Referrals increase the risks of violence and convictions as a child grows to adulthood (Rusby et al., 2007). However, Rusby et al. (2007) noted that referrals are effective when they are implemented in the early stages when a child starts to exhibit disruptive behaviors.

Disparities and Behavioral Referrals

Welsh (2020) described differences in academic discipline between Black students and their White counterparts. Differences have been found in exclusionary disciplinary practices based on income, race, and gender. The most disadvantaged students, such as those with disabilities, non-heterosexuals, underachievers, those from low-income backgrounds, and those characterized as Black, Latinx, or male, are exposed more often to exclusionary discipline in schools. Welsh (2020) found that Black students were more inclined to be served with an OSS than their White counterparts. Similarly, Scott et al. (2012) argued that minority students are increasingly privy to adverse disciplinary actions, citing that more than 73% of freshmen minorities were given behavior referrals between January and May of 2009. It has also been found that minority students have lower academic success due to missing classes because they were suspended (Welsh, 2020). Addressing the various challenges minority students confront is vital in promoting satisfactory academic outcomes.

Outcomes presented by Welsh (2020) and Scott et al. (2012) were further complemented by research by Cruz et al. (2021), arguing that most Black students are increasingly recipients of behavioral referrals (Cruz et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2012; Welsh, 2020). Moreover, Cruz et al. (2021) cited that Latinx, Black, American Indian

or Alaska Native, and disabled, male students from a poor socioeconomic background are more prone to encounter restrictive discipline techniques in U.S. schools. Some exclusionary approaches for minority students include ISS, ODR, OSS, referrals to juvenile justice systems, and expulsions (Cruz et al., 2021; Welsh, 2020). According to research, exclusionary punishment leads to undesirable effects, including wasted instructional time, inferior educational achievement (Welsh, 2020), and a greater incidence of delinquency and dropouts (Cruz et al., 2021).

Erickson and Pearson (2022) also led a similar study to evaluate ways minority students are exposed to negative disciplinary referrals for misconduct. They found that Black students constitute 27% of students reported to enforcement agencies and 31% of those engaged in school-related offenses, making up just 16% of enrolled students. The authors also presented that Latinx students are more inclined to receive harsh consequences than their White counterparts.

Schools use exclusionary discipline to prevent students from engaging in further misconduct. School suspensions, expulsion, and other forms of exclusionary discipline are all examples of disciplinary methods that could be detrimental and exclude students from the regular school setting (Erickson & Pearson, 2022). While authors like Degroote and Houtte (2022) considered disciplinary measures effective in re-aligning students' behaviors, Erickson and Pearson (2022) argued that restrictive discipline, such as, suspension is ineffective and relates to substantial negative implications for minority students.

Erickson and Pearson (2022) recommended that school administrators and teachers invest in a multicultural curriculum to help make learning environments more inclusive to all students. Therefore, school administrators should work collaboratively with teachers to eliminate negative stereotypes of minority students. It

has been recommended to incorporate restorative justice to enhance positive behavioral outcomes for students, entails a communal strategy to fostering respect and understanding and encouraging student engagement in establishing a conducive school environment (Cruz et al., 2021).

Comprehending the different minority students' perceptions is vital to gaining more insight into the various challenges they confront in a learning environment. Pena-Shaff et al. (2019) led a research study to evaluate ethnic and racial distinctions in high schools' perceptions of the school setting and disciplinary practices. This research explores the links between student opinions of teacher conduct, school suspensions, and school culture in three Central New York high schools. Promotion of a positive school context was found linked to lower rates of maladaptive and behavioral concerns, increased graduation rates, academic attainment, and positive teenage development. In terms of student perceptions, the authors cite that when students consider their unique attributes, talents, and inclinations compatible with the education environment, their contentment and overall productivity are enhanced. Latinx and Black students are more inclined to identify discriminatory conduct than students from other ethnicities. Black students who experienced differentially poor teacher engagement and institutional disciplinary policies also reported less support for learning and adult assistance. Pena-Shaff et al. (2019) concluded that students' perceptions provide more understanding of their beliefs and experiences, which impact their actions in the school setting.

While researchers such as Pena-Shaff et al. (2019) and Degroote and Houtte (2022) have focused on discriminatory implications of behavioral referrals, Bell's (2019) study was vital in addressing the relationship between social customs incorporated in the Code of Street and increased violence in school settings.

Conceptually, Anderson (1999) considered the Code of the Street as the primary social standard that regulates human interactions. Anderson further argues that the school code extends upon the Code of the Street by constructing the likelihood that the informal rules that control human interaction on the street will permeate primarily Black high schools (PBHS) and limit aggression.

Bell's (2019) research shows that the unstructured social codes ingrained in the Code of the Street permeate PBHSs to establish the “code of the school,” which empowers students to pursue physical confrontations and out-of-school suspension as a way of acquiring recognition, toughness, and enhanced social standing. In addition, this research indicates that most families are conscious of the code and inform their children to participate in violent scuffles when required for self-defense (Bell, 2019). The school's regulation makes out-of-school discipline useless as a deterrent against school violence. Therefore, school administrators should implement rules to prevent students from engaging in aggressive behaviors, which tend to impact their overall educational outcomes.

According to a study by Hernandez-Melis et al. (2016), Building Bridges is one of the best alternatives to ineffective out-of-school discipline. This alternative is anchored on restorative justice and cognitive behavioral principles. Specifically, Hernandez-Melis et al. (2016) found that Building Bridges can effectively be used to reduce physical violence in schools. As a result, this alternative could significantly reduce the chances of subsequent referrals. Additionally, Nese et al. (2020) found that schools should implement the Inclusive Skill-Building Learning Approach (ISLA), which helps in enhancing student behaviors and improves the relationships between teachers and students. A study by Nese et al. (2020) revealed that ISLA helps in lowering exclusionary discipline practices while ensuring that students do not lose

instructional time. ISLA is effective because it makes sure that at-risk students and those with behavioral problems are supported and coached (Nese et al., 2020).

Therefore, based on the findings of some studies, schools can implement alternatives to out-of-school discipline strategies or approaches.

Strategies to Enhance Classroom Management and School Discipline

Gregory and Fergus (2017) cited the importance of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in protecting minority students against negative punitive school practices. Cho et al. (2020) led a systematic review of studies to assess the implications of technological advancement in facilitating classroom management and school discipline. The detrimental impacts of a disruptive classroom can be evaluated in student performance, school atmosphere, and teacher well-being. However, Cho et al. (2020) cited different approaches teachers utilize to facilitate positive behaviors among students. For instance, the authors mention the importance of behavioral approaches in enhancing student behaviors. In this case, behavioral techniques aim to address specific triggers that prompt students to behave in unacceptable manners, eventually impacting their academic performance. The authors further addressed the importance of technological advancements in facilitating classroom management. A specialized tool such as ClassDojo©, often utilized in U.K. schools, has been vital in digitizing the incorporation of token economies like those in multi-tiered behavioral approaches. The authors concluded by stressing the importance of using computer-stimulated classrooms to facilitate positive behavioral outcomes (Cho et al., 2020).

A study by Anyon et al. (2018) argued against the application of exclusionary school disciplinary outcomes because they have been found to be linked to an unfavorable impact on students' educational outcomes. As a result, many schools are shifting their practices from exclusionary punishments to considering disciplinary

procedures to promote healthy social and economic development in school children. This model implies that authentic and supporting relations are vital for fostering a healthy school atmosphere, lessening behavioral problems, and closing racial disciplinary inequities (Anyon et al., 2018). Therefore, it is recommended that all schools should consider implementing disciplinary practices to foster positive student behaviors.

Fallon et al. (2022) complemented research outcomes described by Anyon et al. (2018) and Cho et al. (2020). They described approaches to improve classroom management and enhance an increasingly inclusive learning environment. Fallon et al.'s (2022) quantitative study focused on different school-based interventions and supports to enhance behavioral and social outcomes among students displaying reluctant behaviors in the school context. According to the study, several initiatives based on scientific data are modified to be more culturally acceptable. One recommendation the authors presented include implementation of Behavior Bingo, an approach aimed at incorporating a student preference evaluation to locate rewards for displays of behavioral expectation instead of focusing on teacher perceptions. Focusing on student perceptions is vital in determining their problems to settle on a practical solution. The authors also cited that the Behavior Bingo approach promotes positive behaviors by incorporating students' race, age, and gender (Fallon et al., 2022).

Besides the Behavior Bingo, Fallon et al. (2022) describes the importance of implementing a social-emotional learning curriculum, such as, *Strong Start* to promote positive behaviors among students regardless of their ethnicity. *Strong Start* is a vital intervention established by modifying various teaching materials such as books to enhance the lesson's importance to students of color. Therefore, schools that

improve positive behavioral outcomes among students should focus on modifying their curriculum to include and address the distinct needs of minority students. Research by Gregory and Fergus (2017) is unique because it focuses on the role of state school policies aimed at eliminating students, especially those from minority backgrounds, from the school environment. The authors also provide more insights into how other schools incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL) to facilitate positive behavioral outcomes. These policies are crucial in eradicating the unfortunate effects of punitive behaviors on students' educational success and future delinquency practices (Cruz et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2012; Welsh, 2020). Gregory and Fergus (2017) cited the importance of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in protecting minority students against negative punitive school practices. ESSA is a legislative bill signed into law in 2015 and aims to protect students exposed to punishments that deter them from participating in classroom instruction. The policies put forth by ESSA are implemented in most of the U.S. school districts.

While Gregory and Fergus (2017) argued about government policies' roles in preventing negative school practices, Mitchell and Bradshaw (2012) described the importance of classroom management and exclusionary disciplinary approaches. To foster a healthy learning atmosphere, the researchers recommend implementing positive behavior interventions instead of restrictive punishment techniques. The primary justification for conducting this study is that substantial utilization of exclusionary punishment tactics is related to unfavorable ratings on structure and control. In contrast, increasing the utilization of classroom-based healthy behavior interventions is related to better ratings on order and discipline, equality, and student-teacher relationships.

The authors cited that using exclusionary punitive techniques frequently correlate to hostile encounters between students and their teachers, which may contribute to more unfavorable student perceptions of the school atmosphere (Mitchell and Bradshaw, 2012). This indicates that students who demonstrated increasing levels of interruption and disruptive behaviors regarded their teachers' punitive action as harsher.

Schools can foster positive relationships between students and teachers by ensuring that disciplinary school codes are not discriminatory to prevent students from displaying rebellious conduct. This indicates that students who demonstrated increasing levels of interruption and disruptive behaviors regarded their teachers' punitive action as harsher. This means that teachers can consider utilizing proactive, positive classroom management approaches like incorporating meaningful behavioral expectations and enhancing them (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Enhancing students' self-esteem seems feasible in ensuring that they do not display disruptive behaviors. Zuković and Stojadinovic (2021) led qualitative research to assess the importance of utilizing positive discipline in enhancing self-esteem among adolescents in schools. According to the authors, positive reinforcement is a method of parenthood founded on the principles of psychoanalytic theory, which perceive support as a means of fostering self-esteem. When applied in schools, this concept implies that students cannot display positive behaviors unless teachers utilize less discriminatory and harsh punishment approaches.

