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A Case Study Analysis among Former Urban Gifted High School Dropouts

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

A Case Study Analysis among Former Urban Gifted High School Dropouts

by

Bradley M. Camper, Jr.

MPA, Rutgers University, 2009

MA, Fairleigh Dickinson University, 2006

BS, Rowan University, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services – Family Studies and Intervention Strategies

Walden University

November 2018

Abstract

The dropout social problem has been the focus of researchers, business and community leaders, and school staffs for decades. Despite possessing significant academic high school capabilities, some gifted students drop out of school. The research problem for this study includes, how and why former gifted urban high school students chose to drop out. The conceptual framework for this case study is Bronfenbrenner's human ecology theory. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of what lead former gifted urban students to dropping out of high school. Using purposive sampling, 4 participants, two men and two women, were selected for semi-structured interviews. The sample included an African-American, Filipino, Caucasian, and Haitian/Cuban/Syrian, whose ages ranged from 38 – 77 years old. The semi-structured interviews were analyzed using first, second, and pattern coding. The resulting themes were (a) family discord, (b) school not interesting, and (c) no role model, and (d) minimum family participation. The former gifted high school students' dropout experiences were rooted in the microsystem perspective of the human ecology theory. The implications for social change from this study findings may help inform those who manage and teach gifted programs about the mindsets of students in gifted services.

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Dedication

I dedicate this journey to my entire family, my son Darryl, my daughters S. Ashley

and Sydney Kai for their constant support and unconditional love. To my dad thank you

for helping me become the man I strive to be.

Acknowledgments

  I would like to thank my Ph.D. committee for their unwavering support for the last 4 years. Each of you have inspired me to push through all barriers and not to feel sorry for myself during this journey. Dr. Tina Jaeckle you have been an inspiration just by showing your patience's and desire to work with me during this process. To my mentor Dr. Gregory P. Hickman aka "Doc", I have so much too say and do not know where to begin. You have been the best mentor, chairperson, and friend that anybody could wish for during their Ph.D. journey. The patience, support and guidance you have shown me during my ups and downs has left a lasting impression. It is my sincere hope that we will continue to work together on future research as colleagues and friends. I will always be indebted to you and Dr. J. for guys being who you are naturally.

  To my parents, I would like to say thank you for instilling the value of education, a work ethic, and a sense of responsibility. Without these skills and understanding my journey would not have been possible. Mom, I could never thank or repay you in a thousand years for all of the support and encouragement you have shown me over the years. While, I know you are extremely proud of me, I am prouder to be your son. You have been and will continue to be my rock. I love you mom!!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Jordan, Kostandini, and Mykerezi (2012) theorized that the key to staying out of low-wage America is staying in school at least through high school graduation. Despite this information high school students are still leaving school prior to graduating without understanding the potential negative consequences associated with this decision (Jordan et al., 2012). These negative consequences can range from poor health to earning less money than that of high school graduate (Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013). The dropout phenomenon is a social problem that induces personal and societal consequences that are negative in nature (Hassane & Abdullah, 2011).

There are a myriad of factors associated with urban and rural high school dropout (Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, & Heinrich, 2011; Stanczyk, 2009; Ziomek-Daigle, 2010), including, but are not limited to, low grade point averages in the eighth grade, student suspensions, low socioeconomic status, behavioral and emotional problems, absenteeism, personal problems and perceptions of their teachers (Blaas, 2014; Kishore & Shaji, 2012). Goss and Andren (2014) found that in 2012, the graduation rates of children from the disadvantaged groups was 72%, compared to the national average of 80%. When parents had a higher income, children were more likely to graduate from high school with high grades, whereas those who came from poor families were more likely to stop attending high school education prior to graduation (Goss & Andren, 2014).

Hickman et al. (2011) explained that the culture of a community and manner in which the neighborhood develops determine the ability of a child to succeed during and after studies. Hickman et al. noted this should hold true for gifted and talented students as

well. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 defines gifted and talented students as any student who have shown high levels of academic abilities in areas of intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields (Zabloski & Milacci, 2012). Specifically, a gifted and talented student is defined as any student with two standard deviations above the norm of IQ which puts them at 130 IQ. Additionally, they are creative and use divergent thinking, and they have special talents (i.e., music, art, etc.) (Zabloski & Milacci, 2012). The NCLB has since been updated by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, which went into effect October 1, 2016. This act did not change the definitions of gifted and talented students; however, it requires states to disaggregate data, in an attempt, to identify gifted and talented students (ESSA, 2015).

The following chapter includes a synopsis of the study. This will be completed in the following manner. The background section explores the environment and importance of the study topic. The problem statement section then specifies the identified research gap and how this is gap is a current social problem. The subsequent section addresses the purpose of the study, which leads into the research question of the study. The next three sections describe the conceptual framework, the study's methodology, and the significance of the study. Lastly, the final section summarizes the content of this chapter.

Background

There have been increased cases of high school dropouts among students who demonstrate a capability in performing well in academics (Werblow, Urick, & Duesbery, 2013). The authors described capability as the ability to perform well on a task. This task can range from academics to manual labor. Despite their academic capabilities, gifted

students encounter a range of circumstances that make them forgo undertaking their

studies to enable them to cope with or address their circumstances (Berliner & Barrat,

2009). A gifted student as defined by the NCLB and the ESSA as those students that

have given evidence of high capability in various areas, which require the school to

provide services or activities to help fully develop the capabilities of those students. The

areas in which students need to demonstrate high capability are intellectually, creatively,

artistically, or through leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields (ESSA, 2015;

NCLB, 2001). The definition of gifted student is not bound by income, race, or ethnicity.

According to Landis and Reschly (2013), the definition creates some controversy among

gifted education researchers.

Problem Statement

According to Messacar and Oreopoulos (2013), the dropout phenomenon

disproportionately affects individuals from low-income and minority households. This

group of individuals faces a variety of negative outcomes in the coming years that range

from social to financial problems (Rahbari, Hajnaghizadh, Damari, & Adhami, 2014).

The act of dropping out does not encompass one single event, but an accumulation of

events that can ultimately lead to an individual dropping out of high school (Rahbari et

al., 2011). Coelho, Marchante, and Jimerson (2017) theorized that the transition into

middle school can have a profound negative effect on students. In addition, the authors

believed, that learning to navigate a new environment with new rules, policies, and

individuals can be extremely stressful to an incoming middle school student. When

students find the transition from elementary to middle school difficult and stressful, they

tend to lose the skills they have previously learned, and this can be the beginning of serious social and academic challenges (Coelho et al., 2017). The authors noted these social and academic challenges can lead to school disengagement and be further heightened by the transition into high school. In addition, the authors illustrated the transition into middle and high school, as well as the previously mentioned negative environmental factors can ultimately lead a student to dropping out of school. Pallas (as cited in Jordan, Kostandini, & Mykerezi, 2012) posited that urban students tend to drop out more frequently versus rural students, since the overcrowding of urban schools lends them to have a lesser quality education. A major difference between rural and urban dropouts is that rural area dropouts tend to be American Indian and Caucasians, while urban dropouts tend to be African-American and Hispanic (Jordan et al., 2012).

While there is a plethora of research regarding high school dropouts (e.g., Hickman et al., 2011; Song, Benin, & Glick, 2012; Stanczyk, 2009; Suhyun, Jingyo, & Houston, 2007), dropout rates (e.g., Mishra & Azeez, 2014; Suh & Suh, 2007; Ziomek-Daigle, 2010) and a variety of other topics related to high school dropouts (e.g., Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010; Johnson, 2010; Mishra & Azeez, 2014; Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2007) there is very little research regarding gifted dropouts. According to Blaas (2014), gifted dropouts have been discouraged with their school experience as early as elementary school. The source of their frustrations are documented as related to being grouped with lower achieving students, as well as various negative family and environmental issues (Blaas, 2014). However, gifted children often do not encounter the typical negative psychological, sociological, and familial experiences that nongifted

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dropouts encounter (Blaas, 2014). In other words, gifted kids shared and nonshared environmental experiences control for many of the usual negative experiences associated with typical students dropping out of high school (Blaas, 2014).

Although the research regarding high school dropouts illuminates important findings, I have found limited research that has examined the understanding of the factors of why gifted urban students drop out of school from an ecological systems perspective. Given such, further research is warranted that could address this lack of research from an ecological systems approach to address the documented problem of urban gifted children dropping out of school despite having the cognitive ability to succeed and despite not experiencing the usual suspects associated with dropping out of school (Blaas, 2014; Zabloski & Milacci, 2012).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was two-fold. Using this type of study will possibly substantiate or dispute aspects of ecological systems as it relates to gifted urban children dropping out of school. Cronin (2014) postulated that multiple case studies are used to describe a factor. This factor could be that of an economic outcome, individual behavior or social phenomenon (Sangster-Gormely, 2013). This case study was performed in an attempt to identify, despite having the cognitive abilities to succeed academically and eventually graduate from high school, at what point their academic career began a downward spiral. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of this documented problem from a participant's perspective it is important to exam the whole life of the participant. This can only be done by examining each subsystem and the affect

it has had on the participant over the course of their lifetime. According to Urie

Bronfenbrenner (1997) the subsystems within the ecological system are the microsystem,

mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). By

researching this phenomenon, it will allow for the opportunity to corroborate or dispute

the specific factors associated with gifted urban high school dropouts. This study was

performed to evaluate, through understanding and rich descriptions, the factors within

each of the subsystems present are responsible in gifted urban students dropping out of

high school from their perspectives. The microsystem was selected for this study to

allow the participants to describe, in detail, their interpersonal interactions with family,

friends, school, and work (Hong & Eamon, 2012). This provided for a deeper

understanding of the affect or impact of the direct contact on the individual. While the

use of the mesosystem will take the understanding of the issues faced by gifted urban

dropouts a step further. This system is focused on the various interrelationships that

surround the individual; for example, the relationship of an individual's parents and their

friends or with a teacher (Hong & Eamon, 2012). The exosystem refers to the numerous

formal and informal social structures that can have an influence on an individual, but

does not contain the individual in that structure, although these structures can have a

direct affect (Hong & Eamon, 2012). The macrosystem focused on the effects the

individuals' cultural values, customs, and societal laws had on decision-making when it

came to their education (Hong & Eamon, 2012). Lastly, the chronosystem afforded the

researcher the opportunity to gain a socio-historical perspective of the participants' life

(Hong & Eamon, 2012). The rationale for using Urie Bronfenbrenner s' ecological

systems theory was to focus on the factors used to influence the specific population of gifted urban students to drop out. I was able to gain a better understanding of how the various interactions of subsystems influence why they dropped out of school from their perspectives.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are:

Research Question 1: Why do gifted urban high school dropouts decide to drop out of high school?

Research Question 2: How do gifted urban high school dropouts, from an ecological systems theory perspective, decide to drop out of high school?

Nature of the Study

The research methodology is a qualitative multiple case study strategy of inquiry. Cronin (2014) and Sangster-Gormely (2013) suggested qualitative research studies attempt to provide a clear understanding of a social issue that has perplexed society over the course of several years. For this study the social problem to be addressed is the dropout phenomenon that has been well-documented for several decades (Clyburn, 2014; Higgs, 2014; Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013; Stanczyk, 2009; Zabloski & Milacci, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle, 2010). Case study research is focused on specific situations or phenomenon and allows you to investigate topics not that are not easily researched by other methods (Cronin, 2014). A collective case study design or multiple case study design focuses on a single issue but allows the researcher to select multiple case studies to explain the selected issue (Lessard, Contandriopoulos, & Beaulieu, 2009). By using

this approach, the researcher has the ability to study the contextual details of the phenomenon, as well as provide rich, deep descriptions of the findings (Sangster-Gormley, 2013). This process allows the researcher to obtain data that is deeply rooted in the experiences of the research participants (Cronin, 2014).

Purposive-volunteer sampling strategies was used to select 6-10 participants for this study. O'Brien, Cohen, Pooley, and Taylor (2013) postulated that using a small sampling size allows for the development of deeper understanding of a phenomenon through a defined context. For potential participants to be eligible for participation in the study, they must have met a set of certain criteria. More specifically, all participants were at least 18 years of age and dropped out of an urban high school, regardless of their current academic attainment level. Sampling this age range provided for, not only, an in-depth analysis of former gifted urban high school dropouts but afforded for in-depth cross-case analysis of the participants; which provided greater depth into the phenomenon that was studied. Each participant must have been identified, at some point in the academic career prior to dropping out as a gifted student based on verification of either state results or teacher recommendations. Participants were required to provide documentation from their former school verifying their claim of being identified as a gifted student. The required documentation was based on the definition of "Gifted or Talented" outlined in the NCLB Act of 2001 and the ESSA of 2015. Each participant must have been identified as having a minimal IQ of 130, must have creative and used divergent thinking, and possess a special talent (i.e., art, music, leadership, and/or specific academic fields) (Zabloski & Milacci, 2012). In order to gain a better

understanding of what a "Gifted or Talented Student" looks like I conversed with several educators with varying positions in neighboring school districts, as it related to gifted or talented students.

These personal communications suggested a variety of reasons from the educators' perspective as to why former gifted urban high school students' dropout. It is important to note that the experience of these educators was between 16-25 years. All seven agreed that they have identified many students, as gifted and/or talented during their careers; however, none were aware if any of those identified dropped out of high school. Each educator offered their own perspective as to why this phenomenon is occurring. As a middle school science teacher I. Foster-Maye (personal communication, October 6, 2016), stated that the gifted and talented students are bored with school, due to not being challenged. Both S. Austin and K. Squire agreed with I. Foster-Maye's statement and added their perspectives to why they are bored with school (Personal communication, October 6, 2016). Teaching to standardized tests was cited by K. Squire as to why students are bored (Personal communication, October 6, 2016). She stated that teaching to standardized test removes the ability to effectively differentiate instruction. While S. Austin believes boredom is created by the need of immediate gratification on the part of the student (Personal communication, October 6, 2016). The principal and math teacher I spoke with had a slightly different perspective. D. Phillips (elementary school principal) and C. Mays (8th grade Math Teacher) both cited the individual students' personal experiences (Personal communication, October 6, 2016). C. Mays reported the community as the "culprit" to kids dropping out of school, while D. Phillips

asserted that the lack of strong family support plays a huge role in the decisions made by these students (Personal communication, October 6, 2016). Unlike her colleagues, C. Nemeth's stated the lack of respect for teachers and education impact the lives of those identified as gifted or talented (Personal communication, October 6, 2016). As a 4-6th grade teacher, she sees many of those identified by her as gifted or talented lack any type of respect for education and teachers. These perspectives may assist the researcher in understanding participants of this study.

Once a pool of eligible participants is identified, I will contact the eligible participants via email or phone to review the additional requirements to participate in the study. The first 6-10 participants whose information has been verified to meet the eligibility requirements will be selected to participate in the study. Using purposive-volunteer sampling strategies will allow for flexibility that can help locate potential participants, as well as other methods of data collection (Cronin, 2014; Sangster-Gormely, 2013).

In order to participate in the study, the participants committed to one interview either in-person, skype or via the phone, with the understanding that the interview was recorded. The interview consisted of building a relationship with the participant, which was accomplished by collecting background information and talking about their life experiences from past to present.

I addressed each research question by creating an open-ended questionnaire based on awareness of one's ecological systems for the sample population and coded those responses for similarities, as well as differences. Two forms of analysis were used for

this study; thematic and propositional analyses (Cronin, 2014; Valiee et al., 2014). These two forms of analyses allowed for the data to be analyzed by the researcher for exploring participant acuities and experiences (Valiee, Peyrovi, & Nikabakht-Nasrabadi, 2014). To establish researcher credibility, the following measures were adopted: data collection was conducted by allocating proper time and place, by constant review of all materials used to collect data (i.e., handwritten, video and audio recordings), and by creating a trusting relationship with all participants (Valiee et al., 2014). Using the design and method allowed the researcher to create additional literature that could add value to the current established literature. Chapter 3 of this study will provide a comprehensive argument of the proposed study's method.