Researchers consider this approach vital because it lays the foundation for the advancement of human self-worth and dignity, respect for others, including their rights, the nurturing of compassion, and the use of constructive dialogue. The researchers concluded that when the perception of good school discipline enhanced,

so did students' self-esteem levels. Therefore, schools should ensure the policies they implement to correct students' behaviors focus on improving their self-esteem.

Chapter Summary

The main objective of this literature review is to assess the contributions made by different researchers regarding the use of behavioral referrals to correct students' adverse behaviors. Various researchers have presented distinct information and shared their perceptions regarding the utilization of behavioral referral programs on students' negative behaviors. This chapter also described factors that influence a student's negative behavior by using the social reconstruction theory. Finally, this literature review section includes the various interventions that school administrators can utilize to foster positive behaviors and relationships between teachers and students to help ensure student's academic success in the future.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

This study explored semester-long referral data from a ninth-grade cohort in a public school in a southeastern state. The archival data (office discipline referrals [ODRs]) used in the study were collected from August 16, 2021, to January 10, 2022. There is a need to examine the ODR process to guide educational stakeholders with providing additional support for students. This chapter describes the research approach and design, the study's participants, research methods and procedures, and the data analysis process.

Research Question

What will the examination of semester-long referral data from the entire ninth-grade cohort of a public school in a southeastern state reveal?

Purpose of the Study

The researcher aimed to understand the reasons for most referrals for this grade level and further suggest how that number can be reduced. The study considered the “who, what, where, and how” relative to the referral writing process as engaged by teachers in a southeastern state.

Research Design and Methodology

This study was a mixed-method study that include archival qualitative non-experimental design. Archival data refers to any data that is collected before the start of a research study. Such data may also include primary versus secondary sources where the researcher analyzes data for a different publication. Archival data may

include categories such as private data sets, public data sets, and private records (University of Virginia, n.d.). Data sets gathered privately may encompass information that has already been used in a different study, data gathered by another organization for evaluation or research aims, or data that one has collected for another research project (Koesten et. al., 2020). The term "public data" is used to describe information that has been acquired by public entities and rendered accessible to the general population for study (Ahmed et.al., 2023). In contrast to public records, which are sometimes gathered for the goal of research, personal documents are kept solely for the benefit of the subject of the record. Within this study, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Notably, qualitative data was derived from personal referrals, where the information was coded, structured and presented in this study. In addition, teacher

Notably, qualitative data was derived from personal referrals and teacher interviews, where the information was coded, structured, and presented in this study. On the other hand, quantitative data was derived from PowerSchool (an information database system containing students' information).

Because I focused on the school's database to get the data, an archival, non-experimental design and mixed method methodologies were the best approaches. A key advantage of archival research is that it enabled the researcher to ethically evaluate socially sensitive phenomena. Such an advantage cannot be found in the laboratory or field research where topics like violence, offenses, illegal behavior, and death may be challenging to examine (Heng et al., 2018).

The high school was the target site for the study and has a total population of 415 students. According to Ward (2018), one of the demographics characteristics of high school students is that the majority range between 13 and 17 years of age. Additionally, more that 70% of high school students embrace cultural diversity, making efforts to interact and appreciate peers from other ethnic groups (Ward, 2018).

Because I focused on the school's database to get the data, an archival, non-experimental design was the best approach. I acquired the numerical data from the school's database and examined it in a quantifiable way through statistical analysis. Khaldi (2017) noted that the non-experimental design was most suitable for the study because control groups, random assignment, or the modification of the independent variable could not be applied in the research study. The non-experimental design offered the ability for me to collect specific data when they are able, rather than a set of time. With this non-experimental research design, I defined and measured the features of the subject matter with more accuracy. Moreover, the design is appropriate for the study because the impact of the study variables is well known (Khaldi, 2017).

Archival data retrieval techniques were applied during the collection of one semester-long data. According to Heng et al. (2018), archival research is the process where researchers analyze data stored for other purposes, not only academic research. The approach is widely applied in different fields, including developmental psychology, sociology and economics. Archival data collection ensures that samples come from various sources compared to those used in laboratory research. Also, the archival data technique ensures that phenomena are examined over time. On this point, archival data collection facilitates the investigation of issues linked to time in research (Heng et al., 2018). Because the archival data collection happens surreptitiously, demand characteristics are lowered. Demand characteristics refer to the experimental artifacts that emerge after the research participants try to distinguish the research hypotheses and unconsciously or consciously modify their behavior in reaction to their understanding of the research purpose.

A key advantage of archival research is that it enables the researcher to ethically evaluate socially sensitive phenomena (Heng, 2018). Such an advantage

cannot be found in the laboratory or field research where topics like violence, offenses, illegal behavior, and death may be challenging to examine. The reason is that these subjects are highly sensitive. This problem is circumvented by archival research by measuring socially sensitive topics in indirect and non-confrontational ways (Heng et al., 2018). The application of archival data collection methods in this research is fundamental because it helps in protecting the anonymity of the students and teachers.

Research Setting

The data collection occurred at a public high school in Henderson County school district in a southeastern state. The high school is the target site for the study and has a total population of 415 students. However, with respect to the demographics of the high school being studied, the demographics were 67% African American, 24% White, 7% Latinx, and 0% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Asian or American Indian students. I analyzed 106 referrals for just the ninth-grade class for one semester of freshmen enrolled in the school. An increased number of referrals, particularly of the freshman class, for this school in the district was the main issue that compelled this study. This prompted the need to investigate why the school had the highest referrals and determine strategies that may be applied to reduce these numbers. The Henderson County school district is comprised of three schools, making a population of approximately 1,500 students district wide. The high school explored in this study experienced higher suspension rates over other schools in the studied district and the highest were at the ninth-grade level.

Parts of this paragraph should be in the participants section. I examined secondary data in a computer database developed for school districts. I derived my sampling identification from the institution using purposive sampling. In addition to

going through the IRB process, I obtained permission to gather student office referrals from the high school's principal and the school district's superintendent. All the information will be kept confidential, and I omitted all names on the data associated with this study. I utilized the purposive sampling method in conducting this research. The purposive sampling was fundamental in documenting and examining the referrals written for students in ninth grade. Using PowerSchool, I collected the archival data on discipline referrals during one semester (SY 2021-SY 2022). Archival data refers to any data that is collected before the start of a research study (University of Virginia, n.d.). Sharma (2017) noted that a purposive sampling approach allows the researcher to take advantage of a qualitative research design, allowing for the appropriate collection of data. Moreover, purposive sampling enables the research designs to be adaptive, meaning I can apply techniques when required to achieve a specific goal enabling the possibilities of generalization. Such efforts should be analytic, logical or theoretical to be valid. In this light, purposive sampling allows for results to offer information and data about future considerations and decisions.

More importantly, purposive sampling enables the targeting of niche demographics to come up with data points. On this point, using the purposive sampling strategy in collecting data involves selecting participants with similar characteristics. Such features may include physical attributes, emotional reactions or income levels. A maximum variation level can be gathered in the sample through the application of purposive sampling. Because purposive sampling is heterogeneous, participants can be chosen from a wide range of significant cases for the study (Sharma, 2017). Researchers can get more insights into a particular primary point under examination.

Data Collection Measures, Instruments, and Tools

Evaluation of ODRs

Data is collected to evaluate discipline referrals. An examination of these referrals was performed to determine the cause for which they were written. I was also able to derive the patterns of the data retrieved. It is crucial to note that a staff member usually fills out the referral form. All seven sections of this form are filled with numerous details by the staff. The first part of this form contained details such as the administrator's name, teacher's and student's names, grade/school, incident date, and time of day. The second section of the form necessitates teachers to select a category of the offense, with the last part of the referral filled out by a staff member. From there, a school administrator signs and approves the submissions of the referral.

After the referral form is completed, the school principal reviews the referral to determine the student's behavior and previous behavior intercessions, after which a decision is made whether to issue an in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension or any other intervention to punish behavior infractions. After the student is given an out-of-school suspension, the student data clerk enters the data into the PowerSchool database for the school district. After completing this task, the clerk fills an ODR copy that is later stored in the assistant principal's office file cabinet.

Teacher Interviews

After obtaining IRB approval, I contacted the high school principal in the studied district to ask for permission to interview teachers within his building. After permission was granted, I sent a letter via email to the ninth-grade teachers explaining the purpose of the study, the interview process, the nature of the study, and the guarantee of confidentiality. I developed open-ended questions for the interview. The teacher interviews took place during the week of February of 21, 2023, and concluded

on February 27, 2023. Teachers who participated met with me for one 30-60 minutes interview at their convenience either before school, during a break period, or after school. The interviews were recorded so that I could accurately transcribe what was discussed. The audio recordings were reviewed only by me and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Data collected were kept in a locked cabinet where only I could access it. Interview responses were anonymous. Also, teachers were not asked to disclose any identifiable information with any of the questions in the interview. Data analysis of the teacher interviews are discussed in Chapter Four.

Participants in the Study

To accurately understand the interviewee responses, it is necessary to provide theory summary of details. The first important factor is the grade levels taught. These teachers instruct a combination of more than one grade of students. One teacher teaches grades 9, 10, and 11. Another teacher teaches a combination of grades 9 & 10, whereas four teachers teach grades 9, 10, 11, and 12. The second important factor is their teaching experience. Two teachers have less than 10 years of experience, whereas two teachers have teaching experience of between 10 and 19 years. Lastly, two teachers have at least 20 years of teaching experience. The final crucial factor is the certified teaching areas of these teachers. The individual certified teaching areas of each teacher are biology (one teacher); English (one teacher); Multicategory (Multicat), learning disability (LD), and intellectual disability (ID) (one teacher); math (one teacher); visual arts (one teacher); and Spanish (one teacher). The study's six participants are profiled below, using pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity.

Ms. Smith has been teaching for nine years in the United States and 16 years overall. She has taught students in grades 9-11. She is certified to teach biology. Ms.

Smith has both bachelor's and master's degrees in biology. She obtained initial certification by coming to the United States on an exchange visitor program for teachers.

Mrs. Johnson has taught for a total of three years. Currently, she teaches ninth and 10th graders. Mrs. Johnson is certified to teach English grades 7-12. Mrs. Johnson holds a bachelor's degree in communication and journalism and graduate certificate in communication. She is currently pursuing a Master of Education degree specializing in technology. She obtained her initial license through the Teachers of Tomorrow program.

Mr. Smash has been teaching for a total of 21 years; four of those years he taught in India and the remaining 17 years with the Henderson County School District. He is certified to teach students in grades 9-12, and he is also certified to be a principal. Mr. Smash received a master's degree in mathematics. He obtained a bachelor's degree in math and statistics. Additionally, Mr. Smash earned a master's degree in educational administration. He received initial licensure through the completion of his graduate program.

Dr. P. has been teaching for a total of 25 years (15 years at Henderson County District, three years at Gulf Coast High School, and seven years in India). He currently is teaching students in grades 9-12. Dr. P is certified to teach multcategory students, students with learning disabilities, and students with intellectual disabilities. Dr. P. also has principal certification. Dr. P. earned a doctorate in educational leadership. He also has degrees in special education, psychology, and neurobiology. He obtained his initial certification through the J-1 Visa program.

Ms. Susan has been teaching for over 26 years. She has taught students in grades 9-12Ms. Susan has a Bachelor of Science in Spanish education. She is certified

to teach Spanish grades K-12. Ms. Susan obtained her initial licensure through the traditional method.

Mr. Sloan has been teaching for a total of six years. He obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts in education. Mr. Sloan received his initial licensure through the traditional method. He is certified to teach students in grades K-12.

Data Analysis

I started by analyzing the data sets used in the current study. I classified suspensions into one of two classifications: in school suspension (ISS) and OSS. These data sets encompassed all out-of-school and in-school suspension information for learners in the ninth grade. Further analysis of the data included separate classification of the referral counts by race, gender, disability status, grade level, infraction type, and ESOL status. In particular, the PowerSchool database provided all the data.

I created an Excel spreadsheet containing separate sheets for every data set. The principal investigator used the district student information system to query ODRs for the students in ninth grade. These were the referrals associated with ISS and OSS. It is fundamental to mention that this discipline data was retrieved between August 16th and January 10th, 2022. Every discipline referral was coded according to pattern variables and particular demographics such as the place, time, and location. Also, gender, incident data, referral teacher codes, and disability status codes were used. The discipline referral types were also coded statistically into one of 102 offense forms as denoted by the information database system in the school district. I used qualitative data, such as archival referral and teacher interviews, to examine and identify the associated themes.

After collecting the data, I ensured it was handled with the utmost confidentiality. I will keep the data intact for four years following this study. Before starting the data collection process, I ensured that I acquired permission to conduct the study and access the student referral data from the superintendent and the school principal in a letter.

This study's analysis aimed at ascertaining the gender, grade level, behaviors infraction, ethnicity/race, and the referring teacher. The data analysis ended with the school profile, because it is associated with discipline data and provided practical intervention suggestions based on the evidence presented by the literature review. I chose the inductive research approach because it is influential in determining probability. Regoli (2016) noted that the inductive approach to research starts with inferences or observations. It drives more investigation to determine whether the probable inference or judgment is accurate or inaccurate. During the process, the researcher who utilizes the inductive approach investigates the realm and a particular context and attempts to test various scenarios. This examination is best suited for investigating or analyzing probabilities (Regoli, 2016). It also helps the researcher to indulge in inductive reasoning to comprehend how correct or work the first evaluations and inferences were.

The essential advantage of this approach is that it enables the researcher to work with probabilities. The researcher generates several options, although not all possibilities are possible or accurate. When the researcher wants to create a perception or measure an idea while having a few materials or data in hand, they require a starting point offered by the inductive approach. Therefore, applying this research approach helps the researcher develop their perceptions (Regoli, 2016). It also influenced how they approached the research.

Another advantage of the approach is that it allows a researcher to be wrong. Thus, I had to apply more observations to ascertain whether my perceptions were accurate (Sheppard, 2020). The inductive approach in this research commenced with a collection of archival data. After collecting enough data, I looked for specific trends and patterns in the data to develop a theory explaining the patterns and frequencies (Sheppard, 2020). In other words, while using this approach, I started with specific experiences and moved to a broad set of premises about the results. Because the collected data were entered in an Excel spreadsheet, I imported the data to MAXQDA for further data analysis and manipulation (coding). Kuckartz and Rädiker (2019) noted that the MAXQDA is a powerful computer-assisted software used for qualitative data analysis that assists analysts and researchers in gaining ideas from text or written documents, for instance, texts in a survey or submissions. I chose this software due to its ability to handle different and many forms of data. Because MAXQDA can work with large amounts of diverse data formats, I could quickly evaluate survey data (qualitative) and text documents (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019). Notably, the software can support various file formats such as video, text, images, and audio. In that manner, different software programs might have been used to analyze and manipulate various forms of data. I chose this software because it helps store all the research data in one project pack.

According to Kuckartz and Rädiker (2019), the software can effectively handle research studies with numerous data sources because its project pack serves as the single source for the whole research data. The software's Document System ensures that a researcher can create folders for managing project data. Also, the Document System's window helps a researcher to handle their data effectively, perform various analyses and examine individual inputs. MAXQDA ensures easy and

quick qualitative analysis. The software simplifies the data analysis project because it contains multiple functions, including MAXDictio and auto-coding (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019). This research involved a coding process for the data collected, which warrants using MAXQDA. Additionally, after all the quantitative data was thoroughly analyzed, five to six research questions were developed to gather teacher insight. This data was then analyzed to provide a first-hand perspective from teachers.

Ethical Procedures

The protection of the research participants and the application of ethical behaviors are highly significant in any research study. While conducting this study, I ensured careful consideration of every study action while taking care of the confidentiality and well-being of the participants. One of the most fundamental ethical procedures included assigning pseudonyms to any real names of the participants. I ensured that all personal information belonging to students and teachers was not shared with any third party. Further, I obtained permission to get access to the archival data belonging to the high school.

Summary

This research study aimed to examine referral data collected over one semester in a high school in a southeastern state in the United States. Notably, this data belonged to students in grade nine. Mainly, this school has been experiencing increased cases of suspensions among students in the past two years. I collected archival data for this study. Some data collection methods included interviews, archival data collection and surveys. The archived school discipline data from the school district's database consisted of the study's data set. The data was retrieved between August 2021 and January 2022. The information consisted of de-identified discipline data for all learners referred to and received disciplinary action because of

offenses. Remarkably, this study only utilized qualitative data, for instance, discipline plans data and archived referral information, to develop several themes. In that manner, this study is considered an archival qualitative non-experimental design, which utilized secondary data.

All archival data was derived from the school district database system known as PowerSchool. It is fundamental in working on complex issues of developing inferences that everyone can comprehend. The sampling method used in this study was the purposive convenience sampling strategy. I chose this strategy for the study because it is convenient for exploring phenomena within the high school. Also, the use of purposive sampling ensured that data generalizations were developed. While I could not develop claims regarding the whole population, purposive sampling assisted me in generalizing about the sample used.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to examine one-semester-long referral data from the entire ninth-grade cohort of a public school in a southeastern state. The following research question was developed and guided this study to identify these experiences: What will the examination of semester-long referral data from the entire ninth-grade cohort of a public school in a southeastern state reveal? This research study incorporated archival discipline data collected during the first semester of the 2021-2022 school year. The discussion in this chapter presents the findings obtained using MAXQDA data analysis software to code and analyze the collected semi-structured interview responses from six classroom teachers. The results presented in this chapter provide a detailed description of the emerging and primary themes.

Study Demographics

The study assessed semester-long referral data from a total of 106 ninth-grade students at a public school in a southeastern state. Most of the referrals ($n = 82$, 77.5%) involved African American students, while 19.8% ($n = 21$) were White students and 2.8% ($n = 3$) were Hispanic. Concerning the gender of the students, 69.8% ($n = 74$) were males, while 30.2% were females ($n = 32$). The findings presented in Table 4.1 also indicate that the majority of students were general education (gen. ed.) students (74.5%).

Table 4.1 Summary of the Study Demographics

Demographic Factors		<i>f</i>	%
Race	AA	82	77.4%
	Hispanic	3	2.8%
	White	21	19.8%
Gender	Female	32	30.2%
	Male	74	69.8%
Disability	Gen. Ed.	79	74.5%
	ID-Mild	1	0.9%
	OHI	10	9.4%
	OHI/SLD	6	5.7%
	SLD	10	9.4%

Note: *f* refers to frequency.

Number of Infractions

The referrals occurred as a result of different types of violations. As shown in Table 4.2, the most common type of infraction was defiance, which was reported among 18 students. Cutting class was reported among 14.2% of the students, while tardiness was the third most (10.4%) frequently reported infraction. Violations involving inappropriate language were committed by nine (8.5%) students, while tobacco violations were committed by 7.5% ($n = 8$) of the students. Infractions involving physical violence were committed by seven (6.6%) students while dress code violations were committed by 5.7% ($n = 6$) of the students.

Confrontation was also reported among 5.7% ($n = 6$) of the students. Violations involving leaving class were committed by 3.8% ($n = 4$) of the students. Similarly, the other offenses (serious) were committed by 3.8% ($n = 4$) of the students. Infractions involving detention violations were committed by 2.8% ($n = 3$) of the students. Property misuse was also reported among 2.8% ($n = 3$) of the students. Dishonesty was reported among 1.9% ($n = 2$) of the students. Similarly, horseplay was committed by 1.9% ($n = 2$) of the students. Table 4.1 also indicates that

1.9% ($n = 2$) of the students committed an infraction involving phone violations. Students who were reported to have disrupted class were also 1.9% ($n = 2$), which was the same as the number of those who were reported with inappropriate material. One student was reported to have bullied others, and one was reported with inappropriate behavior (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Number of Infractions

Infraction	<i>f</i>	%
Bullying	1	0.9%
Inappropriate behavior	2	0.9%
Dishonesty	2	1.9%
Horseplay	2	1.9%
Phone violation	2	1.9%
Disrupting class	2	1.9%
Inappropriate material	2	1.9%
Property misuse	3	2.8%
Detention violation	3	2.8%
Leaving class	4	3.8%
Other offenses (serious)	4	3.8%
Dress code violation	5	4.7%
Confrontation	6	5.7%
Tobacco violation	8	7.5%
Tardy	11	10.4%
Cutting Class	15	14.2%
Defiance	18	17.0%

Note: *f* refers to frequency.