Conceptual Framework

The study is a qualitative case study of former gifted urban high school dropouts. Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was used as the conceptual framework to study a group of former gifted urban high school dropouts. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory looked at the five system types that shape the psychological development of adolescents and each of these systems had roles, norms, and rules that determined the developmental outcomes of the individual and groups centered in the ecological systems (Darling, 2007; Hong & Eamon, 2012). Microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem are the five system types that make up the ecological systems theory (Darling, 2007; Hong & Eamon, 2012). The student's immediate operating environment is considered their family, classroom, or surrounds, which is called the microsystem (Darling, 2007; Hong & Eamon, 2012). A mesosystem

is a link between, two of the student's microsystems interacting with each other or connecting with each other like a student's parents and their school (Darling, 2007; Hong & Eamon, 2012). The exosystem is defined, as an external environment that has an individual as no direct bearing, but receives a direct affect (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). A student's broad ideological and organizational patterns that steer human society is referred to as the macrosystem, while the chronosystem is the broad understanding of the student's life from a historical perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). Each of these five systems of development can contribute to understanding some of the negative consequences facing the potential high school dropout. Each subsystem has a specific purpose for use in this study.

The rationale for using the microsystem is to learn from the participants' perspectives on how the relationship or interactions between parent-child, home, school, social and physical environments may have influenced the participant perception of school (Hong & Eamon, 2012). Next, the rationale for using the mesosystem is to learn from the participant perspective how the relationship of two or more microsystems, for example parental involvement and a participants' school experience, could have influenced the educational development of the participant (Hong & Eamon, 2012). While the participant's perspective of how the indirect school, neighborhood, and church systems influences the importance or unimportance of education from is the exosystem point of view is the next rationale. The rationale for using the macrosystem is to learn from the participant's perspective how economic recessions, war, and the advances in technology affect decision-making. Lastly, the rationale for using the chronosystem

revolves around the participant's own historical content and the effects on their development, for example: death, crime, divorce, or working women.

Operational Definitions

In this section brief definitions of all relevant terms associated with the proposed study will be provided.

Chronosystem: The individual's life through a broad lens from defining events in their lives, for example the death of a parent, divorce, or a mother that works (Feinstein, Driving-Hawk, & Baartman, 2009).

Cognitive ability: The mental capacity of an individual that is involved in every cognitively demanding task (Kirkpatrick, McGue, Iacono, Miller, & Basu, 2014).

Cohort rate: The number of dropouts from a single age group or specific grade of students over a period of time (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009).

Dropout: Any student not enrolled at some point during the previous school year; cannot have been enrolled during the beginning of the current school year; has not graduated nor completed any type of equivalency program approved by the school district or state (Stillwell & Sable, 2013).

Ecological systems theory: Looks at five system types that shape the psychological development of adolescents; each of these systems have roles, norms, and rules that determine the developmental outcomes of the individual and groups centered in the ecological systems (Darling, 2007).

Event rate: The number of students who leave high school each year and is compared with previous years (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009).

Exosystem: consists of the indirect forces on an individual's life; these indirect forces include such factors as a parent's workplace, the school board, or extended family (Feinstein et al., 2009).

Gifted student: As defined by the NCLB are defined typically as those with 2 standard deviations above the norm of IQ which puts them at 130 IQ; they are creative and use divergent thinking, and they have a special talent (music, etc.) (Zabloski & Milacci, 2012).

General Equivalency Diploma (GED): A credential certifying the completion of secondary education, an alternative to a regular high school graduation (Zabloski & Milacci, 2012).

Macrosystem: Provides the broad ideological and organizational patterns that direct human society, which is composed of the cultural values, customs, and societal laws of the individual's community (Feinstein et al., 2009).

Mesosystem: is composed of the interrelationships among the various settings of the individual's microsystem (Feinstein et al., 2009).

Microsystem: Interpersonal interactions in an individual's life (Feinstein et al., 2009).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB): A United States Act of Congress that is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which included Title I, the government's flagship aid program for disadvantaged students (Zabloski & Milacci, 2012).

Social problem: A negative quality of life issue that is raised by a population wide consensus, the socially powerful and/or the economically privileged population (Chambers & Wedel, 2005).

Status rate: The proportion of all individuals in the population who have not completed high school and were not enrolled at a given point in time (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009).

Underachieving student: An inability or failure to perform appropriately in one's own age or grade level; in other words, it is unfulfilled potential; it is the difference between students' abilities and learning outcomes or the learning achievement of which the scores of learning outcomes or achievement are lower than the unfulfilled potential (Thummaphan, Yoelao, Suwanmonkha, & Damsuwan, 2013)

Assumptions

With this study I have made several assumptions. The first assumption is that all participants will answer all interview questions openly and honestly. Secondly, all participants in this research study will be able to reflect on their lived experiences as former gifted urban students. Lastly, each participant will be able to identify when they first became disengaged with school. As the researcher I am assuming that each participant will have the ability to represent and express themselves in a mature and respectable manner. Along with these assumptions there are also several limitations.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. One limitation of this study is the specific population of people being studied, which are former gifted urban high school dropouts.

A second limitation of this study may be gaining access to a pool of former gifted urban high school dropouts. Garnering the willingness of identified former gifted urban high school dropouts to participate in the study is another limitation of this study. In addition to the previously mentioned limitations the sample size of this study will pose a limitation. This study will use a small sample size of six to ten participates. The small sample size will allow for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Cronin, 2014; Lessard et al., 2009; Valiee et al., 2014). Also, reflection will be an additional limitation. Researchers have demonstrated that memory is not accurate over time. Hence, the older they are the less accurate their memory will be as to what factors about these two systems lead them to drop out of school. Another potential limitation of this study deals with the various forms of interviewing. By interviewing participants via Skype and in-person I was able to read and identify body language associated with responses. Conducting telephone interviews eliminated the presence of body language, which possible altered my ability to truly understanding some of the responses provided by participants. The use of one interview is a limitation. By requiring the participants to commit to 2-3 interviews, as the researcher, I ran the risk of losing participants. Lastly, since this is a qualitative case study inquiry it did not provide the quantitative descriptions previous studies (i.e., Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009; Fan & Wolters, 2014; Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2009) have reached concerning the gifted urban high school dropout. This finding of this study is limited to interpretive analysis rather than that of quantitative analysis.

Scope and Delimitations

The primary focus of this study is on the lived experiences of participants determined to be former gifted urban high school students, which have subsequently dropped out of an urban high school. To control the range of this study the following delimitations have been set. First gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, or religious beliefs will not exclude potential study participants. Secondly, to participate in this study, participants will be between the ages of 18–30 years. This age range was chosen to ensure participants ability to fully describe, in their own words, their lived experiences in an open and honest fashion. Third, participants will not be excluded due to their educational attainment after dropping out of high school. This references the earning of a general equivalency diploma (G.E.D.), high school diploma, a postsecondary education certificate or a college degree. Lastly, each participant will have dropped out of a high school that has been deemed located in an urban area. The results obtained from the proposed study would be generalizable to former gifted urban high school dropouts living in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania tristate region.

Significance

Since the dropout phenomenon is a social problem that induces both personal and societal issues that are negative in nature, and those negative personal and societal issues have created major issues in urban communities (Hassane & Abdullah, 2011; Jozefowics-Simbeni, 2008). For individuals that dropout of high school the economic and social implications is of great concern to them, as well as society as a whole. High school dropouts earn 83% less than a high school completer and this lack of income places

additional strains on society (Chapman et al., 2010; Jordan et al., 2012). The lower earning potential reduces the amount of generated tax revenue collected by government and increases the need for social services programs (Chapman et al., 2010; Jordan et al., 2012).

By delving deeper into the research of ecological systems theory and the effect on human development in terms of the gifted urban high school dropout and society, the research helps add missing and meaningful literature to the field, as well as create a need for additional research that may result in the ability to successfully address the gifted urban high school dropout phenomenon on a national level. By addressing this phenomenon on a national level, some of the issues facing the population of gifted urban high school dropouts can be alleviated.

The results of the proposed study will be important, not only to former gifted urban high school dropouts, but to the families, schools, and community of said participants. Impact of this proposed study can possibly create a foundation for social change, about this particular population. The population interviewed for this study have been referenced very limitedly. By bringing awareness to this social problem it will be possible to formulate a strategic plan that is immersed in empirical inquiry that will possibly reduce the gifted urban high school dropout population. Educational practitioners will be able to use the results of this study to avoid cookie cutter approaches to the phenomenon and create a plan that is formidable in addressing the needs of all involved on an individual basis.

Summary

This chapter provides the reader with a clear understanding of the problem. The problem that will be addressed in this study is why gifted urban high school students choose to dropout. Through the introduction, problem statement, nature of study, purpose, conceptual framework, operational definitions, research question, assumptions, limitations, scope, delimitations, and significance of the study I have identified a few key points associated with the dropout phenomenon. Urban and rural school districts can have a dropout rate as high as 50% and 32 % of this population of dropouts live below the poverty line (Jozefowics-Simbeni, 2008; Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013). Lastly, this population earns 83% less than a high school completer (Chapman et al., 2010; Jordan et al., 2012), which all will be further discussed in detail in subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 will focus on a review of the literature as it relates to gifted urban high school dropouts. Chapter 3 will extend the discussion of the study's methodology, which will lead to presenting the findings in chapter 4. In chapter 5 the study's findings will be summarized and possible future research topics will be presented.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter I will review the literature to understand the nature and context of the former gifted urban high school dropout. Chapter 2 will focus on the history of education in America from 3100 BC to present day, with the human ecology of dropouts being the main focal point. I will review the literature by examining the five subsystems (microsystems, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem), coupled with historical and philosophical theories.

Literature Review Strategy

Prior to conducting the article search I reviewed several doctoral studies with similar theoretical frameworks to help provide me with a better understanding of conducting my literature review. The Walden online library and Google Scholar will be the main search engines used to conduct this literature review. Within the Walden online library system and Google Scholar, I assessed several prominent databases: Academic Search Premier, Pynchon, PsychARTICLES, EBSCO, ProQuest Central, ERIC, Education Research Complete and SAGE Premier, to obtain relevant research material. The following keywords were used to ascertain significant literature for my subject matter: *education, urban education, dropouts, high school dropouts, urban high school dropouts, dropout history, school dropouts, education and society, educational systems, middle school dropouts, education and society, primary education, dropout crisis, education crisis, males and education, females and education, enrichment, low-income, underachievement, at-risk students, gifted students, rural students, student engagement, human ecology theory, ecological systems theory, grounded theory, academic mediation*

theory, general deviance theory, deviant affiliation theory, poor family socialization

theory, and structural strains theory. These searches yielded a vast number of articles

that I reviewed thoroughly during the selection process. All articles selected for use were

published within the last five years (from 2011) and from peer-reviewed journals.

Articles were excluded from the literature review based on their relevancy to my topic

being researched. Each article used for this chapter was mined for additional research

literature to add additional saliency to those previously obtained.

History of Education

As noted by Stuart (1967), the history of education is long and complex, and can

be traced back to 3100 BC. The first highly developed civilizations like Babylonia and

Egypt were some of the initial centers of education (Sturt, 1967). With the rise of such

collectivities, the complexity of knowledge expanded such that it was not possible for one

person to pass it to another, or from one generation to another directly (Braster, 2011).

The need to function in more complex societies pushed humankind to consider ways of

accumulating, documenting, and preserving its cultural legacy (Braster, 2011). These

factors coupled with the development of trade, formal religion, and government

necessitated the invention and rise of writing.

Braster (2011) indicated that firsthand experience gained through mere

observation was not enough to teach or impart such skills as writing and reading. The

author noted, to redress the gap, places devoted to learning were set aside, thus schools

emerged. He further noted that a group of adults, designated as teachers, rose with the

emergence of these learning centers. Court scribes, and priests of temples were among

the first cadres of teachers. In many instances, children learned through apprenticeships while a minority went through formal schooling (Sturt, 1967). The author further indicated that memorization was the primary learning method while the fear of severe physical discipline served as a motivational purpose to learn. Among the ancient people living in the Middle East, only the Jews proved constituent as they enforced universal education for all children. Stuart (1967) also noted that apart from learning rudimentary mathematics, children also learned the bible. Those who excelled could proceed to become disciples of the rabbi (teacher/master). Instruction was famous as synagogues served both as places of worship and education functions equally.

Development of the American Schooling System

The first form of public learning came into existence during the 17th century within the New England colonies of New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Massachusetts (Toloudis, 2012). The primary idea of enrolling students into school was to learn about religion (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2011). Toloudis (2012) observed that, given that the settlers in these colonies were initially made up of the Puritans and Congregationalists, it was easy to implement the system. With immigration, the diversity of different religions led to the weakening of the schooling arrangement (Toloudis, 2012). The author noted that, people opposed the concept of learning only in the English language. In addition, opponents of the system felt that the clergy had no basis to impose their religious views using the public education framework (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2011).

The American public schooling system differs significantly from those of other countries as responsibility lies within the schools themselves and individual districts

(Rousmaniere, 2013). The national education system of official education in the country

developed during the late 18ᵗʰ century when President Thomas Jefferson suggested

creating a public learning system (Rousmaniere, 2013). Thus, the author posited that

Jefferson's ideas formed the basis upon which the modern school framework emerged.

Founded in 1635, the Boston Latin School was the first publicly-supported high

school in the country (Paterson, Gow, & Deary, 2014). A year later, New College (which

later came to be known as Harvard University) became the first established institute of

higher learning in the Colonies, as observed by the above authors. Low attendance

affected secondary schools based on the complexity of the curriculum (Paterson et al.,

2014). However, the demand for skilled workers was high, leading to the introduction of

a new curriculum by Founding Father Benjamin Franklin. This led to the establishment of

the American Academy in Philadelphia in 1751 (Paterson et al., 2014). The author

theorized that, Latin grammar schools paved the way for American high schools.

Halfway through the 18ᵗʰ century, private schools emerged to become the order of the day

(Paterson et al., 2014).

After gaining independence from Great Britain, fourteen states founded their

individual legal frameworks in 1791 (Byrd, 2013). The author indicated that half of the

states were governed by specific provisions on education. Jefferson considered education

as something that required government control, and be free from religious interference

(Byrd, 2013). In addition, the president believed that each individual should have the

right to access education. Robert Coram, Noah Webster, Benjamin Rush, and President

George Washington were some of the other personalities who supported Jefferson's

views about education (Toloudis, 2012). Despite such strong support, it was not easy to

implement the ideas given that the country was still under heavy political upheaval,

economic transformation and experiencing a high rate of immigration, as Toloudis (2012)

conceded. The author further indicated that for many years, private schools, religious and

charitable institutions played a dominant role in providing education. Thus, it was not

surprising that up to the 1840s, the schooling system was a localized affair whose

availability and accessibility was generally restricted to wealthy individuals (Toloudis,

2012).

Despite the power wielded by the rich, reformers emerged to oppose the status

quo (Byrd, 2013). Among the most noticeable reformers were Henry Barnard of

Connecticut and Horace Mann of Massachusetts (Byrd, 2013). The author observed that

through the use of numerous publications on the Common School Journal, Mann

managed to publicize issues affecting the education system at the time. The reformers

argued for open public schooling to facilitate the nurturing of good citizens, uniting the

people, and preventing poverty as well as crime. Based on such efforts, free public

education was introduced at the elementary level in the 19th century. In 1852,

Massachusetts passed legislation making education compulsory, followed closely by the

state of New York (Byrd, 2013).

School Law

By 1918, all states had adopted laws requiring that children must attend

elementary school (Byrd, 2013). Despite the widespread embracement of public

schooling, the write acknowledged that Catholics opposed the system, leading to the

creation of separate schools. The decision was supported as the Supreme Court in the case involving Pierce v. Society of Sisters in 1925, ruled that states did not have the authority to compel students to study in public schools (Byrd, 2013).

The rise in numbers of high school attendance has been cited as one of the most striking developments of the 20th century (Paterson et al., 2014). As time passed, many states enacted legislation making education up to the age of sixteen compulsory. As a result, between 1900 and 1996, the proportion of teenagers graduating from such schools increased from a meager six percent to eighty-five percent (Paterson et al., 2014). Many events such as the Great Depression, World War II, Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, and student protests are some of the developments that have had effects on the schooling system (Paterson et al., 2014).

During the twentieth century, participation in higher and postsecondary learning in the US increased significantly. For instance, Paterson et al. (2014) indicated that at the beginning of the century, approximately two percent of Americans aged between 18 and 24 were attending college. Paterson et al. (2014) indicated that by the end of the century, more than sixty percent of the same age group was enrolled in college. Thus, despite various challenges, enrollment of students has been on the upward trend. Based on this account, education has gone through a long path characterized by critical reforms that paved the way for universal access despite challenges such as equality.