Number of Referrals

The assessment of the number of referrals based on month revealed that the majority of the referrals were reported in October ($n = 35$), followed by November ($n = 34$), December ($n = 25$), September ($n = 9$), and the least number in January ($n = 3$). The data shows that the referral cases were high in October and November. Notably, the referrals started to decline in December and stayed at a minimum in January. Concerning the number of referrals based on the time of reporting, the majority was reported between 1 p.m. and 1:59 p.m. ($n = 19$), followed by the number

between 10 a.m. and 10:59 a.m. ($n = 17$), 11 a.m. and 11:59 a.m. ($n = 17$), 9 a.m. and 9:59 a.m. ($n = 16$), 2 p.m. and 2:59 p.m. ($n = 14$), 8 a.m. and 8:59 a.m. ($n = 10$), and the least between 3 p.m. and 3:59 p.m. ($n = 3$). The analysis also revealed that the number of referrals varied based on the day of the week, with the majority being reported on Wednesday ($n = 33$), followed by Thursday ($n = 31$), Friday ($n = 21$), Monday ($n = 13$) and the least number on Tuesday ($n = 8$). As shown in Table 4.2, the number of referrals also varied based on the location, with the majority being reported in the classroom ($n = 56$), in the hall ($n = 25$), and in the administrative area ($n = 14$). Concerning the individual who created the referrals, many of the referrals were created by Teacher 4 ($n = 11$) followed by Teacher 3 ($n = 9$). Teacher 4 had the highest amount of the referrals out the teachers interviewed.

Table 4.3 Number of Referrals

	Factor	Number of Referrals
Month	January	3
	September	9
	October	35
	November	34
	December	25
Time	8:00-8:59 am	10
	9:00-9:59 am	16
	10:00-10:59 am	17
	11:00-11:59 am	17
	12:00-12:59 pm	10
	1:00-1:59 pm	19
	2:00-2:59 pm	14
	3:00-3:59 pm	3
Day of Week	Monday	13
	Tuesday	8
	Wednesday	33
	Thursday	31
	Friday	21
Location	Classroom	56
	Hall	25
	Administrative Area/Office	14

Gym	5
Restroom	2
Hallway	1
Media Center	1
Yard/Playground	1
Cafeteria	1

Infractions and Racial Background

The analysis indicated that the infractions varied based on the racial background (Table 4). African American students made up 88.9% ($n = 16$) of those reported with defiance, while only one Hispanic and one White student had referrals due to defiance. Among the students reported with cutting class, African Americans were the majority ($n = 11$, 73.3%) and the White students made up the remaining 26.7% ($n = 4$). All students who were reported with cases of tardiness were African Americans except for one White student. Similarly, only one White student was with cases of the violation involving inappropriate language while the remaining eight cases of the offence (88.9%) involved African Americans. Among the students reported with dress code violation ($n = 5$), African Americans were the majority ($n = 5$, 83.3%) and the White students made up the remaining 26.7% ($n = 4$). Among the students reported with detention violation ($n = 3$), African Americans were the majority ($n = 2$, 66.7%) and the White students made up the remaining 33.3% ($n = 1$). For referrals due to horseplay ($n = 2$), 50% were African Americans and 50%, ($n = 1$) were White students ($n = 1$). All cases of referrals due to infraction involving physical violence ($n = 7$), other offences (serious) ($n = 4$), leaving class ($n = 4$) disrupting class ($n = 2$), phone violation ($n = 2$), confrontation ($n = 2$), dishonesty ($n = 2$), bullying ($n = 1$), and inappropriate behavior ($n = 1$) were African American students. All cases of referrals due to infraction involving tobacco violation ($n = 8$) were White students. Similarly, all cases of referrals due to infraction involving property misuse ($n = 3$)

were White students. All cases of referrals due to infraction involving inappropriate material ($n = 2$) were Hispanic students (Table 4.3).

Table 4.4 Number of Infractions and Racial Background

Infraction	AA		Hispanic		White	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Dishonesty ($n = 2$)	2	100 %	0	0%	0	0%
Inappropriate language ($n = 9$)	8	88.9 %	0	0%	1	11.1%
Horseplay ($n = 2$)	1	50 %	0	0%	1	50%
Physical violence ($n = 7$)	7	100 %	0	0%	0	0%
Detention violation ($n = 3$)	2	66.7 %	0	0%	1	33.3%
Dress code violation ($n = 5$)	4	83.3 %	0	0%	1	16.7%
Other offenses (serious) ($n = 4$)	4	100 %	0	0%	0	0%
Defiance ($n = 18$)	16	88.9 %	1	5.6%	1	5.6%
Cutting class ($n = 15$)	11	73.3 %	0	0%	4	26.7%
Tardy ($n = 11$)	10	90.9 %	0	0%	1	9.1%
Leaving class ($n = 4$)	4	100 %	0	0%	0	0%
Bullying ($n = 1$)	1	100 %	0	0%	0	0%
Phone violation ($n = 2$)	2	100 %	0	0%	0	0%
Inappropriate behavior ($n = 2$)	2	100 %	0	0%	0	0%
Disrupting class ($n = 2$)	2	100 %	0	0%	0	0%
Confrontation ($n = 6$)	6	100 %	0	0%	0	0%
Tobacco violation ($n = 8$)	0	0 %	0	0%	8	100%
Property misuse ($n = 3$)	0	0 %	0	0%	3	100%
Inappropriate material ($n = 2$)	0	0 %	2	100%	0	0%

Note: *f* refers to frequency.

Infractions and Gender

The findings presented in Table 4.4 indicate that cases of referrals due to various infractions differed based on gender. Among the students reported with tobacco violation ($n = 8$), female students were the majority ($n = 5$, 62.5%). Similarly, for referrals due to cutting class ($n = 15$), female students were the majority ($n = 9$, 60%). However, among the students reported with infraction involving physical violence ($n = 7$), male students were the majority ($n = 6$, 85.7%). Similarly, for referrals due to infraction involving defiance ($n = 18$), male students were the

majority ($n = 14$, 77.8%). The findings in Table 4.4 also indicate that for referrals due to infraction involving inappropriate language ($n = 9$), male students were the majority ($n = 5$, 55.6%). For the cases of referrals involving, dress code violation ($n = 5$), leaving class ($n = 4$), phone violation ($n = 2$), and inappropriate material ($n = 2$), the number of female students was equal to number of male students. However, all cases of referrals due to infraction involving dishonesty ($n = 2$) were female students. The findings in Table 4.4 also indicates that all cases of referrals due to infraction involving tardiness ($n = 11$), other offenses (serious) ($n = 4$), property misuse ($n = 3$), detention violation ($n = 3$), confrontation ($n = 2$), disrupting class ($n = 2$), horseplay ($n = 2$), inappropriate behavior ($n = 1$), and bullying ($n = 1$) were male students.

Table 4.5 Number of Infractions Across Gender Groups

Infraction	Male		Female	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Dishonesty ($n = 2$)	2	100%	0	0 %
Inappropriate language ($n = 9$)	4	44.4%	5	55.6 %
Horseplay ($n = 2$)	0	0%	2	100 %
Physical violence ($n = 7$)	1	14.3%	6	85.7 %
Detention violation ($n = 3$)	0	0%	3	100 %
Dress code violation ($n = 5$)	2	50%	3	50 %
Other offenses (serious) ($n = 4$)	0	0%	4	100 %
Defiance ($n = 18$)	4	22.2%	14	77.8 %
Cutting class ($n = 15$)	9	60%	6	40 %
Tardy ($n = 11$)	0	0 %	11	100 %
Leaving class ($n = 4$)	2	50 %	2	50 %
Bullying ($n = 1$)	0	0 %	1	100 %
Phone violation ($n = 2$)	1	50 %	1	50 %
Inappropriate behavior ($n = 2$)	0	0 %	2	100 %
Disrupting class ($n = 2$)	0	0 %	1	100 %
Confrontation ($n = 6$)	0	0 %	6	100 %
Tobacco violation ($n = 8$)	5	62.5%	3	37.5 %
Property misuse ($n = 3$)	0	0 %	3	100 %
Inappropriate material ($n = 2$)	1	50 %	1	50 %

Note: *f* refers to frequency.

Infractions and Disability

The findings presented in Table 4.5 indicate that cases of referrals due to various infractions differed based on disability status. Gen. ed. students made up 77.8% ($n = 7$) of the referrals reported with inappropriate language, while only one OHI and one OHI/SLD student had referral due to inappropriate language. All students who were reported with cases of confrontation ($n = 5$) were Gen. ed. students except one SLD student. Similarly, only two SLD students were reported with cases of the violation involving cutting class while the remaining 13 cases of the offence (86.7%) involved gen. ed. students. Among the students reported with physical violence ($n = 7$), Gen. ed. students were the majority ($n = 4$, 57.1%), two were OHI students and one was SLD student. One gen. ed. student and one SLD student were reported with horseplay. Most of the referrals due to defiance involved gen. ed. students ($n = 11$, 61.1%), three were OHI students, two were SLD students, one was ID-mild, and another was an OHI/SLD student. Similarly, most of the referrals due to tardiness involved OHI/SLD student ($n = 4$, 36.4%), three were gen. ed students, two were SLD students, and another two were OHI students. Among the two referrals involving inappropriate behavior, one was OHI student while the other was SLD. Among the two referrals involving inappropriate material, one was a gen. ed student while the other was OHI. All cases of referrals due to infraction involving tobacco violation ($n = 8$), dress code violation ($n = 5$), leaving class ($n = 4$), other offenses (serious) ($n = 4$), property misuse ($n = 3$), detention violation ($n = 3$), disrupting class ($n = 2$), phone violation ($n = 2$), dishonesty ($n = 2$), and bullying ($n = 1$) were gen. ed. students.

Table 4.6 Number of Infractions Across Disability Groups

Infraction	Gen. Ed.		ID-Mild	OHI		OHI/SLD		SLD	
	<i>f</i>	%	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%
Dishonesty (<i>n</i> = 2)	2	100%	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Inappropriate Language (<i>n</i> = 9)	7	77.8%	0%	1	11.1%	1	11.1%	0	0%
Horseplay (<i>n</i> = 2)	1	50%	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	50%
Physical Violence (<i>n</i> = 7)	4	57.1%	0%	2	28.6%	0	0%	1	14.3%
Detention Violation (<i>n</i> = 3)	3	100%	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Dress Code Violation (<i>n</i> = 5)	5	100%	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Other Offenses (Serious) (<i>n</i> = 4)	4	100%	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Defiance (<i>n</i> = 18)	1	61.1%	5.6%	3	16.7%	1	5.6%	2	11.1%
Cutting Class (<i>n</i> = 15)	1	86.7%	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	13.3%
Tardy (<i>n</i> = 11)	3	27.3%	0%	2	18.2%	4	36.4%	2	18.2%
Leaving Class (<i>n</i> = 4)	4	100%	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Bullying (<i>n</i> = 1)	1	100%	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Phone Violation (<i>n</i> = 2)	2	100%	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Inappropriate Behavior (<i>n</i> = 2)	0	0%	0%	1	50%	0	0%	1	50%
Disrupting Class (<i>n</i> = 2)	1	100%	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Confrontation (<i>n</i> = 6)	5	83%	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	16.7%
Tobacco Violation (<i>n</i> = 8)	8	100%	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Property Misuse (<i>n</i> = 3)	3	100%	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Inappropriate	1	50%	0%	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%

Material
($n = 2$)

Note: f refers to frequency.

Infractions and Suspensions

The findings shown in Table 4.6 indicate the referral students received varied based on the violation committed. All cases of infraction involving tobacco violation ($n = 8$), physical violence ($n = 7$), other offenses (serious) ($n = 4$), horseplay ($n = 2$), inappropriate material ($n = 2$), and bullying ($n = 1$) received OSS referral. However, all cases of infraction involving dress code violation ($n = 5$), leaving class ($n = 4$), property misuse ($n = 3$), phone violation ($n = 2$), and disrupting class ($n = 2$), and dishonesty ($n = 2$) received ISS referral. Among the students who were reported with confrontation ($n = 6$), five of them received OSS (83.3%) referral while one received ISS referral. Among the students who were reported with inappropriate language ($n = 9$), six of them received ISS referral (66.7%) while three received OSS referral (33.3%). Eleven of the students who were reported with cutting class ($n = 15$) received ISS referral (73.3 %) while four received OSS referral (26.7%). Fifteen of the students who reported with defiance ($n = 18$) received ISS referrals (83.3%), while three received OSS referral (16.7 %).

Among the students who were reported with tardiness ($n = 11$), nine of them received ISS referral (81.8%) while two received OSS referral. Among the students who were reported with inappropriate language ($n = 9$), six of them received ISS referral (66.7%) while three received OSS referral (33.3%). Two of the students who were reported with detention violation ($n = 3$) received ISS referral (66.7%) while one received OSS referral (33.3%). One of the students who was reported with inappropriate behavior ($n = 1$) received ISS referral, while the other one received OSS referral.

Table 4.7 Infractions and Suspensions

Infraction	ISS (n = 62)		OSS (n = 44)	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Dishonesty (<i>n</i> = 2)		50.0 %	1	50.0 %
Inappropriate language (<i>n</i> = 9)		66.7 %	3	33.3 %
Physical violence (<i>n</i> = 7)		0 %	7	100 %
Horseplay (<i>n</i> = 2)		0 %	2	100 %
Detention violation (<i>n</i> = 3)		66.7 %	1	33.3 %
Dress code violation (<i>n</i> = 5)		100 %	0	0 %
Defiance (<i>n</i> = 18)		83.3 %	3	16.7 %
Cutting class (<i>n</i> = 15)		73.3 %	4	26.7 %
Tardy (<i>n</i> = 11)		81.8 %	2	18.2 %
Leaving class (<i>n</i> = 4)		100 %	0	0 %
Bullying (<i>n</i> = 1)		0 %	1	100 %
Inappropriate behavior (<i>n</i> = 2)		50.0 %	1	50.0 %
Phone violation (<i>n</i> = 2)		100 %	0	0 %
Disrupting class (<i>n</i> = 2)		100 %	0	0 %
Confrontation (<i>n</i> = 6)		16.7 %	5	83.3 %
Tobacco violation (<i>n</i> = 8)		0.0 %	8	100 %
Property misuse (<i>n</i> = 3)		100 %	0	0 %
Inappropriate material (<i>n</i> = 2)		0 %	2	100 %
Other offenses (serious) (<i>n</i> = 4)		0 %	4	100 %

Note: ISS refers to in-school suspensions, OSS refers to out-of-school suspensions, and *f* refers to frequency.

Referrals Across Different Student Demographics

The cases of referrals also varied based on the student demographics (Table 4.7). Considering the racial background of the students, the majority of those who received ISS were African Americans (*n* = 51, 82.3%), while 10 (16.1%) of them were White students and only one was Hispanic. Table 4.1 also indicates that majority of those who received OSS were African Americans (*n* = 31, 70.5%), while 11 (25.0%) of them were White students and only two were Hispanic. Considering the gender of the students, majority of those who received OSS referrals were males (*n* = 32, 72.7%). Similarly, majority of those who received ISS referrals were males (*n* =

42, 67.7%). Concerning disability, most of those who received OSS were the Gen. ed. students ($n = 33$, 75%). Similarly, majority of those who received ISS referrals were males ($n = 46$, 74.7%).

Table 4.8 Referrals Across the Different Student Demographics

Student Demographics		ISS ($n = 62$)		OSS ($n = 44$)	
Race	AA ($n = 82$)	31	70.5 %	51	82.3 %
	Hispanic ($n = 3$)	2	4.5 %	1	1.6 %
	White ($n = 21$)	11	25.0 %	10	16.1 %
Gender	Female ($n = 32$)	12	27.3 %	20	32.3 %
	Male ($n = 74$)	32	72.7 %	42	67.7 %
Disability	Gen. ed. ($n = 79$)	33	75.0 %	46	74.2 %
	ID-Mild ($n = 1$)	0	0 %	1	1.6 %
	OHI ($n = 10$)	4	9.1 %	6	9.7 %
	OHI/SLD ($n = 6$)	2	4.5 %	4	6.5 %
	SLD ($n = 10$)	5	11.4 %	5	8.1 %

Note: ISS refers to in-school suspensions, OSS refers to out-of-school suspensions, and f refers to frequency.

Referrals Made by Teachers and Administrators

As shown in Table 4.8, a total 58 referrals were made by the administrators. Administrator 1 made 45 referrals, while Administrator 2 made 13 referrals. Most of the referrals made by Administrator 1 were for tobacco violation ($n = 7$), dress code violation ($n=5$), confrontation/altercation ($n = 5$), and cutting class ($n = 5$).

Table 4.9 Referrals Made by Administrators

	Offense	Number Referrals/ Offenses	Number per Teacher/ Administration	Total
Administrator 1	Tobacco violation	7	44	57
	Dress code violation	5		
	Confrontation/Altercation	5		
	Cutting class	5		
	Refusal to obey/defiant	4		
	Other offense (serious)	3		
	Dishonesty	2		
	Fighting	2		
	Horseplay	2		

	Bullying	1	
	Disrespect	1	
	Disrupting class	1	
	Hit/Kick/Push	1	
	Inappropriate behavior	1	
	Inappropriate material	1	
	Inappropriate language	1	
	Profanity/Fighting	1	
	Property misuse/ Horseplay	1	
Administrator 2	Fighting	4	13
	Profanity	2	
	Other offenses (serious)	1	
	Pornography	1	
	Tobacco violation	1	
	Inappropriate behavior	1	
	Cutting class	1	
	Refusal to obey/Defiant	1	
	Confrontation/Altercation	1	

As shown in Table 4.9, a total of 48 referrals were made by the teachers.

Teacher 4 had the highest number of referrals ($n = 11$), followed by Teacher 3 ($n = 9$), Teacher 2 ($n = 5$), and Teacher 6 ($n = 4$). For Teacher 4, the majority of the referrals were for tardy ($n = 7$) and refusal to obey/defiance ($n = 2$). For Teacher 3, the majority of the referrals were for leaving class ($n = 4$). For Teacher 2, the majority of the referrals were for detention violation ($n = 3$) and for Teacher 6, the majority of the referrals were for property misuse ($n = 2$).

Table 4.10 Referrals Made by Teachers

	Offense	Number of Referrals/ Offenses	Number per Teacher/ Administrator	Total
Teacher 1	Inappropriate	1	2	48
	Profanity	1		
Teacher 2	Detention Violation	3	5	
	Refusal to Obey/Defiant	2		
Teacher 3	Leaving Class	4	9	

	Cutting Class	2	
	Refusal to Obey/ Defiant	2	
	Phone Violation	1	
Teacher 4	Tardy	7	11
	Refusal to Obey/ Defiant	2	
	Profanity	1	
	Disrespect	1	
Teacher 5	Profanity	1	3
	Cutting Class	1	
	Profanity	1	
Teacher 6	Property Misuse	2	4
	Cutting Class	1	
	Refusal to Obey/ Defiant	1	
Teacher 7	Disrespect	1	3
	Phone Violation	1	
	Cutting Class	1	
Teacher 8	Disrespect	1	
	Cutting Class	1	
Teacher 9	Cutting Class	1	
	Defiant Behavior	1	
Teacher 10	Cutting Class	1	1
Teacher 11	Cutting Class	1	1
Teacher	Refusal to Obey/ Defiant	1	1
Teacher	Tardy	2	2
Teacher	Tardy	1	1

Repeat Offenses

Of the 106 students, 102 were repeat offenders. Among the repeat offenders, 69.6% were males (Table 4.10). The majority of the repeat offenders were African American students (77.5%). Concerning the infractions that were repeatedly committed by the students, Table 4.10 indicates that the most frequent infractions were refusal to obey/defiant (16.7%), cutting class (13.7%), tardy (10.8%), profanity (7.8%), tobacco violation (7.8%), and dress code violation (4.9%).

Table 4.11 Description of the Repeat Offenses

Student Demographics/Infractions	<i>f</i>	%
Female	31	30.4 %
Male	71	69.6 %

African American	79	77.5 %
White	20	19.6 %
Hispanic	3	2.9 %
Refusal to Obey/Defiant	17	16.7 %
Cutting Class	14	13.7 %
Tardy	11	10.8 %
Profanity	8	7.8 %
Tobacco Violation	8	7.8 %
Dress Code Violation	5	4.9 %
Fighting	4	3.9 %
Other Offenses	4	3.9 %
Leaving Class	4	3.9 %
Confrontation/Altercation	4	3.9 %
Detention Violation	3	2.9 %
Disrespect	3	2.9 %
Dishonesty	2	2.0 %
Inappropriate Language	2	2.0 %
Horseplay	2	2.0 %
Hit/Kick/Push	2	2.0 %
Property Misuse	2	2.0 %
Phone Violation	2	2.0 %
Inappropriate Behavior	2	2.0 %
Bullying	1	1.0 %
Pornography	1	1.0 %
Disrupting Class	1	1.0 %

Note: f refers to frequency.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a way of summarizing research findings into themes based on shared patterns in the data provided. According to Terry et al. (2017), thematic analysis works best for qualitative studies where the researcher uses non-numerical data such as statements for analysis. By using thematic analysis, the researcher can group the responses from interviews into a manner that relates to the research question. Consequently, it would help discuss the key concerns within the research questions into detail and help the researcher answer each inquiry in the best way possible. Below is an analysis of the three main themes from the results of the six teacher interviews.



Figure 4.1 Themes.

Need for Additional Training

The results from the teachers revealed that in their training to become teachers, they were given courses on classroom behavior management. These training courses were mainly concerned with the defiance of the students. Even though defiance is one of the most frequently occurring behaviors that leads to referral, there are many other behaviors as well. The interviews by the teachers revealed tardiness, profanity, tobacco violation, and cutting class as some of the most prevalent behaviors referred to. Consequently, they admit that they need more classroom behavior management training to deal with these behaviors. This is especially because the punishment of these students is not always the most effective method to deal with these infractions and negative unwanted behaviors by the students.

As one teacher indicated, “Things are a changing so frequently now days, and there is more research being done, so yes, this will be helpful every time when we attend professional development.”