Dropout History

Student attrition is a long-running issue that has existed alongside school attendance (Nichols-Barrer, Gill, Gleason, & Tuttle, 2014). In this regard, it is a natural

event among a given group of students. The pejorative angle of the term *dropout* is however relatively new as it only developed during the early 1960s as a response to the rising number of students abandoning school before attaining the qualifications required for graduation and the research I reviewed did not have a formal name or category for those that did not finish school (Baker, 2013). The author observes that, early on, the term reflected a compliment accorded students who had successfully graduated from high school but were yet to join college for further studies. With time, *dropout* came to capture societal perceptions on delinquency, dependency and the significance of high school as an institution of learning (Baker, 2013). Before labeling dropping out as a problem, establishing high school graduation as a norm within the American society was a prerequisite. Two main factors played a role in the development: increasing enrollment during the 20th century and the evolution of the labor markets at the time (Baker, 2013).

Baker (2013) also noted that during the twentieth century, high schools expanded while the markets constricted. According to the author, before the turn of the 20th century, very few segments of the population accessed high school education. Similarly, fewer individuals could graduate. During this time, the highest percentage of the population that ever graduated was two percent. This was reflective of the general agreement that high school level education was a reserve for the rich (with intellectual, social and capital means). Similarly, the labor market supported the conduct given that few employers sought employees with refined expertise (Baker, 2013). Notably, many markets required meager knowledge or schooling such that high school qualifications were unnecessary.

By the middle of the century, labor markets were shifting led by technological developments and a high number of migrant laborers (Alvarez, 2012). Additionally, the writer indicated that legal restrictions were put in place to restrict child labor. These laws played a significant role in increasing high school enrollment. The rise in the number of youths attending school resulted in two outcomes: a higher graduating number and elevation of diploma in the search for employment. By 1940, eighty percent of individuals aged between fourteen and seventeen were enrolled students while over fifty percent of those aged seventeen graduated from secondary schools (Alvarez, 2012). When this is compared to 50 years earlier, the numbers demonstrated a big increment in the percentage of students who were attending and graduating from school, as Alvarez (2012) found.

With the rise of the high school diploma, employers turned to using graduation as one of the measures of short-listing candidates for jobs (Baker, 2013). Having grown in stature, the diploma proved a major incentive to stay at school as the youth worked to secure their academic credentials (Alvarez, 2012). In this regard, the shift in expectations about the potential associated with possessing academic qualifications was an important factor in the increased enrollment and graduation of students. However, at the time, addressing the issue with those who did not complete their education was idiosyncratic besides lacking focus (Alvarez, 2012). From the author's observations, the enduring feeling that attrition was natural owing to the system of enrolling many students, abrasion was viewed as unfortunate but tolerable.

Child Labor Laws and Education

At the beginning of the 20th century, activists of child labor reignited the debate about the issue of attrition. According to Smith, Droddy, and Guarino (2011), school attendance was cited as a factor that was reducing child employment and suggested that employers would mitigate the delinquency problem. However, Smith et al. (2011) indicated that the agitators did not focus on graduation but simply on protecting child from the dangers associated with labor. As a result, they concentrated on legislative efforts to limit child labor, as well as the implementation of compulsory attendance provisions. Administrative progressives also contributed another perspective of attrition as highlighted by the dominance of their ideas during the first decade of the 1900s (Steggall, 2014). Particularly, thoughts on social efficiency and vocational education reigned supreme. The progressives held the view that schools had the role of preparing students to undertake complex tasks that they would face later in life (Steggall, 2014). Thus, they cited the loss of students to the labor market through attrition as one of the efficiencies of the education system (Steggall, 2014). Through such efforts, comprehensive high schools expanded their enrollment and graduation, partly due to the highlighting of the attrition issue as a success factor of education. Nevertheless, the perspectives, and causes and effects of the concern remained unresolved, as conceded by the author. By the 1960s, dropout rates were seen as a social problem owing to the significance the society placed on graduation (Smith et al., 2011). The authors noted that at the time, high school attendance was widespread such that the learning centers were viewed as comprehensive rather than selective institutions.

Graduating from the facilities had become a social expectation, as more students continued to graduate (Steggall, 2014). In this regard, school dropout rates began receiving increased attention. In particular, critics of the issue labeled it as an economic liability, increasing social dependency and delinquency. In essence, concerns were mounting that dropping out of school had negative consequences for the society. The overall perception was that a high school dropout living on the streets had no chance of becoming a constructive citizen (Steggall, 2014). Furthermore, such a person would most likely become rebellious and antisocial. Owing to this problem, the United States government through the National Education Association began a project on school dropouts to redress the problem (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Dropouts Defined

The varying ways of calculating the dropout rate reveals different ways of thinking about the issue at hand (Chapman, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2010). There are four different rates used to measure the high school dropout, which are the event rate, status rate, cohort rate and the high school completion rate (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009). The event rate indicates the number of students who leave high school each year and is compared with previous years and the status rate, a cumulative rate much higher than the event rate, denotes the proportion of all individuals in the population who have not completed high school and were not enrolled at a given point in time (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009). The cohort rate describes the number of dropouts from a single age group or specific grade of students over a period of time, while the high school completion rate indicates the percentage of all persons' ages 21 and 22 who have

completed high school by receiving a high school diploma or equivalency certificate (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009). According to the Children's Defense Fund no matter how many ways researchers calculate the dropout rate, one commonality is that a student leaves school permanently every 9 seconds for various reasons (Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, & Heinrich, 2011).

The literature covers several factors that play a role in the emergence of the dropout problem. In the current section, the focus is on economic, household level, school level, and cultural factors. Economic considerations have an impact on student participation in school to completion (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013). Issues such as schooling costs and parental investments emerge. Under the latter category, Doll et al. (2013) referred to the efforts parents make to invest in the wellness of their children. The researchers observed that in the developed world, few cases of bias exist based on gender. However, in the developing world preference is given to males, an aspect that leads to the neglect of girls' education. Doll et al. observed that the overall perception is that boys are being prepared for the responsibility of taking care of the family financially in the future while girls leave the household after marriage. Thus, the tendency of favoring boys over girls was perpetuated out of future expectations. However, Stier (2014) found that the problem is prevalent among poor families whose sources of income are limited. In such cases, girls are more likely to leave school prematurely while boys to continue with their studies.

Negative Cost of Education

In the developing world, education costs are also a determining issue regarding school dropout rates. Both direct and indirect costs are critical given that the inability to afford to pay for school fees is among the reasons for why some students abandon their studies. According to Ghosh and Sengupta (2012), poor households perceive the cost of educational fees for girls to be higher than for boys. Parents also see the benefits of sponsoring girls' education as limited in comparison to supporting boys through school. Household level factors focus on the possibility that children who work in early life are more likely to leave school prematurely. Ghosh and Sengupta supported the position having observed that in poor households, girls were more likely to begin working at a younger age than boys were. In addition, girls drop out of school at a higher rate to take care of families or siblings (Ghosh & Sengupta, 2012). With increased responsibilities, girls are at a disadvantage, and face a greater risk of dropping out of school. After examining data from a sample drawn from Bangladesh, Shahidul (2012) found that parental involvement at the family level decision-making process influenced school dropout rates. It emerged that when mothers were involved in making decisions, girls were more likely to continue learning than in families where females did not participate. However, Shahidul observed that single-mother households are not supportive of school because they encounter difficulties in earning enough money to cater for education. As a result, students from such families are more likely to leave school prematurely.

Absenteeism is also a contributing factor to dropping out of school. Irregular attendance is a precursor to leaving school before graduating regardless of the sex of the

student. Manacorda (2012) observed that absenteeism from school negatively affects female students more than male ones. Based on the researcher's findings, girls were at a higher risk of repeating classes, irregular attendance, and dropping out of school. In addition, girls attained lower scores than boys on average. According to Manacorda, teenage pregnancy was one of the contributing factors to poor academic performance among girls.

After a review of the literature on factors that predisposed girls to higher dropout rates compared to boys, Shahidul and Karim (2015) concluded that many interrelated economic, social, cultural, and school factors contributed to the problem, regardless of the sex of the students. However, girls seemed more disadvantaged because they performed poorly in their academics and were at a higher risk of exiting school before graduation, as Shahidul and Karim found. Further, the authors discovered that financial factors limit the ability of parents from poor socioeconomic backgrounds, an aspect that cycles down to the education of their children. Owing to cultural underpinnings, girls are more likely to be denied funding than boys in their pursuit of education opportunities (Shahidul & Karim, 2015). Girls also encounter problems as they are required to carry out household chores unlike their male counterparts.

After a detailed study, Jeronimus, Riese, Sanderman, & Ormel (2014) found that life outcomes and negative employment were also associated with dropping out of school. Jeronimus et al. (2014) indicated that individuals who drop out of school decrease their odds of securing a worthwhile job because their working skills are poorly developed. Thus, they lack the basic functional skills required for a worker to succeed. In

practice, completion of high school is a basic requirement to securing admission to higher levels of education. Such credentials also meet the minimum expectations for employers. Thus, it is not surprising that individuals with lower levels of education are likely to stay in poverty, and in need of government assistance. Apart from being involved in crime, high school dropouts are at a higher risk of suffering from poor health, especially mental disorders (Shahidul & Karim, 2015). Negative outcomes of this nature are not only harmful to the social life, but also to the economy given the diminished worth of a society's workforce.

Further, the literature demonstrates that many factors contribute to school dropouts. Such features vary although they range from psychosocial, cultural, institutional, to economic. In their study, Burrus and Roberts (2012) concentrate on understanding the dropout process and risk factors and then offer recommendations for addressing the problem. According to the authors, exiting school prematurely is a process that begins before students enter high school. Thus, an identifiable set of factors are visible as many as four years before individuals drop out of school. The researchers also found that such students happened to be in their early years in high school. Given the possibility of identifying risk factors, addressing the concern requires a careful understanding of the reasons.

Associated Risk Factors

Based on the findings of Burrus and Roberts (2012), the risk factors are divided into demographic features, performance characteristics, and self-identified factors. Under the demographic attribute, household income level, race, age and sex are the main aspects

that predict school dropout. In reference to race, Burrus and Roberts (2012) noted that ethnic and racial minorities disproportionately drop out of high school. Regarding age, reference is made to the age of the student while enrolled at school. A student whose is older than the average is at a risk of dropping out of school (Burrus & Roberts, 2012).

Performance characteristics are also critical as observed by Burrus and Roberts (2012). Citing a study of Philadelphia schools conducted by Neild and Balfanz in 2006, Burrus and Roberts indicated that poor grades, low attendance and being at an older age than classmates as major factors. From the study, an eighth-grade student stood a 75% chance of leaving school if he/ she attended school irregularly, or failed mathematics, English, or both. For ninth grade students, the risk of exiting school increases with the irregular attendance, inability to earn more than two credits, and being held back a grade. The study also found that all students who were categorized as at-risk dropped out later.

Psychosocial

Span and Rivers (2012) supported the position held by Burrus and Roberts (2012) that psychosocial factors contribute to the dropout problem. Such attributes include motivation and personality. For instance, an assessor can predict school dropout by examining how students, teachers and parents actively take part in educational activities. Engagement or participation is however multifaceted as it entails the degree of identification with learning centers and the presence of positive associations with teachers and peers.

Parental and Guardian Engagement

Students who do not find school activities interesting are at an increased risk of abandoning their studies (Span & Rivers, 2012). A lack of participation or engagement is however not limited to students only, as the commitment of teachers also comes into question given that those who are highly devoted to teaching are more likely to inspire students and dissuade them from harboring ideations of quitting school given that Span and Rivers (2012) found that adult or parental guardian engagement was also a major concern. According to Burrus and Roberts (2012), the absence of such significant figures from the schooling of young people is a big risk factor. Adults who follow the performance of students increase their level of motivation, and the need to continue with their studies. Thus, the disposition to drop out of school is lower among students whose guardians are involved in their learning. In order to overcome the concern, it would be appropriate for parents to participate in studying activities that motivate their children. As Burrus and Roberts (2012) found, parental involvement is more influential than is teacher participation in predicting school dropout. However, when students feel insufficiently challenged by their teachers, the likelihood of dropping out of school also increases. This also applies when the motivation to complete homework declines. Thus, it is conclusive, based on the study by Burrus and Roberts (2012), that both parental and teacher engagement are influential in the decision to stay or quit school.

Brundage (2013) found that pregnancy and parenthood also contribute to the high dropout rates. Unplanned teen pregnancy is a relatively common problem today. In such a state, students encounter problems, as they are forced to abandon other roles while at

the same time tending to their new responsibility as mothers (Brundage, 2013). Further,

the author established that a significant number of girls who dropped out of school cited

pregnancy as one of the main reasons. Owing to the stigmatization of young motherhood,

many students who become pregnant fail to resume studies once they have given birth

(Brundage, 2013). Other concerns such as struggling with fatigue, morning sickness and

maternal responsibilities compound the girls' resolve to continue with school (Brundage,

2013). Caring for babies is not only time-consuming, but expensive such that young

mothers are forced to drop out of school as they search for income, as the above author

found.

Boredom

The issue of boredom is closely related to engagement (Brundage, 2013). The

author went further to note that apathy has also been mentioned as a contributing factor to

the decision of students to quit schooling. The problem largely affects high school

students who find academic content uninteresting as they lack a personal relationship

with teachers (Brundage, 2013). Hence, learners seek alternatives to education as a way

of overcoming the perceived boring nature of studies. Additionally, the author theorized

students who do not anticipate pursuing higher learning opportunities do not see the value

of an education. Overcoming such a concern requires the participation of education

boards, school faculty, parents, and students in deliberating ways to increase

involvement.

Lack of Engagement

Low levels of engagement tend to lead to academic struggles as research shows that students who struggle academically are at a high risk of dropping out of school (Span & Rivers, 2012). With low scores, learners understand that their chances of securing a career based on education are limited. At another level, low-performing students do not want to face the disappointment of failure, hence they decide to quit before they put themselves in a position to embarrass themselves (Span & Rivers, 2012).

Lacking adequate parental support also contributes significantly to school dropout rates. As pointed earlier, parents are influential in terms of their children's school attendance (Haupt, 2014). Parents who show commitment and engagement serve as inspirational figures (Baydoun, 2015). As Baydoun found, failure to demonstrate any form of interest often discourages students. Engagement is in the form of communication, inquiry about schoolwork, and following-up performance. Disengagement is a contributor to dropping out of school.

Shahidul and Karim (2015) have extensively assessed the role of money in education. Based on their view, some students drop out of school so that they can secure jobs and earn money in the process. The present-day materialistic society heightens the problem given that young persons are interested in buying luxuries or leading comfortable lives (Shahidul & Karim, 2015). Hence, they believe that exiting school gives them the platform to find work, and earn an income to finance their lifestyles. Given that getting an education takes time, some high school students instead prefer to concentrate on working.

Students coming from wealthy or upper middle-class backgrounds make efforts to persevere through the school programs because in many instances, their parents have a decent education (Brundage, 2013). Hence, they believe that they stand a good chance of succeeding by completing their education. Similarly, parents of such socioeconomic status value education so much such that they cannot allow their children to drop out of school (Paterson, Gow, & Deary, 2014). According to Paterson, Gow, and Deary (2014), coming from a poor socioeconomic background are at a higher risk of dropping out of school. Thus, direct and indirect costs of education contribute to premature school exits.

Demographics of Dropouts – Usual Suspects

It is widely acknowledged that education plays an integral role in the development of society. The significance of education is reflected in the numerous efforts that stakeholders undertake to enhance learning (Miller, 2014). On the whole, countries whose citizens obtain higher levels of education are comparatively more developed than those countries that place less of an emphasis on the role of education for their citizens (Munteanu et al., 2014). Thus, it is not a coincidence that globally, efforts are being made to ensure that students graduate from school successfully (Miller, 2014). Despite such endeavors, the following challenges continue to weaken education (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014). For instance, Pham and Keenan (2011) observed that high dropout rates are a major concern that educators, policymakers and the academia community pay attention to give the impact they have on the life of the individual. Whenever students drop out of high school, their odds of career success are greatly limited (Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013). Aud et al. (2011) found that dropouts earn much less compared to their peers with

a high school degree. Additionally, such persons are more likely to end up being

incarcerated (Aud et al., 2011). Kena et al. (2015) indicated that up to 16% of U.S.

citizens aged between 18-24 years who lack a degree were not enrolled in any school.

Thus, a significant number of school-age individuals do not attend school or college

(Kena et al., 2015).

The ramifications societies face when a sizable portion of the population fails to

complete school are dire (Aud et al., 2011). For instance, the economic value of attending

school is evident across communities (Beatty, 2012). Figures obtained from the U.S.

Census Bureau indicate that 10.2% of adults (over the age of 25 years) who had dropped

out of college are living at or below the poverty line, while 5% of adults who possess a

bachelor's degree or higher are living at or below the poverty line (DeNavas & Proctor,

2015). The gap widens when comparing students who have dropped out at the high

school stage (Kena et al., 2015). It is acknowledged however that the value of education

cannot be assessed using earnings alone given that societal ills such as incarceration rates

are higher among school dropouts (Doll et al., 2013).

There are various reasons that account for these problems. In particular, two sets

of factors are commonly cited as having the greatest impact. First, the institutional

aspects revolving around communities, schools, and families play a role (Shealy, 2011).

Second, individual characteristics depicting the behavior of the students involved also

make a contribution (Shealy, 2011). Regarding families, communities and schools,

reference is made to the role they play in influencing students' decisions to cease

attending school (Shealy, 2011). For instance, it has been found that students who come

from two-parent homes report lower dropout rates than those from single-parent families (Beatty, 2012). The employment status of parents also influences a child's progression in learning (Beatty, 2012). Parenting practices such as monitoring children's progress, engaging with school administration and assessing a child's friendships are additional factors that play a role in the advancement of students while learning (Beatty, 2012). School characteristics such as structural features, resources, presence/ absence of student bodies, and operational policies and practices are also critical in the learning process as they are directly or indirectly linked to school dropouts (Doll et al., 2013). Although low socio-economic status it itself does not automatically lead to students dropping out, living at a higher socio-economic level increases the chances of completing school (Beatty, 2012).

Owing to the significance of education in society, efforts are continuously being made to redress negative issues such as school dropout rates (Aud et al., 2011). In this regard, many prevention strategies have been devised. According to Brundage (2013), identifying struggling students is partly the beginning point for developing responses to school dropout problems. Irregular attendance, behavioral problems, and failing grades in class are some of the predictors of school dropout (Brundage, 2013).

Differences in Gender, Ethnic, Urban vs. Rural Populations

The literature on the problem of dropping out of school is rich (Fry, 2014). When reviewing the literature, certain differences are discerned (Paterson et al., 2014). It is also acknowledged by the authors, that societal development is assessed based on the evaluation of aspects that border on educational inequalities. Since the inception of

schooling, certain differentials have often influenced participation as well as graduation (Paterson et al., 2014). For example, Fry (2014) found that in the United States, ethnic minorities such as Hispanics, Blacks and Latinos have been sidelined historically. This has also traditionally been the case for girls, where gender bias has hindered educational opportunities.

Focusing on the gender divide demonstrates that school dropout rates are higher among girls than for boys (UNESCO, 2012). Based on an extensive study across many countries, UNESCO (2012) found that the number of those abandoning school was higher for girls than boys in forty-nine countries. This discrepancy is true despite the fact that enrollment of the two sexes is roughly the same across all countries. The international body observed that, on average, boys were likely to attain higher levels of education when compared to girls. The implication is that a variation on school dropout exists based on the sex of an individual. In this regard, certain factor account for the state of affairs. Socio-cultural factors have been identified as those that heavily predispose girls to abandon school before graduation. However, some of the factors also account for the dropout of male students from schools. Although many factors are discussed, caution must be exercised to avoid making assumptions that any of them operate in isolation.

The Divide

While education encounters many challenges, in the US the issues that affect education the most are related to gender, race, and urban/rural divides. For instance, Span and Rivers (2012) observed that despite the popular perception that education should be accessible to each child, not everyone truly has access to it given that actors such as race,

sex and socioeconomic status influence educational attainment. School dropouts,

discrimination based on race and sex have persisted, although improvements on

redressing the problems continue to yield positive results. In the past, girls were rarely

admitted to schools for many years after their establishment, and even when they were

allowed entry, they were not taught the same subjects.

Racial segregation in the US has remained a thorny issue that persists today. Span

and Rivers (2012) concede that, the fact that racial minorities began schooling from

disadvantaged positions might explain why they are the worst affected regarding school

dropouts too. The percentage of high school dropouts among students aged 16 to 24 has

fallen by fifty percent between 1967 and 2013, although racial discrepancies remain

(Edgar, 2014). In particular, the author found the rate is high among students of Hispanic

origin and immigrants. Many factors explain the disparities. Recording lower scores,

changing schools often, deviant behavior, family/ work responsibilities, poorly educated

family backgrounds, absenteeism and school disengagement are some of the factors

attached to high rates of school dropouts (Edgar, 2014).

Race and ethnicity are major factors in predicting school dropout, although the

discrepancy continues to fall. Hispanic and black youth are more likely than Asians and

whites to drop out of school given that only five percent of whites aged between 16 to 24

reported dropping out of school in 2013 (Doll et al., 2013). This was a modest figure

given that the rate of Hispanics was twelve percent while it stood at eight percent for

blacks. In an attempt to extrapolate the finding, Doll et al. (2013) indicated that the high

rate among the Hispanics was attributable to the big number of immigrants of the origin

into the country who fall into the school-age bracket. Asian youth registered the smallest

rate, as only three percent dropped out of school. Gender was also a factor given that

males accounted for seven percent while the rate of females was six percent (Doll et al.

2013)). The authors further demonstrated that despite the equally representative share of

each sex in the sampled population, the dropout cases demonstrated that more males

dropped out of school given that fifty-four percent were not attending school.

Mitigation School Dropout

A strong link exists between poverty and school dropouts. Students living in

poverty are at a higher risk of exiting school prematurely since the idea that poverty is a

risk factor is underscored owing to the differences in races (Beatty, 2012). Students from

minority groups were more likely to drop out of school compared to whites, as the author

observed. In order to solve the problem, understanding the underlying causes is

mandatory. Researchers such as Susmita and Sengupta (2012) pointed out that

identifying those students at the biggest risk should be the basis for addressing the

problem. Similarly, stakeholders can resolve the issue by identifying schools with high

dropout rates. According to the authors the implication is that paying attention to the

issue allows for a proper understanding of the problem and responding by generating

responses. Secondly, McCurdy et al. (2016) indicated that upon the recognition of the

risk populations, interventions can be designed. Many such programs have been

developed, leading to varied degrees of performance. As such, there is a need to assess

the interventions before selecting those that fit the circumstances of those being targeted.

In their conclusion, Burrus and Roberts (2012) observed that student dropout rates are more of a social and economic issue within the United States. Further, the two indicated that leaving school before graduating is a costly affair that requires urgent measures. The authors noted that the narrative on school dropout suggests serious problems, although several signs were present to suggest that the problem could be resolved. While appreciating the role of school policy makers and administrators in lowering high school dropout rates, Burrus and Roberts (2012) conceded that more proactive steps need to be taken. Through the mobilization of the required resolve, the country can overcome the concerns.

The current trend points to a scenario where efforts to lower school dropouts appear to be bearing fruit. Although many factors exist to explain the need for addressing premature exits from school, reasons ranging from moral, social to economic ones are evident (Balfanz & Fox, 2011). Beatty (2012) noted that more than three decades ago, school dropouts could nonetheless secure reasonable jobs. However, it is no longer possible to access good job opportunities for those individuals who lack a high school degree. Thus, young people who abandon learning prematurely are at a big disadvantage as they struggle to pay their bills.

Unemployment, Crime, and Incarceration

Apart from the meager earnings linked to dropping out of school, other concerns such as being unemployed, committing crime and incarceration are among issues that school dropouts have to confront (Balfanz & Fox, 2011). It is also apparent that the kind of jobs such persons secure do not provide stability. Hence, they are always at risk of

being unable to finance their healthcare and related aspects. Owing to the findings, the need for controlling school dropouts is urgent.

The use of targeted interventions has been applied in a number of circumstances. Although many have yielded promising outcomes, in given instances they fail. For instance, during the 1990s, the federal government funded intervention programs intended to address the school dropout issue (McColloch, 2012)). The author indicated that many of the programs were low-intensity and focused on providing occasional counseling, tutoring, and highlighting of activities to improve students' self-esteem. Combined with high-intensity programs, schools were empowered to lower their dropout rates. Thus, one of the approaches that stakeholders can use to address the problem is intervention-led.

In the past, interventions were voluntary in nature (McColloch, 2012). Thus, those who were enrolled in the programs need to willingly participate. The implication is that the extent to which such methods succeed depended on their acceptance to take part in the studies. Despite such shortcomings, the efficacy of the programs was significant in lowering school dropout rates (McColloch, 2012). In this regard, institutions that seek to reduce the rates at which students exit schools prematurely can consider rolling out intervention programs to redress the concern.

Previously, educators perceived the dropout problem as an issue outside the school confines (Baydoun, 2015). Hence, it was seen as a social phenomenon that learning institutions could not solve by themselves. Educators supported the observation based on the fact that the dropout rates varied across schools, an aspect they did not link

to the quality of teaching (Shahidul & Karim, 2015). This is now challenged, given that schools, administrators and teaching staff have a role, which is linked to the problem (Shealy, 2011). Shealy (2011) also noted that school curriculum contributes to the boredom that some students encounter while studying. In such cases, schools need to revise their structures and curriculum in order to make them attractive to all students. Such a move would play a role in lowering the dropout rates.

School Reform

Regarding reforming schools, working on improving student-teacher relationships is one of the methods that can be adopted to improve school attractiveness, and reduce dropout rates (Balfanz & Fox, 2011). Against popular perception, relations at school have a bigger impact than demographic factors, as Balfanz and Fox (2011) found. Thus, concentrating on such attributes is critical towards reducing premature exits. Closely linked to school systems are academic challenges and nature of environment. Dropout rates are lower in environments where teachers provide more supportive to their students. Similarly, schools with academically challenging environments were found to register higher graduation rates (Balfanz & Fox, 2011). In this regard, addressing the dropout problem entails working closely towards improving the school environment to be supportive of the learning process.

The exigency associated with school dropouts has resulted in the emergence of many groups proposing ways for dealing with the problem (Balfanz & Fox, 2011). Despite the acceptance by all groups that dropout rates are a major concern, they propose different means for combating the problem. In part, the recommendations are based on

the dissimilar conceptions that the groups hold regarding the school dropout issue. In some instances, the methods proposed to solve the problem are complementary while in other cases they are contradictory (Shealy, 2011).

Role of Federal Government and Nonprofit Sector

The federal government is one of the institutions that has embarked on redressing the problem. The current Obama Administration for instance initiated a campaign aimed at improving schools and public education. Dubbed the Race to The Top (RTTT), the initiative provides funding to states that demonstrate significant progress in the following areas (Balfanz & Fox, 2011). The first aspect is in designing and launching thorough standards as well as high-quality evaluations, attracting and retaining leading teachers and leaders in classrooms, supporting data-based decision-making and applying innovative methods to improve underperforming schools (McColloch, 2012). The incentive to improve on poorly performing schools' targets those whose dropout rates are predominantly high given the resonating idea is that underperforming schools are undermined by poor infrastructure, leading to high rates of premature exits of students (Balfanz & Fox, 2011). Thus, the hypothesis is that improving the facilities will lower the dropout rates.

The education sector is also a major player in activities that affect students (Foley-Nicpon & Assouline, 2015). The group has the task of preparing programs that satisfy student needs. The actors are thus expected to respond to needs of at-risk pupils by urging them to stay in school. In this regard, some of the issues that have been mentioned include poor teacher and staff training on handling student issues. Owing to the

realization, training centers such as the Sacramento State College of Continuing Education began offering training on preventing the dropout problem (Foley-Nicpon & Assouline, 2015). In a bid to ameliorate the concern, some schools are allocating funds to cater for dropout counselors and related programs. These strategies are being brought in to address attributes that predispose students to dropping out of school (Foley-Nicpon & Assouline, 2015). As a result, it is evident that investing in training is among the measures that can be taken to reduce the problem.

The non-profit sector is also involved in education matters. As a consequence, the group is also playing a role in devising strategies to address the school dropout problem (Foley-Nicpon & Assouline, 2015). In their nature, non-profit entities run programs to help youth to stay in school. Such groups also lobby political leaders to pay attention to factors that predispose students to dropping out of school. The primarily reason for their involvement is the poor state of equipment at the disposal of schools to address the concern. The Alternative Schools Network (ASN), which operates from Chicago, is among the entities that fall into the category (Foley-Nicpon & Assouline, 2015). Besides supporting the extension of direct educational services, such organizations also advocate for the rights of students. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) also plays a significant role given that it funds and sponsors students who are willing to go back to school (Rousmaniere, 2013). The program is credited with reducing dropout rates, absenteeism and providing a rich cultural content that spurs parental involvement. Thus, the latter group focuses on increasing the involvement of

parents in learning activities. Additionally, the provision of sponsorship for students who face problems is a critical strategy in resolving the concern.

Social Work

Social workers can play a role in mitigating the dropout problem as well. According to Ghosh and Sengupta (2012) historically, social work has been grounded on casework, and taken on a school-home-community orientation. The authors noted that the role of social workers has changed over the years and continues to change with time. Contemporary professionals focus on psychosocial evaluations, individual/ group counseling, crisis intervention, behavior management, and consultative engagements between parents and teachers (Ghosh and Sengupta, 2012). The authors observed that in many instances, the services are targeted among special needs students, although the services are useful in helping other students with a number of school problems.

While serving schools, social workers are able to identify social issues that predispose students to misconduct. Given that school dropout rates are a social problem, with many negative outcomes on the society, social workers could play significant role in redressing the concern (McColloch, 2012). Dropout rates from poor neighborhoods are especially disturbing owing to the high numbers of students involved (McColloch, 2012). With the adoption of strict measures such as those supported by the No Child Left Behind Act, the pressure to perform has pushed many students out of schools. Parkerson and Parkerson (2011) supported the idea having found that studies show that dropouts pose problems such as homelessness, unemployment, dependence on the welfare system, involvement in crime, consumption of illegal drugs, and poor health and marital relations.

In effect, social workers can play a key role in the prevention of the problems by identifying and advocating for the prevention of the issue.

From the above review of the literature, a picture is created regarding suspects of dropping out of school. Thus, in coming up with the typical portrait of drop out suspects, risks factors are pulled together, including academic underperformance, poor background, ethnic minority, overage, discriminatory school practices, at-risk label, suspension from school, course failure, among other factors. Among the behavioral attributes, the following are assessed. Attendance is a factor to consider when examining school dropouts. A big percentage of students who drop out exhibit a pattern of irregular school attendance. Dropping out is a gradual process that occurs among given students. Suspensions also account for high rates of dropouts. More than half of the students who drop out happen to have been suspended on at least one occasion during their schooling. As previously observed, failing a course unit also predispose learners to quitting school before graduation.

School Characteristics

Apart from behavioral attributes, school characteristics also play a significant role. Attending large comprehensive schools leads to the biggest risk factors in dropping out of school. It is also held that reviewing ninth grade indicators is also helpful towards understanding the problem. Being years older than classmates in ninth grade is a predictor of exiting school. Closely associated with the above is the performance of students at middle school. Those students with poor scores are more likely to abandon learning. Similarly, an analysis of proficiency levels is important in understanding school

dropout tendencies given that poor performers are at a higher risk of dropping out. Thus, a portrait of a typical dropout must demonstrate demographics, structural and socioeconomic factors.

Human Ecology of Dropouts

Taking the ecological and development model is integral towards the understanding of the ecology of dropouts. Ecological frameworks on human development acknowledge that the social context within which an individual lives influences ones' behavior (Jablonka, 2011). Thus, an understanding of the environment is important in developing responses to problems involving exiting school prematurely. When students are progressing through early adolescence, they encounter many emotional and physical changes (Brundage, 2013). Puberty results in a number of physical changes, which spur students into believing that they have become mature to carry out their lives independently. Entry into puberty is thus one of the initial push factors that places an individual on the path of deviant behavior. Such conduct is associated with negative engagements that are often incongruent with school standards. At the stage, peer groups, youth culture, and grown role models assume a high degree of social influence (in terms of values, attitudes and behaviors) for the adolescents (Brundage, 2013).