Additionally, this theme is made even more relevant due to the ineffectiveness of implementing a standardized approach to effectively deal with these unwanted student behaviors. This is because the semester-long study data review demonstrates the students' high level of diversity that include differences due to ethnicity, gender, or disability. The number of referrals also differed per month, time, day of the week, and location.

The comments the teachers made in interviews expressed that they need more classroom training. These comments were relevant because of the differences in the infractions as well as the diversity of the students among the teachers interviewed. Each demographic had a unique type of infraction and the frequency in which they dominated. For example, the results show that African Americans represented all the dishonesty infractions, whereas inappropriate materials and property misuse are wholly dominated by Hispanics and Whites, respectively.

Transition from Middle to High School

Another major theme from the responses by the teachers and also demonstrated by the semester-long review of behavioral data from the students is that transition plays a significant role in infraction frequency. Most of the teachers have taught grades 8, 9, and 10. They reveal that it is at grade nine where they experience the highest number of infractions. The teachers allude that the transition from middle school to high school impacts the high frequency of infractions in ninth grade. This transition is tough for some ninth graders. Fortunately, by the 10th grade, the frequency of these behaviors begins to decrease, leading to a drastic reduction in reporting rates. According to the teachers interviewed, the students become acclimatized to the new challenges posed by ninth grade. They also mature into their new level, leading to an eventual reduction in the frequency of the reported behaviors.

It is also important to note that though the relatively younger teachers appeal for more training, the older teachers, such as the teacher from interviews 5 and 6, are satisfied. The sixth interviewee, for example, is quoted saying, “My Yankee accent, and my experience, I really feel like all of that lends itself to they don't try to try me, because that wasn't always the case when I was young and smiled more.” They aver that it is incumbent upon the teacher to adapt and be innovative in their classroom behavior management. According to teacher 5, the trainers taught them the traditional approach to managing students. This was during an era with no technology, internet, or smartphones. The principle from the initial training can then be adjusted depending on the circumstance.

Additionally, the teacher from interview 6 admitted that the training given to them was sufficient, and with time and experience, their approach to students changed. Rather than smiling all the time, there are appropriate times to display the serious demeanor of a teacher. These teacher revelations indicated a need to innovate and adapt to the change because there will be no training for every circumstance. The teachers, therefore, need to be innovative and adapt their classroom behavior management as the situation and circumstance demands.

Thoughtfulness in Decision-Making Process

All six teachers in the interview agreed and had congruence with the steps they would take when deciding to write a discipline referral. When a student exhibited a behavioral issue for the first time, the teachers would not immediately write a discipline referral. Instead, they would attempt to deal with the issue in-house. The interviewee 2 teacher said, “I try to avoid writing discipline problem as much as possible before trying out things in the classroom.” This means talking to the student about changing the identified behavioral issue and giving them several warnings. The

approach of warning and talking to the student is due to the empathy and understanding that, as humans, the students cannot be perfect and thus be prone to errors. However, in their decision-making process, the teachers note that there comes a time when warnings and talking to the student are not enough. These students with behavioral issues can only be instigated to change if their behavioral issue is referred to the relevant bodies in the school through the writing of a discipline referral. This approach is, however, only taken up when all the other steps of warning or talking to the student have failed.

The thoughtfulness in the decision-making process is also directly related to the student-teacher relationship. All six teachers in the interviews appreciated the need to develop a strong and high-quality student-teacher relationship, which is also related to the decision-making process. Interviewee 2 demonstrated this by saying, “Like if there is a good relation, a good bonding between teacher and student, then you can avoid a lot of discipline referral things because you have built that relation.” According to the teachers, the teacher-student relationship can be developed by engaging them in non-class related activities or chatter. This may include talking about their hobbies or having lunch with them. Alternatively, the relationship can be one of mutual respect whereby the teacher always shows respect to the student, hence expecting the same respect to be reciprocated. It is, however, important to note that all the teachers agreed that a strong and quality student-teacher relationship does not positively or negatively impact their writing of referrals. When they have warned and corrected the student for their behavioral issue without any success, they write the referral without hesitation. Therefore, the teacher-student relationship does not lead to the teachers' bias or lack of objectivity.

Summary

In summary, the results from the six teacher interviews revealed three main themes. First, there is a need to give the relatively younger teacher more training in classroom behavior management. However, training in itself is not sufficient. The teachers, especially the relatively older teachers with more teaching years, revealed the need for innovation and adaptation in managing the students and dealing with behavioral issues. These behavioral issues are mainly exhibited in the ninth grade due to the issues of transitioning from middle school to high school. In the decision-making process, the teachers' first attempt to deal with these behavioral issues in class and writing a discipline referral is the last course of action. Lastly, the student-teacher relationship is crucial in managing and controlling these behavioral issues. However, the relationship should not impact the writing of a disciplinary referral.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The literature review conducted in Chapter Two highlighted the significance of school discipline in creating a conducive environment for teaching and learning. The review revealed that the conventional approach to discipline involving out-of-school suspension (OSS) is ineffective in shaping students' behavior and could cause more harm than good (McIntosh et al., 2018). Theoretical frameworks, such as reconstruction, conscientization, and a social justice lens, provide viable alternatives to traditional disciplinary approaches prioritizing punishment over reform. These frameworks offer a systematic process for managing school discipline and promoting students' self-development. The literature review also revealed the existence of disparities in disciplinary practices, with Black students being more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts. Such disparities indicate a lack of social justice in disciplinary approaches and could contribute to a negative learning environment (Almog & Shechtman, 2007).

Overview of the Study

The review suggested that restorative justice practices prioritizing equity and fairness should be incorporated into disciplinary approaches to boost effectiveness. Social justice is a lens that recognizes the impact of social, economic, and political factors on students' behavior. This approach emphasizes the importance of addressing the underlying causes of misbehavior, such as poverty, discrimination, and trauma. Social justice approaches to discipline prioritize equity, fairness, and respect in

disciplinary practices, which helps to create a conducive learning environment for all students (Collie et al., 2012). By adopting social justice principles, schools can reduce disparities in disciplinary practices and promote positive student behavior. Restorative justice practices aim to repair the harm caused by misbehavior and encourage accountability and empathy (Austin et al., 2015). This approach focuses on repairing relationships damaged by misconduct rather than punishing students.

Restorative justice practices involve students, teachers, and other school community members in repairing harm and promoting positive behavior (Collie et al., 2012). This approach is effective in reducing suspensions and promoting positive behavior in students. One of the significant benefits of restorative justice practices is that they allow students to learn from their mistakes and take responsibility for their actions. This approach promotes self-reflection and helps students develop empathy toward others (Bell, 2019). Furthermore, restorative justice practices create a sense of community in which all members feel valued and respected, which contributes to a positive learning environment.

Implications

It is imperative to note that implementing social justice and restorative justice practices requires a significant shift in the mindset of educators, administrators, and students (Anyon et al., 2018). This shift involves moving away from punitive disciplinary practices that prioritize punishment over reform and towards a more holistic approach that recognizes the importance of addressing the underlying causes of misbehavior (Clunies-Ross & Little, 2008). Furthermore, implementing these practices requires adequate training and support for teachers and administrators to ensure that they can effectively implement these approaches in their schools (Blake et al., 2016). Promoting positive behavior in schools requires an integrated approach that

considers the underlying causes of misbehavior and seeks to address them through equitable and fair disciplinary practices. Social justice and restorative justice practices are viable alternatives to traditional disciplinary approaches prioritizing punishment over reform (Clunies-Ross & Little, 2008). By adopting these approaches, schools can create a conducive learning environment that promotes the self-development of all students.

Summary of Main Points

Chapter Five summarizes the details of the six teachers who participated in the research, including the grade levels taught, teaching experience, and certified teaching areas. The chapter also presents the main themes that emerged from the results of the interviews with the teachers. One of the major themes is the need for training in classroom behavior management (Bell, 2019). The teachers revealed that the training they received during their qualifying training to become a teacher focused mainly on defiance behavior. However, many other behaviors, such as tardiness, profanity, tobacco violation, and cutting class, need to be addressed. Moreover, the teachers suggest that implementing a standardized approach to dealing with these unwanted behaviors may not be effective due to the diversity of the students (Blake et al., 2016). Therefore, teachers need more classroom behavior management training to deal with different infractions and diversities. Another theme is innovation and adaptation in classroom behavior management. The veteran teachers were satisfied with the training they received, while the early career or novice teachers appealed for more training. The teachers asserted that it is incumbent upon the teacher to adapt and be innovative in their classroom behavior management (Cho et al., 2020). This aspect indicated a need to innovate and adapt to the change because there will be no training for every circumstance. The teachers, therefore, need to be innovative and adapt their classroom

behavior management as the situation and circumstance demands. The third major theme is the impact of transition on infraction frequency. Most of the teachers have taught grades 8, 9, and 10. They reveal that it is at grade nine where they experience the highest number of infractions. The high school transition from middle school impacts the high frequency of infractions in ninth grade. However, by the 10th grade, the frequency of these behaviors begins to decrease, leading to a drastic reduction in reporting rates.

The last major theme is the decision-making process in dealing with students with behavioral issues. All six teachers agreed that when a student exhibits a behavioral issue for the first time, they would not immediately write a discipline referral. Instead, they would attempt to deal with the issue in-house by talking to the student about changing the identified behavioral issue and giving them several warnings (Cho et al., 2020). However, in their decision-making process, the teachers noted that there comes a time when warnings and talking to the student are not enough. Generally, the results chapter highlights the need for continued training of teachers in classroom behavior management, innovation and adaptation in classroom behavior management, the impact of transition on infraction frequency, and the decision-making process in dealing with students with behavioral issues (Clunies-Ross & Little, 2008). The chapter provides valuable insights that can guide future research and policy development in managing student behavior in schools.

Action Plan

Based on the findings of the literature review, the following recommendations are proposed to improve school discipline.

Incorporate Social Justice Principles Into Disciplinary Approaches

School administrators and educators should adopt a social justice lens when dealing with students' behavior. This approach recognizes the impact of social injustice on students' behavior and seeks to address the underlying issues that contribute to misbehavior. Schools should prioritize equity, fairness, and respect in their disciplinary practices to create a conducive learning environment. Incorporating social justice principles into disciplinary approaches is crucial to promoting positive behavior in schools. This approach recognizes that social injustice, such as poverty, discrimination, and trauma, can contribute to students' misbehavior (Clunies-Ross & Little, 2008). By adopting a social justice lens, schools can work towards addressing these underlying issues and creating a more equitable and fair disciplinary system. One way to incorporate social justice principles into disciplinary approaches is to prioritize equity in disciplinary practices. This involves ensuring that all students are treated fairly and equally, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. This means that disciplinary consequences should be consistent and proportional to the offense committed, and biases should not influence disciplinary decisions (Cho et al., 2020).