Within the family unit, adolescents begin looking for more independence as well as opportunities to make personal decisions (Jablonka, 2011). However, the author observed that the changes demand for a shift in responsibilities and roles which prove challenging to the relationships and dynamics at the family level. At the same time, many

adolescents transition from junior high school to high school environments. The shift does not however match the developmental needs of the young people.

Demographic characteristics that predispose students to dropping out of school include poverty, homelessness, sex, and ethnicity (Jeronimus et al., 2014). Being a minority contributes largely to likelihood of dropping out of school (Fry, 2014). One point of disappointment is that many gifted students who fall into the above demographics are at a higher risk to drop out of school (Jablonka, 2011). The association of the demographic risk factors with school dropout is partly explained by their connection to academic factors such poor performance, low levels of motivation, absenteeism, behavior problems, among others. The differentials expand as students enter middle school (Fry, 2014).

Zalasiewicz, Williams, Haywood, and Ellis (2011) have also noted that the puberty stage is characterized by emotional problems which are largely based on self-esteem issues. The authors also established that increasing levels of anxiety, depression and self-consciousness are also partly responsible for the problems that such individuals face. At the stage, students display behavior problems that can lead to suspension or expulsion from schools. Zalasiewicz et al. (2011) indicated that the issue is worse when special students are involved given their tendency to be affected more emotionally.

Cognitive Self-Concept

Examining the cognitive self-concept as it relates to identity is also significant in a bid to understand the dropout theory (Zalasiewicz et al., 2011). The writers observed that at the high school level, students are developing complex abstractions about

themselves. In this regard, they are less concrete and egocentric as they contemplate the future (Zalasiewicz et al., 2011). The functioning of the brain influences thoughts about intimacy, achievement, autonomy, self-identity and achievement. Thus, aspects such as identity are crucial determinants as adolescents seek to move away from parental dependence. As the trend continues, individuals at the stage increase their degree of differentiation as they think more about their self-worth. According to Steggall (2014), self-expectancy, success expectations, and subjective task value assessments influence educational performance and achievement, attributes that have a bearing on school failure, disengagement, and dropping out.

Self-Perceptions

Self-perceptions on academic ability border on beliefs that individuals hold regarding their competence (Jablonka, 2011). Such judgments are associated with success expectations, and achievement behaviors. As Steggall (2014) observed, self-expectations demonstrate views held by a person regarding their personal ability to advance in their endeavors. Perceptions demonstrating decreased academic ability emerge at the time students are in high school, leading to a high likelihood of dropping out of school.

The high number of disruptive events surrounding the growth and development of young people alters the process of identity formation (Jablonka, 2011). Chances of overcoming the turbulent life lies on the ability of those involved to construct a coherent identity based on prior experiences, current views, anticipated future, and conceptualization of an opportunity for advancement (Jablonka, 2011). However, Steggall (2014) indicated that the presence of abstract internalized and differentiated

perceptions about the self-pose a notable risk to such persons. Some of the outcomes include mental problems, antisocial behavior and dropping out of school.

The young students' ability to harbor hopes and ideals about their chances of success in the future such as proceeding to college can serve as motivation depending on the outcome of self-evaluation (Doll et al., 2013). However, the increase in the abstraction of thinking and self-focus poses a danger of cultivating a new acute awareness about deviations between ideal and actual ability (Steggall, 2014). Hence, persons in question begin identifying areas that would undermine their efforts to succeed. If not controlled well, a high risk of dropping out exists. The new findings Doll et al. (2013) contribute to lowering perceptions about one's potential leading to the devaluation of education, reduced motivation, poor school adjustment, and poor overall performance. An increase in evaluations of the above nature enhances self-awareness and consciousness, aspects that might attract self-embarrassment or shame. In such a state, the student in question is at a big risk of dropping out of school.

Family System

The family system is also central to the understanding of the ecology of dropouts (Doll et al., 2013). In this regard, reference is made to the structure of families, and their role in shaping students. Students come from varied family compositions although single and two-parent families are the most common. Those who come from single-parent families and those residing in foster care are at a bigger risk of exiting school prematurely (Doll et al., 2013). The authors also noted that by the time students reach high school, chances are high that they have experienced a divorce, or the remarriage of one or both of

their parents and the trauma associated with such a loss is huge for young people. Such developments predispose students to low performance, which is a predictor of dropping out of school. In addition, anger, resentment, and associated conflicts result in aggravated problems, which lead to heightened tendencies towards school disengagement (Doll et al., 2013). Generally, as stated by the authors single parents are less likely to monitor the behavior of their high school-aged children, thus leaving them free to lose track and misbehave. Thus, poorly monitored children associate with peers, leading to the involvement of social ills and the inducement of dislike for schools (Doll et al., 2013).

Family resources also form an important aspect of the dropout ecology (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2011). As previous sections indicate, socioeconomic factors are strong predictors of dropping out. In this regard, reference is made to family history, income, parental education level, employment and occupation, factors which influence a student's disposition to drop out of school. Poverty-stricken homes have problems with satisfying basic needs such as clothing and food. Hence, such families are stressed with homelessness, mobility, and other aspects that hinder academic achievement and school attendance. Unlike young children, high school students are mature enough to understand the problems facing their families (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2011). Any form of family troubles with finances negatively undermines the ability of students to focus on their education. In such an environment, the chances of students exiting school before graduation increases (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2011). Students who witness traumatizing events at home are also at a risk of dropping out. The situation is worsened when students are the direct victims of trauma (UNESCO, 2012). In cases where girls are victims of

sexual violence outcomes such as pregnancy, it exposes those involved to a high risk of dropping out of school.

Alvarez (2012) posited that the process of socialization is one of the most influential on child nurturing. Past research shows that socioeconomic status mediates academic outcomes (Alvarez, 2012). For example, students are at a higher risk of dropping out of school if one member from the family has already abandoned school before graduating. The implication is that such families place little value on education, leading to low levels of motivation to continue schooling. The scenario is worsened when a person attends a school that holds different cultural values to his or her own. Thus, ethnic minorities are at a disadvantage, and more likely to drop out of school than their white counterparts.

Parenting practices are also central to the concept of ecology of dropouts. Behaviors espoused by parents mediate student achievement as well as completion of school (Alvarez, 2012). Those students who come from punitive environments are more predisposed to poor performance, and dropping out of school. The outcome is linked to negative role-modeling resulting from punitive parenting. When students reach the age of adolescents, they are more mature and prepared to question the logic behind being treated punitively (Baydoun, 2015). As a result, a conflict ensues leading to bad relations. In such an environment, students lack the motivation to carry on learning. The position is supported by the view that authoritarian parenting is linked to deviant group association, and school dropout tendencies while inattentive and permissive parenting are also

counterproductive because they are linked to negative attitudes and unsatisfactory

performance (Baydoun, 2015).

Peer, Work, and School Systems

        The peer group also constitutes a significant aspect of the ecology of dropouts. As

observed previously, the family structure can be disruptive to schooling activities in

given instances. Failure by families also peer groups wide-ranging powers (Byrd, 2013).

Further, the writer indicated that negative pressure from friends' increases when families

fail to provide leadership on issues affecting the young people. In many instances, the

influence of friends pushes individuals to engage in unacceptable practices such as illicit

sex, substance abuse and engagement in crime (Byrd, 2013). In such environments,

students are more inclined to drop out of school because they have limited incentives for

following school or family directions.

        The work system also constitutes a major element of the ecology of dropouts. In

this regard, Baydoun (2015) observed that the occupational environment has not changed

in line with the shifting environment. In particular, technology has largely replaced the

industrial system of operations (Byrd, 2013). Despite the development, work

environments have not made the adjustments necessary to match peoples' lifestyles.

Thus, family life has become compromised as individuals put in more effort to meet their

daily needs. Baydoun (2015) also acknowledged that present-day work opportunities

allow even unskilled persons such as high school students to work. Given that school

work does not generate income, the temptation to quit school in favor of the workplace

emerges. The need for immediate income in order to survive proves more critical when

individuals involved are from poor backgrounds given the hardships they encounter to secure basic needs (Edgar, 2014).

The school system is the final element explored in a bid to understand the ecology of dropouts. According to Doll et al. (2013), factors such as school location, ethnic composition of students and staff, levels of truancy, punishment system and grade retention are crucial in comprehending the environment which predisposes students to dropping out of school. In reference to the above school attributes, it is noted that when students perceive their learning climate as unsupportive, their chances of rebelling and ultimately dropping out of school increase markedly. A lack of interest from teachers, safety concerns and unfair disciplinary practices contribute to make learning institutions unaccommodating for at-risk students (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2011). Furthermore, at high school level students have different developmental needs, which if not catered for the mismatch is likely to lead to school dropouts. The mismatch occurs when at-risk students are placed under special facilities or stricter control. The problems are worsened when students understand that they have been classified as at-risk (Brundage, 2013). Thus, the ecology of the dropout reflects the composition of environmental factors that predispose an individual to exiting school before graduation. Based on all the factors, peer group, school, family, work system, and demographic characteristics are some of the main attributes that constitute the ecology of a dropout.

Theory of Dropouts: Human Ecology Theory

Discussing the Human Ecology Theory (Ecological Systems theory) is critical for comprehending the dropout problem. This school of thought posits that human

development is subject to various types of environments (Jablonka, 2011). Thus, the

theory is critical in explaining why people behave the way they do. Jablonka (2011)

indicated that the various environmental systems highlighted by the theory include

microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem.

Microsystem

According to Jablonka (2011), the microsystem constitutes the direct environment

that people spend their lives. In this regard, family, friends, teachers, schoolmates,

neighbors and individuals who are in direct contact come into mind. The system reflects

the environment where people have direct social relationships with various persons.

Based on the theoretical framework, individuals are not simple recipients of experience,

but important contributors to the making of the environment. At the microsystem level,

relations have two-directional effects. On the one hand, the individual is affected, while

on the other hand, the individual influences the environment. The theory holds that bi-

directional influences are the most influential ones on a growing person. Nevertheless, it

is acknowledged that factors from outside the environment can still influence an

individual's behavior.

Mesosystem

The second system which is the mesosystem is the layer that links structures

between an individual and the microsystem (Jablonka, 2011). For instance, the

association between a parent and a child's teacher or between the church attended and the

neighborhood constitute the environment. In other words, one's family experiences might

be connected to school or church experiences. As an illustration, a child who is neglected

by his or her parents, has a low chance of developing a positive attitude regarding teachers or school. Similarly, the individual might feel rejected leading to his or her adoption of defense mechanisms such as withdrawal. Thus, the above system is critical in understanding the concept of school dropouts by linking school events to the problem, as part of the current literature demonstrates.

There is a high possibility that students may not perform well in school work when their families undergo a number of stressful situations (Lamb, 2011). This is because such children may try to assist their families in overcoming such limitations and may not concentrate on their academic work. According to Cronin (2014), such difficulties can be overcome through the application of the two-parent families' system where both parents contribute towards the provision of assistance to the child. Family structures have undergone increasing changes in America over the past ten years. This has been associated with the increased number of children being born to single parents. It is observed that when a child is born in a single parent family, there is a likelihood that the child may not perform well in academic work (Lew, 2006). It is also found that irrespective of a person's race, when a child is raised by a single parent, there is a likelihood that the child may live in poverty, and there is a less likelihood that the child may do well in the areas that have impacts on economic capabilities of his/her family such as attainment of education. A child who gets the opportunity to attend good public schools may not have better futures if the family in which he or she is brought up does not provide motivation for him/her to succeed in life.

Boys are proven to the most affected as a result of an unstable family

composition; thus, they face the risk of dropping out of school (Macklem, 2014).

Children whose parents are not married and also face economic challenges experience

problems during schooling and in later stages in life. Studies show that among Americans

with little education, when men are raised by single parents, they do not reap the benefits

of peaceful marriages (Peterson, 2006). In addition, due to lack of stability in family

dynamics, children may be forced to seek connections and groups that ensure their fitting

in those groups (Darling, 2007). In the interior sections of cities, gangs are substitutes to

some connection needs. Those in the working class may take a southern rebel identity

that makes them ignore certain middle-class roles and functions of education and

responsibilities they have to their families.

      According to Heckman and LaFontaine (2010), these behaviors result into dismal

performance in schools. In addition, parents act as role models to their children. Hence,

when a child sees his or her parent work hard and makes greater use of his or her

knowledge and achievements; he or she is likely to follow the same culture of striving to

perform well in order to improve his/her academic competence.

      In the case of students who are unable to continue with their high school

education, they do not get motivation from relatives or parents who have attained a high

level of education and who are also hard working (Derksen, 2010). Consequently, they do

not get inspiration from family members, and as a result, they fail to focus on their

academic work. This results in their dismal performance in academics. This also does not

motivate the students to put more efforts in learning, which eventually results in cases of

giving up their educational ambitions before graduation.

This section also shows that when parents put more emphasis on the significance of education and the provision of solutions to academic challenges experienced by students, there is a high chance that such students can be motivated and improve on their performances, as well as develop an attitude, which results in the students liking the school.

Exosystem

The exosystem captures the larger society layer where an individual operates directly (Jablonka, 2011). Structures found in the layer influence the development of the child through its interaction with given structures from the microsystem. As a result, community-based resources or parent workplace schedules come into play in determining the behavior of students. At his level, children are not involved directly, but have the capacity to separate positive or negative forces while interacting. In brief, individuals have no active role within these environments despite being a part of them (Jablonka, 2011). In an event that a mother who is more attached to a child goes abroad for a particular reason, the child is forced to stay with others, leading to a sort of conflict. Alternatively, the development might foster positive relations between the child and those who remain behind. Regarding the dropout problem, reference is made to the absence of a parent from home. Such a scenario is not supportive of the development of the child as it contributes to social problems which might lead to disciplinary concerns, and ultimately dropping out of school.

Macrosystem

According to Jeronimus et al. (2014), the fourth system is the macrosystem which focuses on the culture of an individual. Cultural contexts entail socioeconomic statuses of those involved (family, ethnic group and country of residence). By way of illustration, an individual who is born into a poor family is forced to work hard on a daily basis. The literature is full of references to the role of socioeconomic status in the emergence of the dropout problem. As established, individuals from poor backgrounds are at a bigger risk of failing to complete school because of several reasons linked to an inability to meet basic needs satisfactorily.

Apart from structural challenges facing schools, it is observed that there exist cultural challenges that have affected the performance of students in schools and have contributed to their possibility of dropping out before graduation. These cultural activities have been illustrated in terms of policies, activities, beliefs and results that are associated in a number of ways (Lafleur, 1992). The cumulative impacts of these challenges result in a pattern that is not restricted to the impact of race and class as predicting factors to accomplishments in school, the idea of different styles of learning compared to intellectual goals that need to be achieved, and inadequate response to the resent policies affecting education in the tertiary level.

In some schools, there is a culture of viewing the low-income minority students as people, who are not ready to learn. Most teachers in such schools have the perception of cultural variations of the learning environments as contributing barriers to the inability of children from the low-income families to continue with their education (Landy & Becker,

1987).

It is also observed that a number of urban school managers have accepted the observation that the notion of 'urban behavior' and variations in cultural behaviors are contributing factors to low academic performance among the Hispanic and African-American students in schools. Similar ideas have been observed in a number of suburban schools, as well as district schools (Mayer & Gaschke, 1988). These beliefs can be prevented if district schools take part in dialogue regarding these ideas through activities such as reading groups, participation in seminars, and making new ideas operational through staff meetings, grade-level and participation in content sessions, and college circles.

There has also been a culture of perceiving the learning styles with intellectual deficiencies. If there is no diligence in urban schools, induced traits on the minority groups of students may have an impact on their academic performance and contribute to the possibility that they would not complete their secondary education and get certificates (Meece & Midgely, 1983). The ideas about the low-income and minority groups as being 'deficient' can result in a feeling that students from the low-income families are stereotyped and subjected to various vulnerabilities based on their social status. The idea of intellectual inferiority has resulted in psychological impacts and other characteristics that are destructive to a person's identity. Students may anticipate failures when they join school as a result of negative stereotypes about their groups' intellectual capacities.

There has also been lack of cultural responsiveness by certain schools. This is because the ideas of culture influence communication and perception of information, as

well as thinking process. According to Messacar and Oreopoulos (2013), cultural responsiveness is where information is acknowledged. Scholars state that accessibility to education is enhanced so that minority and majority groups have equal access to education opportunities. For instance, schools can determine the cultures that exist within their systems and come up with certain measures in which these cultures can be incorporated into their administrative structure. In such a way, they ensure that various cultures are considered (Ntoumanis, Pensgaard, Martin, & Pipe, 2004).

Reflective professionals have investigated why some schools are more efficient in the implementation of policies than others (O'Brien, Cohen, Pooley & Taylor, 2013). In most cases, schools are involved in formulation of policies, circular and other forms of decisions with little regard for racial, ethnic and cultural impacts on the students being served (O'Brien et al., 2013). For example, in schools where there are a high number of children, who do not live in a safe environment, it is required to construct such an environment so that they can complete their homework and feel comfortable (O'Brien et al., 2013).

When the culture of a school does not respond to students' needs, there is a possibility that students may develop mistrust and consider the school environment not worth staying and not making any meaning (Weis, 1993). Thus, children may spend little amount of their personal time on studies and eventually stop attending such schools (O'Brien et al., 2013). This results in the high rates of dropouts that affect the productivity of the population (Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013). When students perceive a school to be less hospitable, they may also opt to drop out of it as a way of escaping lack

of a pleasant environment for learning (O'Brien et al., 2013).

Chronosystem

Jablonka (2011) noted that the chronosystem, which captures transitions or shifts underpinning an individual's lifespan, is the forth system. Under this system, socio-historic factors that play a role in shaping individuals are invoked (Jablonka, 2011). The author noted that, divorce brings a transition effect into a family, and forces members to adjust to a different scenario. According to Zalasiewicz et al. (2011) children are affected largely because they are dependent on parents. As highlighted in the paper, divorce has long-lasting effects, especially when children are at the high school level (Zalasiewicz et al., 2011). When family matters are at crossroads, such students are affected negatively, and left at the risk of dropping out of school (Jablonka, 2011; Zalasiewicz et al., 2011).

The Human Ecology Theory is useful in a study seeking to understand school dropouts given that such an eventuality is viewed as a social problem. The position is supported by the view held by contemporary child development theories which hold that both biological and environmental factors play an influential role in shaping behavior (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Zalasiewicz et al., 2011). In developing this theory, Bronfenbrenner concentrated on the quality as well as context of a growing person's environment (Jablonka, 2011). The author noted that theorist believed that, while developing, a child interacts with the environment and as complexity set in, children's' cognitive and physical structures advance in maturity. Thus, the environment that surrounds an individual can support or hinder his/her growth and development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Using the model is instrumental in highlighting problems that students

have faced over time (Jablonka, 2011). For instance, drawing from the theory shows that technology has altered the way society functions (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Bronfenbrenner's theory also raises pertinent concerns regarding the deficit framework which was applied to assess the level of support given by the authorities to families handing the dropout problems. One intriguing aspect was that parents were expected to declare themselves deficient in order to attract assistance from the public (Moore, 2011). This was attributable to the cultural worth of independence. A high extent of need was reflective of a high level of dependence. Thus, the Bronfenbrenner framework addresses the problem of pressuring victims in a bid to help them to address school dropout problems (Sipsa, Ickovics, Lin, & Kershaw, 2012).

An examination of the theory reveals that the instability and unpredictability that characterizes family life has facilitated the creation of a destructive environment (Sabri, Hong, Campbell, & Cho, 2013). The aspect has undermined the development of children significantly. Unlike in the past, currently children lack the constant interaction they had with parents, thus they are denied an important influence when growing up (Top, Liew, & Luo, 2017; Akinnawo, Ocheho, & Adegbayi, 2013). The ecological theory posits that a breakdown at the microsystem distorts interactions because children do not know how to associate with the external environment (Sipsa et al., 2012). Thus, the young people are left to look for information from other sources, an aspect that leaves them with destructive characters (Callan & Dolan, 2013). The deficiencies in upbringing are prevalent among adolescents, and are reflected in antisocial conduct, indiscipline and indulgence in self-destruction (Sabri et al., 2013).

The theory has other implications for both teaching and practice. Understanding the breakdown in society would be the beginning point to resolving the dropout problem. Teachers and parents need to explore ways of facilitating stability and predictability in families to achieve the goal (Callan & Dolan, 2013). Fostering the associations would serve as a basis for the students to appreciate the value of positive conduct, thus leading to reductions in dropout rates (Callan & Dolan, 2013). The interpretation of the theory shows that the problem of school dropout stems from the family life and workplace conflict, contrary to the popular view that it results from the antagonism between schools and families (Sipsa et al., 2012).

Additional Significant Theories

Apart from the Human Ecology Theory, the Academic Mediation Theory, General Deviance Theory, Deviant Affiliation Theory, Poor Family Socialization Theory, and Structural Strains Theory are also useful for comprehending the topic under review (Jang & Song, 2015; Raitano, 2013; Yu & Zhao, 2013). The academic mediation theory posits that poor academic achievement is a strong predictor of dropping out of school (Raitano, 2013). The framework reviews the mediation impact that learning performance has on other attributes such as affiliation to deviance, personal misconduct, family socialization, structural strain and school dropout (Raitano, 2013; Yu & Zhao, 2013). In essence, poor academic performance interacts with the above factors, leading to a scenario where students prefer quitting school in search of other engagements (Jang & Song, 2015; Raitano, 2013).

General Deviance Theory

Regarding the General Deviance Theory, reference is made to the tendency of unexpected behavior preceding school dropout (McNaughton-Reyes, Foshee, Bauer, & Ennett, 2012). Engagements in delinquency, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy and other related behaviors are precursors of general deviance which is a predictor of dropping out of school prematurely (Jagnandan, 2012). The author noted, that such actions also engender poor academic performance, which often accelerates school dropouts. The Deviant Affiliation Theory focuses on the line between exhibiting antisocial behavior and dropping out of school (McNaughton-Reyes et al., 2012). Students might behave antisocially out of influence from friends, or based on personal decisions (Jagnandan, 2012). Regardless of the source of the behavior, individuals who show such conduct stand higher chances of dropping out of school before graduation.

Poor Family Socialization Theory

The Poor Family Socialization Theory indicates that the institution of the family is integral to the development of children through the upbringing process (Werblow & Duesbery, 2009). The framework shows that family background influences the possibility of dropping out of school. However, the relationship is weak given that the factor does not account much for dropout as academic performance does (Werblow & Duesbery, 2009). The position is further explained by the view that families that are poor at socializing do not have high expectations. In the end, the Structural Socialization Theory also contributes to the understanding of topic as it alleges that the association between demographic factors (ethnicity, gender, and status) and school dropout is significant

(Connolly & Beaver, 2015; Epstein & Ward, 2011). The authors argued that many studies have for instance shown that males are at a bigger risk of dropping out of school compared to females. In addition, individuals from poor backgrounds are more likely to exit school before graduation. Despite the contention about the role of race, evidence shows that ethnic minorities are at a higher risk of failing to complete their education.

Literature Gap – Gifted Students

Among the researchers who have explored the topic is Fry (2014). Fry makes several important findings. However, just like other investigators before him, Fry (2014) fails to mention anything about gifted education. Having found that ethnic minorities such as Hispanics, blacks and Latinos were disadvantaged, it would have been interesting had Fry sought to understand how gifted children faired in regard to the school dropout issue. Shahidul and Karim (2015) found that economic, social, and cultural and school factors contributed to the problem of school dropouts. Shahidul and Karim (2015) further assessed whether differences existed regarding the role of sex/gender in predicting school dropout. After tracing the history of dropouts, the expectation is that authors such as Alvarez (2012) and Baker (2013) should cover the topic as it relates to gifted students. However, they fail to do so, the same way the rest of the researchers have done. Thus, despite making a significant contribution, they did not venture into the issue of gifted students. The two studies reflect the popular trend where researchers probe the topic without concentrating on the how it affects gifted children despite the significance of the population to education. As a result, it would be critical to bridge the gap by exploring factors that predict or mediate school dropouts among gifted students.

Shifting attention to theoretical strands, it is highlighted that the environment has ramifications for both teaching and practice. Understanding the breakdown in society would serve as the point at which to begin resolving the dropout problem. Teachers and parents must consider exploring ways to facilitate stability and predictability in families in order to enhance the prospects of addressing the concern. Nurturing the associations would help form the basis upon which students would appreciate the importance of positive behavior, leading to a reduction in school dropout rates. This stems from the view that the dropout problem relates to the workplace and domestic life conflict, which contradicts the popular perception that it emanates from the antagonism between schools and families. From this establishment, pursuing the issue of gifted education alongside the family-work conflict line would be significant in informing further research.

According to Lessard, Contandriopoulos and Beaulieu (2009), the culture of expectations has a strong impact on the people that live in a particular environment. High schools specifically play a significant role in determining the possibility of success of a child in later stages in life. When the culture that exists in a school puts more emphasis on gratification compared to academic work and good grades, or when the neighborhood is composed of gangs and there is lack of reliance in activities of churches and supportive organizations, a person who is brought up in such an environment is less likely to perform well at school (ARISE Foundation, 1999). Marshall (1996) explains that this is also a factor that contributes to the possibility of a child being out of school and eventually dropping out before graduation. There are also various forms of social stigma as a result of being a good student, which discourage most Afro-Americans and

Hispanics in particular environments from attaining high academic success (Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013). This is because such children strive to conform to the society that discourages performance in schools, thus not focusing on their school work. This also acts as a factor that results in dropping out of high school. While there are various forms of frustrations as a result of pressure from parents to ensure children perform well in school, it is found that such children can be better off in life compared to those who were not encouraged to perform well in schools by their parents and peers.

Gifted Students

There are many definitions associated with gifted and talented students (Horne & Shaughnessy, 2013). For example, according to Crepeau-Hobson and Bianco (2011) the term "gifted and talented children" defines children and youth that, through demonstrated evidence, are performing at levels above their respective grade (K-12th Grade) in regard to intellect, creative, academics, as well as the performing and visual arts. Such talent would require schools to provide services and activities to address these needs (Crepeau-Hobson & Bianco, 2011). According to McClain and Pfeiffer (2012) a student with an IQ of 130 or better is considered gifted; while the National Association of Gifted Children [NAGC] (2013) definition includes additional criteria along with that of academic performance. The NAGC further believes a gifted and talented student has a unique ability to reason and learn, as well as being in the top 10% of their class in achievement.

As mentioned in chapter one the definition of a gifted and talented student is not bound by income, race, or ethnicity and varies from one country to another, as well as

from state to state (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2013). According to McClain and

Pfeiffer (2012) the current definition creates some controversy among those scholars

entrenched in gifted-education. Researchers Horne and Shaughnessy (2013) posited that

there are many definitions that are associated with describing a gifted and talented

student. According to McClain and Pfeiffer (2012) a popular one used by many

researchers to define a gifted student is that of a student with an IQ of 130 or better falls

in the realms of a gifted student.

When it comes to high school students much of the research has focused on the

achievement or educational gaps between race, ethnicity, and gender (Henfield,

Washington, & Byrd, 2014). According to Rampey, Dion, and Donahue, 2009 (as cited

in Henfield, Washington, & Byrd, 2014) there also exist an achievement gap between

African-American and Caucasian students that perform at gifted and talented levels.

These students also face and deal with various school and societal issues. For example,

gifted classrooms are less likely to be culturally sensitive or relevant for those gifted

students that are culturally different (Ford, 2015). Another example, bullying and

victimization is prevalent within this group of students (Peters and Bain, 2011). Also, the

Gifted and talented students school counseling needs are not being met (Colangelo &

Wood, 2015). In addition to the aforementioned school and societal issues, gifted and

talented students also fall prey to assumptions based on their ability. One major

assumption is that all gifted and talented students prefer to work alone (French, Walker,

& Shore, 2011). These studies focused on the high school gifted and talented student it

should be noted that many of the previously mentioned issues began earlier in the academic careers of such students (Ratchetted, Rubenstein, & Murry, 2015).

Defining this middle school issue has been a difficult and intense challenge for psychologists and researchers (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2013). According to Reis and McCoach (2000) (as cited in Ritchotte et. al., 2015) underachievement can be defined as difference potential and documented performance. The authors also noted in their definition, that this performance is realized over time and is not a result of any type of learning disability. Ritchotte, Rubenstein, and Murry (2015) theorized that underachievement for gifted and talented students begin in middle school. The issues in the previous paragraph are all evident in middle school (Henfield et.al., 2014). The following section will discuss in detail the issues and concerns faced by gifted and talented students.

Historical Perspective

The concept of providing gifted children with specialized schooling dates back to the first century. During that time, promising children could be sent to schools to be catered for by private tutors while the less academically-inclined students attended trades schools. According to Colangelo and Wood (2015), Roman citizens born into affluent families were the most common candidates for tutoring. The two authors further indicated that the process of identifying and separating gifted students proceeded over the centuries, although it was fraught with challenges. In the late 17th century and 18th century musically gifted children such as Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart attended specialized schools, although such schools were not labeled as such. Furthermore,

children attending the schools were not tested formally. Instead, educators at the time recognized that such students had a higher level of ability compared to their peers, and needed different guidance to attain their potential.

It was not until the middle of 1800s that official identification and testing of gifted children began in such states as Missouri, Massachusetts and New Jersey (Colangelo & Wood, 2015). According to the above authors, Sir Francis Galton was the first academic to focus on the field of education for the gifted. As Colangelo and Wood reported, in his writing, Galton concluded that natural selection and heredity were the direct contributors to the possession of unusually high intelligence.

Cabus and De Witte (2012) reported that the study by Galton later found its way into France, paving the way for the continuation of the gifted narrative on education by Alfred Binet. Based on the feelings of the latter researcher, standardized tests would improve reliability compared to teacher recommendations. Further, the above authors indicate that gifted education grew in stature in the 1950s following the dawn of the Cold War space race. In particular, the Soviet launching of Sputnik into space led the US to question the education level of its children.

Recently gifted education has been examined against the level of federal funding. For instance, in 2009, Congress assessed the funding of the Javits Act, the sole federal program that focuses on gifted students. It took major interventions from students, teachers, parents and gifted advocates to convince Congress not to make cuts in its budget (Cabus & De Witte, 2012)

The Dropout Problem

The dropout phenomenon is largely viewed as a dominant phenomenon during the last ten decades. Before the 1940s, dropping out of school before graduation was common. The National Dropout Prevention Center (2011) reported that the initial census conducted in the 1940s revealed that fifty percent of people aged between twenty-five and twenty-nine had not completed their secondary education. An assessment by Cabus and De Witte (2012) indicated that today, among the top 100 metropolitan areas nationally, only fifty percent of the student population had graduated from high school. Some of those given cities ranked even poorer. For example, Baltimore's graduation rate stood at thirty-four percent while in Cleveland and Indianapolis in was thirty-four and thirty percent respectively (Aud et al., 2011). Despite its usefulness, the numbers might be inflated given the approach adopted by the NCLB in labeling students as those who do not clear high school within a period of four years. The implication is that any student who is not enrolled in school for a year is counted as a dropout, irrespective of whether he or she goes back to finish school later.

In their study, Mintrop and Sunderman (2009) assessed achievement scores and dropout rates. According to the authors, both achievement scores and dropout rates continue to rise. However, they failed to establish a link between the two variables. In their conclusion, the term push-out seems as more appropriate compared to dropout given the high tempting nature among underachievers to exit school prematurely. Shriberg and Shriberg (2006) and Ritchotte et al., (2015) observed that the rigorous nature of the school curriculum forces a big number of students to exit school prematurely. The

authors attributed the struggles of these students to the lack of established study habits. Ritchotte et al., suggested that these students may struggle to overcome these new stressors and contribute to the dropout rates.

Chapman et al. (2011) are among the scholars who have assessed dropout rates among gifted students. The authors observed that no standard definition existed to capture the two terms. Citing the federal government, Chapman et al. observed that gifted students were those tested and approved by professionals in the field. However, testing requirements are determined by each state and school district. For Chapman et al., the definition of gifted needed to go beyond the quantitative perspective to focus on intelligence.

As observed, a number of studies have been carried out on the topic. Although many papers have examined attributes of gifted education and dropouts, few of them demand additional and detailed reviews. For instance, the work by Cabus and De Witte (2012) assessed the national population and another drawn from the state of Washington. Despite the usefulness of the research, it failed to concentrate on gifted dropouts. However, the findings are significant as they help to corroborate the information from other studies on the topic. Relying on information from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), Cabus and De Witte managed to highlight the financial effects attributable to the dropout problem, both at the individual and community levels. From the research, it was found that the rate of unemployment stood at over seventy-five percent among high school dropouts. Additionally, the study demonstrated that dropouts

earned $18,000 less per year compared to graduates. The adverse effects of dropouts are exacerbated given that it is a lifelong event rather than a momentary one.