Another important principle of social justice is fairness. Schools should strive to create a disciplinary system that is fair and just, which involves providing due process to students who have been accused of misbehavior (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). This means that students should have the opportunity to present their side of the story and that disciplinary consequences should be based on evidence. Respect is also an important principle of social justice in disciplinary approaches. Schools should strive to create a learning environment where all students feel valued and respected (Clunies-Ross & Little, 2008). It involves treating students with dignity

and respect, regardless of their behavior, and avoiding practices that could be perceived as discriminatory or punitive.

Incorporating social justice principles into disciplinary approaches can also involve addressing the root causes of misbehavior. This means that schools should work towards providing students with the resources and support they need to overcome challenges such as poverty, trauma, and discrimination. Schools can promote positive behavior and prevent future misbehavior by addressing these underlying issues. Incorporating social justice principles into disciplinary approaches is essential to promoting positive behavior in schools. This involves prioritizing equity, fairness, and respect in disciplinary practices and addressing the underlying issues that contribute to misbehavior (Clunies-Ross & Little, 2008). By adopting a social justice lens, schools can create a learning environment conducive to all students' self-development, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Adopt Restorative Justice Practices

Restorative justice practices aim to repair the harm caused by misbehavior and promote accountability and empathy. Instead of punishing students, schools should focus on repairing the harm done and creating a sense of community in which all members feel valued and respected. Adopting restorative justice practices in schools is crucial to promoting positive behavior and creating a supportive learning environment. Restorative justice practices aim to repair the harm caused by misbehavior and promote accountability and empathy rather than simply punishing students for their actions. By adopting restorative justice practices, schools can foster a sense of community in which all members feel valued and respected. Restorative justice practices involve bringing together the parties involved in a harmful incident, such as the victim, the offender, and any affected members of the community (Cho et

al., 2020). During this process, the parties are encouraged to share their perspectives and feelings, and to work together to identify ways to repair the harm that has been done. This can involve a range of actions, from apologies and restitution to community service and mediation.

One key benefit of restorative justice practices is promoting student accountability. Rather than simply being punished for their actions, students are encouraged to take responsibility for the harm they have caused and to work towards making things right. This can be a powerful motivator for students to change their behavior and take steps to repair any harm they have caused. Another important benefit of restorative justice practices is their promoting empathy and understanding among students. Through bringing together the parties involved in a harmful incident, restorative justice practices provide an opportunity for students to see things from each other's perspectives and to develop a deeper understanding of the impact of their actions on others (Cho et al., 2020). This can help foster a sense of community in which all members feel valued and respected, leading to more positive relationships among students.

In addition to promoting accountability and empathy, restorative justice practices can also help to reduce the likelihood of future misbehavior. By addressing the underlying issues that contribute to misbehavior like conflict, trauma, or discrimination, restorative justice practices can help to prevent future incidents from occurring (Cho et al., 2020). This can lead to a more positive and supportive learning environment for all students. Also, adopting restorative justice practices in schools is essential to promoting positive behavior and creating a supportive learning environment. Restorative justice practices aim to repair the harm caused by misbehavior and promote accountability and empathy, rather than simply punishing

students for their actions (Clunies-Ross & Little, 2008). By adopting restorative justice practices, schools can foster a sense of community in which all members feel valued and respected and can work towards preventing future incidents of misbehavior.

Provide Training for Teachers on Managing Challenging Behavior

Teachers should receive training on how to manage students' challenging behavior effectively. This training should include strategies for preventing misbehavior, de-escalating conflicts, and promoting positive behavior. When managing challenging behavior, it is important for teachers to have a comprehensive understanding of the underlying causes of misbehavior. This can include factors such as social and emotional difficulties, learning disabilities, and home life challenges. Once the root cause is identified, teachers can then develop effective strategies for preventing misbehavior. When managing challenging behavior, teachers need to have a comprehensive understanding of the underlying causes of misbehavior (Charlton & David, 1993). Through implementing these techniques, teachers can help prevent many behavioral issues from occurring in the first place. They can reduce the likelihood of students engaging in unacceptable behavior, which could ultimately reduce the probability of behavioral issues. However, even with the best preventative strategies, challenging behavior may still arise. In these instances, teachers need to have effective techniques for de-escalating conflicts and promoting positive behavior. This might involve things like remaining calm and composed, using non-verbal cues to communicate with students, and utilizing specific techniques for diffusing difficult situations. Providing training for teachers on managing challenging behavior is an essential component of effective classroom management (Clunies-Ross & Little,

2008). Equipping teachers with the knowledge and tools they need to handle difficult situations makes students feel more supported and engaged in their learning.

Address Disparities in Disciplinary Practices

Schools should examine their disciplinary practices to identify disparities in the treatment of students from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Schools should prioritize equity and fairness in their disciplinary practices and work to eliminate any biases contributing to treatment disparities. Addressing disparities in disciplinary practices is critical to promoting school equity and fairness. Studies have shown that students from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds receive differential treatment in school disciplinary practices (Cho et al., 2020). Black students, for example, are more likely to be suspended, expelled or subjected to harsher disciplinary consequences than their White counterparts. This has led to the creation of a school-to-prison pipeline that disproportionately affects minority students. To address these disparities, schools must examine their disciplinary practices and identify any biases contributing to unequal treatment. This can involve analyzing discipline data to identify patterns of disparate treatment or conducting focus groups with students and staff to gather their perspectives on the issue (Collie et al., 2012). Once the disparities have been identified, schools can then take steps to eliminate them.

One approach is to develop clear and consistent discipline policies that are applied equally to all students. This can involve creating a set of guidelines that outline the consequences for different types of misbehavior and ensuring that they are consistently applied across all racial and ethnic groups. Schools can also adopt restorative justice practices, as discussed earlier, which emphasize repairing the harm done and promoting accountability and empathy. Another approach is to provide

cultural competency training to teachers and administrators. This training can help educators understand how their own biases and stereotypes may affect their interactions with students from different backgrounds (Collie et al., 2012). It can also provide them with strategies for creating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Schools can also work to build stronger relationships with families and communities. This can involve engaging with parents and caregivers to understand their perspectives on disciplinary practices and involving them in the development of school policies. It can also involve partnering with community organizations to provide support and resources to students who may be at risk of being disproportionately disciplined. Overall, addressing disparities in disciplinary practices requires a comprehensive and systematic approach that prioritizes equity and fairness. Schools must be willing to acknowledge the existence of these disparities and take steps to eliminate them (Civil Rights Project, 2000). By doing so, they can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students.

Policy Implications

The findings of this study have policy implications for both teacher training and school discipline policies. Firstly, the results suggest that teacher training programs should provide more comprehensive and ongoing training on classroom behavior management, with a focus on addressing a wider range of student behaviors beyond defiance. This is particularly important given the diverse range of student demographics and behaviors that teachers encounter in the classroom. Additionally, training should be adapted to changes in student behaviors over time, in order to equip teachers with the necessary tools to address emerging issues. Secondly, the results suggest that school discipline policies should consider the impact of transitions on

student behavior (Civil Rights Project, 2000). Specifically, policies should recognize that the transition from middle school to high school can be a difficult period for students and provide targeted interventions and support to help them adjust. Additionally, policies should encourage teachers to take a proactive approach to managing student behavior, including attempts to address behavioral issues in-house before resorting to formal disciplinary actions (Cruz et al., 2021). Such policies may help to foster a positive and supportive school culture that emphasizes student development and success.

Empower the Students

Besides assisting the teachers to deal with the aforementioned issues, there is a need to also empower the students and reduce their likelihood of engaging in such unacceptable practices. Prajapati et. al (2017) recommended teaching students life skills lessons on how to deal with psychological issues and make wise decisions despite the influence of others. The educators should explain to the student the danger they pose to themselves and their families by engaging in the unaccepted behavior. The individual should emphasize that such actions could result in school dropout, or chronic illnesses, which may both affect their futures lives and reduce their abilities to enjoy a better life later. The school should also consider establishing a freshman academy that orients new students in to the school environment the moment they enroll. Currently, the school utilizes a freshman hall. During that time, the orientation team should have an interactive session with the student and explain the unacceptable behaviors and the consequences for noncompliance.

Suggestions for Future Research

Notably, the results of this study highlight the importance of ongoing teacher training and adaptation in managing student behavior in the classroom. The findings

suggest that traditional approaches to classroom behavior management may be insufficient in addressing the range of student behaviors that teachers encounter. Instead, teachers need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to adapt their approaches to meet the needs of their students. Additionally, the study highlights the impact of transitions on student behavior and the need for targeted interventions and support during these periods (Cruz et al., 2021). Ultimately, these findings have important policy implications for teacher training and school discipline policies, which should aim to promote a positive and supportive school culture that prioritizes student development and success.

Conclusion

In conclusion, school discipline is a critical aspect of promoting a conducive learning environment for students. The traditional disciplinary approach of punishment through out-of-school suspension has been found to be ineffective and could cause more harm than good. Instead, social justice principles and restorative justice practices offer viable alternatives to promoting positive behavior in students. Also, school discipline plays a critical role in the education system. In-school and out-of-school suspensions are typical forms of school discipline, but their effectiveness is often criticized for being too aggressive, unsuccessful at shaping behavior, and adversarial to students' educational development.

Studies show that social injustices affect respect, dignity, and decency, triggering indiscipline and ineffectiveness of out-of-school suspension. Therefore, schools should adopt restorative justice practices in their punishment strategies and treat all students equitably regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds. Theoretical frameworks such as social reconstruction and conscientization can help students realize awareness of the sociocultural reality and change facts to transform

their lives. Teachers should receive more guidance in handling students' behaviors, especially those with challenging behavior.

Finally, the literature review methodology is crucial in obtaining relevant research findings to describe the primary issue in the study. The literature review identified disparities in disciplinary practices, with Black students more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts. This finding highlights the need for schools to adopt equitable and fair disciplinary practices that prioritize the needs of all students. To improve school discipline, it is recommended that school administrators and educators adopt social justice principles, who recognize the impact of social injustice on students' behavior and seek to address the underlying issues that contribute to misbehavior. Furthermore, schools should prioritize restorative justice practices that aim to repair the harm caused by misbehavior and promote accountability and empathy among students. Finally, teachers should receive training on how to manage challenging behavior effectively. This training should include strategies for preventing misbehavior, de-escalating conflicts, and promoting positive behavior. Schools should also examine their disciplinary practices to identify disparities in treatment and work to eliminate any biases that contribute to such disparities. In conclusion, promoting positive behavior in schools requires a holistic approach that considers the underlying causes of misbehavior and seeks to address them through equitable and fair disciplinary practices. By adopting social justice principles and restorative justice practices, schools can create a conducive learning environment that promotes the self-development of all students.