In their study, the above researchers applied the national dropout data to compare to the state of Washington. The results indicated that the dropout rates were highest among Hispanic-Americans, at twenty-eight percent. The rate as eight percent among African-Americans while it stood at seven percent for whites. Warning against simplistic applications of the findings, Cabus and De Witte (2011) observed that research into the topic remained complicated, thus must be cross-referenced before its adoption.

Dai, Swanson and Cheng (2011) have also studied the topic of gifted education. The authors surveyed 1,234 studies on gifted education, giftedness and creativity spanning a period of 12 years (from 1988 to 2010). The study relied on the PsycINFO database with specific focus on journals as the critical sources. Dai et al., assessed the methodology used, the scope and conceptual areas that were captured. Based on the study, four main themes (creatively gifted, identification, achievement/ underachievement, and talent development) emerged. After a detailed review, Dai et al. established the presence of rich and broad spaces connecting the above four categories to psychological underpinnings, in addition to educational implications explored by the many studies. However, the researchers observed that the conceptual spaces were too loosely organized to be viewed as practical. Nevertheless, a number of prominent trends are identified such as emergent qualitative studies and descriptive research. The authors also proceeded to observe that although many psychological studies have assessed the gifted education context, a gap existed between theory and practice, separating the

understanding of the development of gifted education and promoting the development through the use of education. The researchers concluded that despite the progress made, it is necessary to use more systematic and sustainable research that is coordinated among researchers for the knowledge on the field to advance.

In their survey, Callahan, Moon and Oh (2014), observed that addressing concerns on the lack of specific and systematic data on gifted education demanded additional studies on the topic. As a result, the above researchers assessed the gifted programs across elementary, middle and high school categories. In their study, De Witte and Csillag (2013) indicated that gifted students ought to use their elevated abilities appropriately if they are to advance further in their academic pursuits. For such students to carry on with their schooling, they need to be adequately prepared for the challenges that they are likely to encounter. In particular, such learners need more challenging classrooms environments in comparison to those found in mainstream classes. De Witte and Csillag further observed that failure to provide the students the requisite knowledge is likely to among other things hasten their exit from school prematurely. Despite the special demands from the gifted learners, teacher-training institutions do not prepare instructors adequately. It is noted that preparations are necessary for teachers if they are to utilize the effective learning strategies necessary for retaining students in class. The failure to prepare teachers leaves students exposed to the possibility of dropping out of school since the teachers are unable to care for their needs. The inability to engage gifted students adequately increases the chances of dropping out significantly.

The study by De Witte and Van Klaveren (2014) found that a teacher's behavior in class is a contributing factor in the student's decision to remain in school or to drop out. Apart from the training concerns, teacher cognitive dimensions also emerge as a major problem that complicates teaching gifted students. Teacher effectiveness captures multiple factors such as holding high expectations for students, adopting the use of diverse resources to plan, learning modules, tracking learners' performance, adapting student instruction to fit peculiar demands, seeking attitudinal and social changes, and evaluating learning outcomes through broad methods, among others. However, it is noted that some attributes might be useful in given circumstances but not in others. As a result, it is the responsibility of the instructor to vary the method of delivery in order to maximize the outcome.

De Witte and Van Klaveren (2012) described a selection of strategies they consider useful to ensure that teachers help gifted students to find learning interesting so that they graduate from school. The researchers further indicate that teachers from mainstream classrooms were disadvantaged given that developing differentiated teaching frameworks was a complex requirement that was difficult to implement. However, a minor distinction could be necessary to attain the objective. Regardless, the researcher realized that teachers were ill prepared to execute the differentials necessary to attract and retain gifted students.

De Witte and Van Klaveren (2014) observed that curriculum compacting is one of the methods that educators need to adopt in a bid to cater for students who are gifted. The method entails the differentiation of content to suit the demands of gifted students. The

approach involves defining the objectives and expected outcomes of a given unit of instruction; the determination and documentation of students who master subjects ahead of others with alarming ease; and the provision of replacement strategies for materials that are mastered already. The goal is to replace topics that appear easy with more challenging ones. As previously indicated, gifted student might be more inclined to drop out of school when the learning process is deemed less challenging. Consequently, the above stated strategies need to be considered. Three of the focal dimensions deserving of consideration include advanced content and focusing on content that structures study disciplines; high-level processing and product work and framing learning outcomes based on major learning themes and connections among different fields in order to meet the challenging expectations of gifted children.

According to De Witte and Van Klaveren (2014), teacher encounters difficulties in their attempts to alter their teaching instructions to satisfy the requirements of gifted students. In cases involving untrained teachers, the problem is worsened given the higher possibility that they might ignore them. In such a case, it is understandable that the chances of dropping out of school for neglected children are high. According to another study (Haelermans & De Witte, 2013), teachers acknowledged that a lack of awareness as a contributory factor to the inability to address problems faced by the learning segment. In order to address such concerns, exploring different teaching models and methods would help. Such an approach gives the teacher a high degree of influence over the learners. However, a big percentage of teachers lack the confidence necessary to implement effective strategies to ensure that gifted learners do not leave school

prematurely. Based on the above, it is held that the absence of qualified teachers is a hindrance to the learning of the gifted students. In order to overcome problems of the above nature, enhanced training would be necessary.

Among the factors considered useful there are the application of technology or advanced textbooks. Textbooks hinder the teaching of talented children owing to the idea that they are off the standards that are appropriate for gifted students. Furthermore, some books contain inaccurate information. The use of technology applies to the demonstration of abstract learning activities. The absence of up-to-date technology might discourage gifted students from going forward with their studies.

The classroom setting is also a contested issue in regard to who it enhances or hinders learning for gifted students. Based on the study by Wilson, Huttly, and Fenn (2006), the set-up has both enhancement and disruptive roles. A number of teachers indicated that the class setting could be disruptive if it had broken chairs or is covered by graffiti on the walls. In order to improve the attractiveness of classrooms, improving their organization would be ideal.

De Witte, Cabus, Thyssen, Groot, and van den Brink (2013) reviewed an extensive body of literature leading to significant findings. In particular, the review highlighted the methodological discrepancies employed by previous studies. Through the approach, the study managed to bring out the complexities that surround premature exits from school. The main strength of the study is highlighted in the link across factors rather than isolated expectations.

According to De Witte et al. (2013), stereotyping is among the issues that attract attention. The authors observed that potential predictors of school dropout are widely considered. Individual learners and their peers, classmates, teachers, school, and the environment are major factors that influence school dropout rates. In the past, the focus was on variables gender, age, ethnicity, race, parental education, property ownership, income, residence, language among other related factors were identified as playing a contributory role to the issue. However, the latter factors tended to lean towards the view that leaving school prematurely was a natural process.

De Witte et al. (2013) further observed that the focal point is not to look at dropouts or as a perceived failure of schools and pupils and associated costs. Rather, it should be viewed as an indicator of or origin of primary inequities. The perspective focuses on school education as a fundamental right due to its citizens that must be protected at all costs. Sometimes the issue is seen as a complex and multidimensional with many causes and effects. Moreover, the concern is seen as a symptom of attendant problems. This explains why school dropouts are classified as a heterogeneous group. However, the concept attracts negative connotations. As a result, the possibility of reproducing stereotypes is high. Stereotyping often presumes that a correlation exists between the dropout problem and delinquency and unemployment.

Based on their review, De Witte et al. (2013) observed that the labor market also encourages school dropout rates among learners with high expectations such as gifted students. In their nature, gifted children perform much better compared to the average student. It also follows that such individuals have high expectations which they feel are

not sufficiently catered for by the job market. In such circumstances, chances of exiting school prematurely increase significantly. The writers indicate that the situation is worsened by the environment in which such students operate. Authors such as Cabus and De Witte (2012) pursue a related aspect by focusing on the allure of the labor environment. According to the authors, teenagers realize that they can secure work easily. At their young age, the attractiveness of finance independence is extremely high to object, unless the students are guided positively. Owing to the previous indications that gifted students are likely to be bored by the school curriculum, the possibility of exiting increases when the outside environment provides an alternative activity. Given the potential of generating personal income, gifted students become more vulnerable than ordinary students to exit school prematurely.

Cabus and De Witte (2012) concede that students who drop out of school take part time jobs which are often just temporary in nature. Thus, according to the authors, the lack of full-time work serves to discourage student from dropping out. The writers also cite increased freedom as provided by emerging flexibilities as a major factor in the development. Regardless, Cabus and De Witte concluded that in the long-run, students are attracted more to employment than schooling, leading to higher rates of dropout. In the short-term, it looks like a good decision although in the long-term, dropouts encounter problems given that they encounter difficulties in their bid to secure permanent employment as they lack critical credentials.

Cabus and De Witte (2012) took their narrative further, arguing that the dropout discourse is incomplete if the issues of unemployment, juvenile delinquency, and urban

poverty are not explored in detail. When viewed critically, these factors are influenced by class and race. Individuals of color have traditionally been denied equal opportunities to succeed. The popular stereotype is that minorities are unskilled, unintelligent, unadjusted, and more prone to delinquency. In this regard, it is seen that in the past, an array of risk factors formed the basis of research. Without a doubt, a number of risk factors predict the probability of school dropout. Although giftedness is a concern, the study by Cabus and De Witte fails to explore it. Nevertheless, their focus on how labor markets interfere with learning is informative. In particular, the outcome is consulted to inform the current literature with particular reference to the boredom in school and attractiveness of the labor markets for school-going children.

In their conclusion of the problem, De Witte et al. (2013) contended that early exits from school implied more than failure on the part of students to attain pass marks required for graduation. As such, the issue goes beyond the preparation of students for learning, or to align schools to diversity concern. In supporting the position De Witte et al. it can be observed that some students remained in school although they had failing grades. This is especially useful to the issue of gifted learners given that the reason for their exit from schools before graduation is not related to failure. According to the authors, societal belief, that only schools prepare individual for a better life explain the perspective.

After an extensive review of the literature, De Witte et al. (2013) arrived at the conclusion that quantitative or empirical-analytical studies dominated the literature. Thus, a shortage emerged regarding the number of research that deployed the qualitative

research method. De Witte et al., highlighted the surprise indicating that the nature of the topic warranted more studies using the qualitative method. The failure to assess the topic qualitatively led to a limitation of shallow assessment of values rather than the application of detailed interpretations and judgments that are encouraged under the qualitative research approach. The authors further conceded that it seemed illogical to presume that at one time, all factors predicting school dropout would be exhausted, leading to their conclusive listing. Based on their findings, De Witte et al., called for the adoption of methodological pluralism in order to overcome previous deficiencies. In particular, the writers proposed the adoption of methods that aligned with the questions under interrogation.

Further, De Witte et al. questioned the wide application of multivariate and standard logit models in reviewing the topic. In practice, the usability of bivariate methods (group comparisons) has declined, yet the approaches are adopted to capture school dropout rates. Policy-oriented studies are particularly the main culprits in this regard. It is however noted that bivariate studies do not permit interaction effects. The implication is that it is difficult to explore the multiple dimensions surrounding the school dropout problem. Another concern is that the approach limits the understanding of the topic thus leaving room for upholding stereotypes. According to the researchers, the time has come to move beyond which factors predispose learners to dropping out of school; among whom, when and why; to include whether, why and when the problem occurs. Additionally, what needs to be done about the problem becomes another issue for

consideration. As De Witte et al. observed, there is a need to come up with a broader framework that accommodates all relevant factors and demographics on the topic.

At-Risk

The review by De Witte et al. (2013) found that the determinants could be split into school-related, family-related, work-related and others. Despite the above classification, De Witte et al. established that a big proportion of the literature did not focus on school factors but on pupils and their families. Moreover, regardless of the focus on both distal and proximal factors (attributes related to students, families, teachers, schools and community), a big number of the studies a considerable percentage of such studies concentrate on one or two of the factors.

De Witte et al. (2013) also assert that a big percentage of research concentrates only on personal and social characteristics of individuals at the risk of dropping out of school. The main point lies on differentiating dropouts from graduates. The current study deviates from the above trend by attempting to identify and highlight attributes that contribute or cause gifted children to leave school before graduation. Regarding the main contributory factors that are linked to abandoning school, De Witte et al. observed that many studies assessed them separately despite the possibility of links between them. For instance, viewing school, parent or student factors in the absence of the societal/ community context would be misleading. Disentangling the effect of the above attributes from each other even by means of modeling might be impeded by challenges. Such concerns remain largely unresolved based on the analysis of previous studies.

Summary

It is evident that despite efforts to rid education of the many setbacks that bedevil it, challenges persist. For instance, school dropouts are a continuous concern that stakeholders seek to eradicate. It is however acknowledged that although the problem has not been eliminated, progressive steps have been taken. The need to do away with such concerns completely rests on the acceptance that education is critical in the development of societies. The role of education is apparent given the value that societies attach to it. From the literature, many researchers such as Reis et al. (2014), Pham and Keenan (2011) and Aud et al. (2011) have also linked school dropouts to negative outcomes. As a result, redressing the concern would be a way forward. The authors also held that given that dropouts affect non-gifted students, their effect on gifted students is likely to be negative owing to their special needs.

The study identifies a number of factors that contribute to the problem of school dropout. Despite the wide array, they are classified as institutional aspects that gravitate on communities, schools, and families, and individual characteristics that depict the behavior of students who are involved as observed by Shealy (2011). Concerning the second set of factors, the role families, communities and schools in influencing students' decisions to stop attending school assume significance. In this regard, marital status and employment status play an important role.

While tracking the history of education, it emerges that its development is linked to shifting societal needs (Reis et al., 2014). As the demand for labor increased, the need for educated people also rose and this rising demand could not be met by the reliance on

apprenticeship (Shealy, 2011). The situation led to the creation of learning centers. From the initial stages, discrimination was common as only the rich had access to the opportunities (Pham & Keenan, 2011). However, with concerted efforts, the sector has undergone many reforms (Reis et al., 2014). Nevertheless, some groups lack opportunities in accessing and continuing with education as elaborated in the literature (Pham & Keenan, 2011). The extensive literature on the topic seems deficient in terms of its coverage of gifted students. Many studies have focused on environmental and demographic issues that are related to the dropout problem. In particular, educational achievement gaps between races, ethnicity, and gender are some of the issues that are explored. According to Calero, Belen, and Robles (2011) the identification of gifted students and development of appropriate learning curriculum are required. For Colangelo and Wood (2015) addressing the counseling needs of gifted students would be helpful towards addressing the dropout question. For Foley-Nicpon and Assouline (2015), cultural sensitivity must be addressed.

Chapter 3 seeks to explain the methodology for exploring the lived experiences of former gifted urban dropouts. In chapter 3, I will provide, in detail, an outline of the steps planned to conduct the study. Included in this detailed outline I will provide the theoretical concepts used to support the design. In addition, I present issues related to the validity of the study. To conclude, I will review ethical procedures used to conduct this study.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

The purpose of this qualitative explanatory case study is to seek; how, from an ecological perspective do gifted urban high school dropouts identify as reasons for choosing to drop out of high school. Rural and urban high school dropouts have faced many factors, both positive and negative, that have led them to leaving school (Aud et al., 2011). Many of these factors are based on their own ecological experiences (Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013). As stated in chapter one what is known, from an educators' perspective is that gifted students drop out for many reasons (C. Mayes, Personal communication, October 6, 2016). The reasons identified by these professionals range from; boredom, lack of strong family support, and lack of respect to a negative community environment (I. Foster-May, Personal communication, October 6, 2016). The use of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems theory may illuminate unknown experiences as it pertains to the multiple systems of lived experiences of former gifted urban high school dropouts. This chapter will describe, in detail, the qualitative method used to assist in understanding their lived experiences. More specifically I will discuss the research design, as it relates to appropriateness. In this chapter I will provide a detailed explanation about the methods used to recruit participants for this doctoral study and what procedures will be used during data collection. Lastly, I will discuss all ethical procedures as it relates to my role as the researcher and the protection of all participants' rights.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

There are many qualitative approaches available for researchers to use when designing a study. For example, a researcher can employ ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenological research, or narrative research (Yilmaz, 2013).