Furthermore, there are several effective approaches that schools can adopt to promote positive behavior and create a supportive learning environment. First, incorporating social justice principles into disciplinary approaches is crucial to

addressing the underlying issues that contribute to misbehavior and promoting equity, fairness, and respect in disciplinary practices. Second, adopting restorative justice practices in schools is essential to repairing the harm caused by misbehavior and promoting accountability and empathy, which can lead to a more positive and supportive learning environment. Finally, providing training for teachers on managing challenging behavior can help prevent misbehavior and develop effective strategies for de-escalating conflicts and promoting positive behavior. By implementing these approaches, schools can work towards creating a safe and supportive environment where all students can thrive and achieve their full potential. By supporting students' behavioral needs, this training should also include strategies for working with students who have experienced trauma or are dealing with mental health issues, as these factors can contribute to challenging behavior. Teachers should be trained to recognize the signs of trauma and mental health issues and to provide appropriate support and referrals for these students.

Another important aspect of training for teachers is the use of positive behavior intervention and support (PBIS) systems. PBIS is a framework that emphasizes the promotion of positive behavior through the use of evidence-based practices. It includes teaching and modeling appropriate behaviors, providing positive reinforcement, and implementing consistent consequences for misbehavior. By utilizing PBIS systems, teachers can create a more positive and supportive classroom environment that promotes positive behavior and reduces the occurrence of challenging behavior. Also, training teachers on managing problematic behavior is essential to promoting positive behavior in schools. This training should include strategies for preventing misbehavior, de-escalating conflicts, and promoting positive behavior, as well as techniques for working with students who have experienced

trauma or are dealing with mental health issues. The use of positive behavior intervention and support (PBIS) systems are also a key component of effective teacher training. By providing teachers with the tools and knowledge to effectively manage challenging behavior, schools can create a more positive and supportive learning environment for all students.

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APPENDIX A

APPROVED IRB LETTER



OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR
HUMAN RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER for
EXEMPT REVIEW

Shalanda Shuler
College of Education
Wardlaw College
820 Main Street
Columbia, SC 29208

Re: **Pro00126029**

Dear Shalanda Shuler:

This is to certify that the research study *An Examination of Semester-Long Review of Behavior Referral Data at a High School in a Southeastern State* was reviewed in accordance with 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2) and 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7), the study received an exemption from Human Research Subject Regulations on **2/3/2023**. No further action or Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight is required, as long as the study remains the same. However, the Principal Investigator must inform the Office of Research Compliance of any changes in procedures involving human subjects. Changes to the current research study could result in a reclassification of the study and further review by the IRB.

Because this study was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight,

consent document(s), if applicable, are not stamped with an expiration date.

All research related records are to be retained for at least three (3) years after termination of the study.

The Office of Research Compliance is an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB). If you have questions, contact Lisa Johnson at lisaj@mailbox.sc.edu or (803) 777-6670.

Sincerely,



Lisa M. Johnson
ORC Assistant Director and IRB Manager

University of South Carolina • 1600 Hampton Street, Suite 414 • Columbia, South
Carolina 29208 • 803-777-7095
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APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What grade levels have you taught?
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. Did your teacher-preparation program require you take classroom management courses? If, so, how many? Did those courses prepare you well once you got into the classroom as a teacher? If, so, how? If not, why?
4. What areas are you certified to teach?
5. What is your educational background?
6. How did you obtain your initial license to teach?
7. Do you think you could benefit from more training in classroom behavior management?

APPENDIX C

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

AN EXAMINATION OF SEMESTER-LONG REVIEW OF BEHAVIOR REFERRAL DATA AT A HIGH SCHOOL IN A SOUTHEASTERN STATE

1. What are common behavioral problems you have observed at your classroom/school setting?
2. What contributes to your decision-making process when you write a discipline referral?
3. In what ways does the quality of the teacher-student relationship positively or negatively impact the writing of referrals?
4. What behaviors are you more likely to excuse and what behaviors are you more likely to write up?
5. Do you think that the high school transition from middle school has an impact on the ninth- grade level increase of referrals?
6. Rank the infractions below from 1-5 (with 1 being the highest number), indicating your observation of the root cause of behaviors that lead to office discipline referrals.

Profanity

Tardy

Tobacco Violation

Refusal to Obey

Cutting Class

APPENDIX D

SUPPLEMENTARY FIGURES

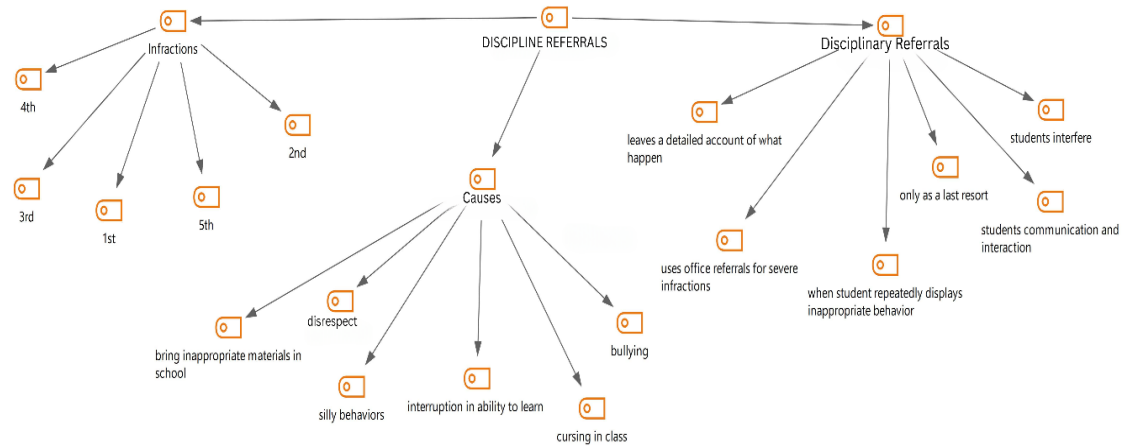


Figure D.1 Thematic Analysis

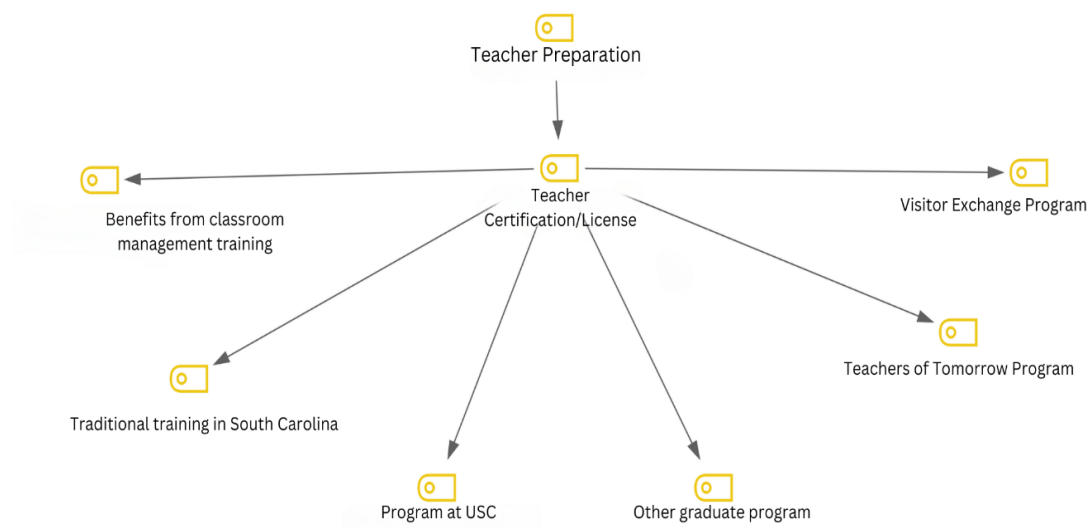


Figure D.2 The Need for More Training

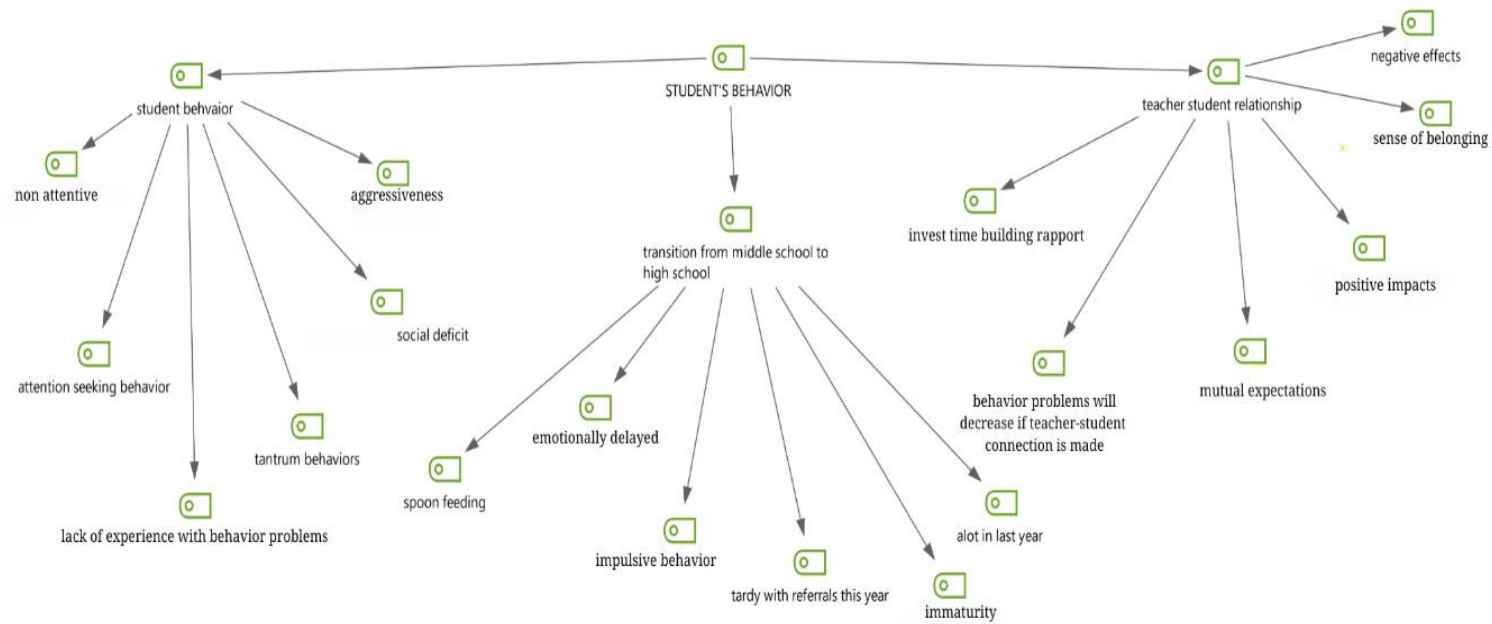


Figure D.3 Thoughtfulness in the Decision Making Process