There are various other methods of qualitative inquiry that are available for research studies. The following are a few examples of additional research design considered for this research study. Yilmaz (2013) described narrative research as a qualitative strategy in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives that is later retooled into a narrative chronology. There are various types of narrative research studies including, biographical study, autobiography, life history, and oral history. Grounded theory research as stated in Ralph, Birks, and Chapman (2015), is a qualitative strategy in which the investigator develops a broad, intellectual theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study.

The purpose of this type of study is to move beyond the descriptions of an individual's life experiences (Cronin, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013). There are numerous types of grounded theory available. Two of the most popular approaches are the systematic procedure and the constructivist approach. Neither of these approaches will provide the researcher with the lived experiences of the participants being studied. Lastly, another popular approach to qualitative research is ethnography. Ethnography is the qualitative strategy that focuses on an intact cultural group (Kisely & Kendall 2011). To be an ethnography study the study must be conducted in a natural setting over a sustained

period of time through observational data collection and interviews (Kisely & Kendall 2011).

Case Study

Qualitative multiple case study inquiry was the chosen research design to examine the lived experiences of former gifted urban high school dropouts. According to Valiee et al. (2014) qualitative multiple case study will allow the participants to provide a clear understanding of their lived experiences. Yilmaz (2013) and Lessard et al. (2009) suggested that through this process can it be revealed, through the participants lived experience, what it was like to be a former gifted urban high school dropout. Triangulation was used to validate these findings. Cronin (2014) posited that triangulating multiple data points that converge will make the findings of a study as robust as possible. The perspectives mentioned in chapter one created data points used to triangulate the data obtain during the one on one interviews. Studying multiple cases over a current time will allow the researcher to gather information on the effects of dropping out of school as a former gifted urban student. While all these research designs were considered for this study, explanatory case study was chosen due to its ability to allow the researcher to delve deep into the phenomenon that was studied.

Prior to choosing case study inquiry as the research design for this study, a variety of other qualitative inquiries were considered. These other methods would not have been as effective in providing an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. For example, the purpose of grounded theory is the development of a theory (Ralph, Birks, & Chapman, 2015). A grounded theory approach may have been

appropriate, if human ecology theory or other proposed theories cannot adequately

describe the participants lived experiences. Ethnographical study is a study of a group of

people whom share and interact within the same culture or system (Kisely & Kendall

2011). This type of study would only be able to identify the experience of specific group

of people limiting the depth of the study. Lastly, narrative or biological study focuses on

the lived experiences of an individual (Simmonds, Roux, & Avest, 2015). While this

type of study can provide an in-depth look at the lived experiences of an individual it is

for this reason this type of study was not used.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher it is extremely important to clarify my bias in the final study.

According to Sangster-Gormely (2013) it is highly necessary for the reader of the final

study to have a clear understanding of the researcher's position to this topic. I was

employed in a poor urban school district that has a dropout rate of 50%. My job function

was to address the socio and emotional well-being of my students for staying in school

and leading product lives. I have had first-hand experience of witnessing students drop

out of high school. I also grew up poor in the same urban environment where I was

formerly employed. I have experienced the feeling of marginalization, as well as other

inadequacies. I am fully aware of my life experiences and will contain them as necessary.

Methodology

Qualitative methodology was selected as the research method to study the topic.

According to Sangster-Gormely (2013) the purpose of qualitative research is to help gain

an understanding of a phenomenon that has baffled society for years. When it comes to

high school dropouts there are a great deal of studies that have provided numerous

variables to use as identifying measures for this substantial population (Suhyun et al.,

2007). Some examples of these identifying measures of urban dropouts are school

disengagement, student suspensions, emotional problems, absenteeism, and perception of

their teachers (Suhyun et al., 2007). These identifying measures were used in this

doctoral study. Researchers can compare the dropout rates of rural, suburban, and urban

students. This can be done by comparing students in suburban areas using a set of

identifying measures and repeating the comparison using rural and urban students.

Academic researchers can compare female versus male, as well as various age groups.

Researchers can also compare past and current dropouts using a variety of identifying

measurements previously mentioned. In the final study it is not yet known if gifted urban

high school dropouts have experienced the same factors that lead them to choosing to

drop out of high school.

Measures

The measure used for this research study will be semi-structured interviewing.

Open-ended questions will be used during the interview. This form of questioning

allowed the participant to tell his or her story using their own words. The purpose of this

research study was to identify what links, from an ecological theoretical framework, lead

former gifted urban high school students to the decision of dropping out of high school.

In this case, a gifted urban high school dropout is identified as person whom decided to

leave high school prior to graduating or completion. The identified persons could have

dropped out of school and returned later to earn their high school diploma or GED, as

well as a post-secondary degree. A pool of potential participants was developed using

the Walden Research Pool, email, social media, and word of mouth. What follows is the

broad research questions used to help elicit a better understanding of their lived

experiences. Listed in Appendix B are the specific questions that were used for the

interviews.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: Why do gifted urban high school dropouts decide to drop

out of high school?

Research Question 2: How do gifted urban high school dropouts, from an

ecological systems theory perspective, decide to drop out of high school?

Procedures

To recruit and inform participants, collect and analyze the data, as well as validate

all findings, a set of guidelines or procedures were followed. What follows are the

procedures that were used as a guide for the process. All participants were contacted via

the telephone, skype and email. Once a pool of participants were created an information

letter detailing the nature of the study was delivered to each participant via the United

States Postal Service, email or in-person. In this letter I requested an appointment with

the potential participant for an informative meeting to present the proposed study,

provide a copy of the information letter describing the study and address any questions or

concerns of the potential participant. Next, I requested all interested potential

participants contact me to schedule the interview. If there has been no contact made

within one week of the informative meeting a follow-up telephone call was made, as well

as a follow-up email sent to the potential participant. At the time of the interview each

participant was given a copy of the information letter outlining the proposed study. Each

participant signed the Consent Form or has provided a copy of the signed Consent Form

prior to the start of the interview. The interview consisted of asking the questions that are

listed on the Interview Protocol Form. A copy of the Interview Form is in Appendix A.

All videotapes and audiotapes were transcribed verbatim and analyzed according to the

steps outlined at the end of this chapter. Validation occurred by member check-in, which

happened after the data was completely analyzed. At this time the participants were able

to further validate that the results were a true depiction of their lived experience as a

former gifted urban high school dropout. In addition, the data collected was triangulated

against the information composed through personal communication with principals,

teachers, and superintendents. This process ensured the validity of all data collected.

Data Collection

Data was collected through a one on one interview. Initially the background of

the participant was the focus of each first interview. The primary intent of the first few

minutes of the interview was to build rapport with the participant, which assisted with

providing credibility and getting all necessary documents signed. In addition to the

aforementioned, the interview will assist in gathering all of the participants' information

about their life to the present. This will allow the researcher to put the participant's

experience into context. Interview questions focused on having the participants

reconstruct their family, school, friends, neighborhood and work experiences in phases,

which may yield some context of their current situation. The purpose of acquiring this

information was to provide the researcher with a much-needed insight into the multiple

environments the participants navigated in their early years. Also, this interview provided

an in-depth description of the nature of the study and the researchers' personal

experiences as a former dropout prevention officer in an urban school district.

Data Analysis Plan

Once all of the interviews were conducted and transcribed the data was organized

allowing the researcher to obtain a general understanding of what type of information the

data provided. Dedoose is the qualitative data collection software program used in the

analysis of data. This software program assisted in the coding and identifying themes.

The first step in analyzing the data was to read each transcript in its entirety (Ivey, 2012).

By reading each transcript completely it allowed the researcher to obtain a general sense

of the lived experiences of the participants (Blake, Robley, & Taylor, 2012).

After step one was completed the researcher began to highlight and listing

statements from the text that have explicit germaneness to the phenomenon studied. The

phenomenon researched was an attempt to extract various statements to fully understand

the factors, from an ecological perspective, that gifted urban high school dropouts

identified as the reasons they choose to drop out of high school. All statements

highlighted and listed are referred to as themes (Blake et al., 2012). The themes

delineated from the data were unlimited and will be listed separately. Blake, Robley, and

Taylor (2012) posited that it is important to use actual language of the participants when

recording the findings. This will allow for the researcher to maintain the thick rich

description, as well as accurately present the data and move to the next step (Blake et al.,

2012). The third step in understanding the former gifted urban high school dropout's experience was labeling the statements into themes. Ivey (2012) theorized that each statement extracted should have the potential to be coded as a theme in order to be used in the findings. The potential themes need to encompass an element of the lived experiences of the participants (Ivey, 2012). These themes are a representation of the participants' feelings, emotions, and actions in regard to how the participants experienced the phenomenon being studied.

Lastly, the data analysis process was concluded by creating individual, as well as group descriptions of the lived experience of the phenomenon. The purpose of this step was to create a narrative of what it means for each participant to be a former gifted urban high school dropout, from an individual and group aspect (Lessard et al., 2009; Valiee et al., 2014; Yilmaz, 2013). These narratives were validated through triangulation of the personal communication of principals, superintendents, and teachers.

Ethical Protection

All participants in this study were adult males and females that have volunteered to participate in this study and who were free to decide whether or not to participate. By participating in this study there was no known harm for the participants. If, at any time, a participant experiences any harm, or any difficulty associated with participating in this study, a referral or an agency local to the participate would have be made on their behalf. In order to protect the participants, each potential participant has completed both a consent form and a confidentiality form. All notes, transcripts, files, videotapes and

audiotapes are kept locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's home with only the researcher having access to the confidential material.

Validation of Findings

The findings of the proposed research was validated rather than verified, since the term verification has some quantitative overtones (Creswell, 2013; Sousa, 2014). According to Schou, Høstrup, Lyngsø, Larsen, and Poulsen (2012), validation of the findings allows for the integrity of qualitative inquiry to remain intact. In qualitative inquiry there are eight common strategies used to validate the findings of a researcher; which are prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer review or debriefing, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias, member checking, rich and thick descriptions, and external audits (Schou, Høstrup, Lyngsø, Larsen, and Poulsen, 2012; Sousa, 2014). All interviews were transcribed verbatim in order to provide the researcher with appropriate and expressive information. As the proposed researcher I employed the use of clarifying researcher bias, member checks and rich, thick descriptions as the strategies used to validate the findings of the proposed study of inquiry. These strategies were chosen due to their high cost effectiveness and popularity among qualitative researchers. Sousa (2014) noted member checking consists of presenting the findings and interpretations of the data collected and asking participants to provide their views of the credibility of those findings and interpretations. Based on the initial findings a set of questions were formulated to acquire the necessary information from the participants in regard to the credibility of the findings. Creating rich, thick descriptions was the last step in the validation process of the proposed study. According

to Creswell (2013) and Sangster-Gormely (2013) the purpose of rich, thick descriptions is transferability based on the details provided by the researcher of the proposed study. By creating detail descriptions, which were rich and thick, it allows a reader to find shared characteristics and possibly transfer these findings to other settings (Creswell, 2013; Simmonds et al., 2015).

Chapter 4: Findings

The objective of this qualitative study was to investigate how former gifted urban high school students choose to dropout and why do they choose to dropout. I sought to understanding the decision-making process of the individuals interviewed. This study further examined whether the demographic variables of the human ecology system theory: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, or chronosystem affect the choices of the participants. In this study two forms of analysis were used for this study; thematic and propositional analyses (Cronin, 2014). The objectives of these two forms of analyses allowed for the data to be analyzed by the researcher for exploring participant acuities and experiences (Valiee et al., 2014). These objectives were accomplished.

In this chapter information regarding the setting, how research participants were recruited, specific methods used for data collection, and the emergent themes from coding of the data analysis will be discussed here. Also, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability will be discussed in this chapter to present evidence of trustworthiness. Lastly, the details of the results and a summary of the findings, as they relate to the research questions will be supplied in this chapter.

Setting

A qualitative case study was selected for the purposes of this research using recorded telephone interview questions as a form of data collection. Initial approval to conduct the research study was obtained from the Walden University IRB on December 30, 2016 (#12-30-2016-0317762). Participants for this study were located by searching and contacting each state educational department for information on their dropout rates

and gifted programs. This proved to be daunting, as only a handful responded to my

request. Furthermore, I researched and contacted IQ societies, programs for gifted

children and young adults, as well as those programs specializing in high school

dropouts. I was able to place announcements on some of the program websites. Any

person that contacted this research regarding participating in the study were officially

emailed the "Letter to Participant" (Appendix A) and the "Consent Form" (Appendix C).

After receiving their signed consents, via email or postal services, a telephone interview

Table 1.

Participant Demographics

	Shaun	Kelli	Jason	Sonya
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female
Age	44	44	38	77
Race/Ethnicity	African-American	Haitian/Cuban/Syrian	Filipino	Caucasian
Language Spoken	English	Haitian Creole/Spanish/English	English	English
At-Risk Youth	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Dropped Out	9th	10th	9th	12th
Earned G.E.D./HS Diploma	G.E.D.	G.E.D.	G.E.D.	HS Diploma
College Education Attained	Master's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	None	Some College
Current Employment Level	Full Time	Full Time	Full Time	Retired

Employment Industry	K-12th Grade	University	Computer Technology	Secretarial Services
Military Services	Navy Reserves	None	None	None

was scheduled and conducted while being recorded.

Demographics

The demographic profiles of the participants are illustrated in Table 1. The characteristics listed on the table illustrate the ways in which the participants met the selection criteria: All participants dropped out of high school, each participant is over 18 years old, each participant resided in an urban area at the time they dropped out of high school. For this study it was not a requirement for the participants to have earned their high school diploma or G.E.D. Having earned an associate, bachelors, or master's degree did not preclude the participants from participating in this study.

Shaun

Shaun is a 43-year-old African-American man from the south. He left home at the age of 14, shortly after dropping out of high school. During the early years on his own, he ran into legal trouble that resulted in having a felony record. What will be divulged later in greater detail is that his career ambitions were molded by his life experiences, in and out of high school. Shaun is a master's at arms in the Navy Reserves with a Level 1 clearance. This clearance is not easily obtained and those with a felony are usually precluded from obtaining this clearance. He holds a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies. He stated, "Is basically elementary education with a concentration in reading" and a master's in education. He is now in school earning a second master's degree and gearing up for a Ph.D. program. Shaun works as an

educational diagnostician, where he administers cognitive and achievement batteries to student with the goal of making educational determinations to address the student needs. This participant considers himself a walking oxymoron, because of his career choice and his high school career.

Kelli

Kelli dropped out of high school at the age of 15. She was in the 10th grade at the time. Kelli describes her upbringing as constant chaos. She was born and raised in a major city on the east coast and constantly moved around, with and without her mother. Both of her parents are immigrants, so she is part of the first generation of family members to be born in the U.S. She identifies as Haitian/Cuban/Syrian. This 44-year-old mother of three had goals of becoming a corporate lawyer and loved going to school, when she was able to attend. She soon dropped out and later became pregnant at the age of 16. Later, Kelli earned a bachelor's degree in history and has no plans on returning to the classroom. Currently, she works at a major university on the east coast in the undergraduate/graduate admissions department.

Jason

This 37-year-old Filipino participant is one of two participants who belongs to an IQ Society. Although not truly active he peruses the websites and blogs for pure entertainment. Jason grew up in one of the poorest neighborhoods on the West Coast. At the age of 14, he dropped out of high school. He talks about how everyone would tell him he very intelligent and smart, but not living up to his potential. Like, Shaun he grew up in a single parent household without the perceived benefit of a father or positive male

role model as a guide. Similar to Shaun, Jason turned to the streets and found himself in legal trouble. Due to his legal trouble Jason was forced to obtain his G.E.D. as a condition of his probation, which he did. Jason describes a thirst for knowledge but does not aspire to attend a formal educational setting. His desire to learn landed him a position with a Fortune 500 company as a computer software engineer. His experience in this field will be detailed later in this chapter.

Sonya

While each of the participants of this study are unique in their own way, Sonya, maybe the biggest surprise of them all. This participant is 77 years-old Caucasian woman, whom grew up in a tough Midwest city. At the age of 17 she dropped out of high school to pursue an academic career at Stanford University in Berlin, Germany. Sonya describes how during her Junior year of high school she took correspondence courses to graduate early but fell short due to not having the necessary physical education credits to graduate. As, I listen to her speak I can hear the anger in her voice, as she refers to her principal as a "…complete ass." She and I laugh for a while and after we compose ourselves, Sonya begins to talk about disappointed she felt and decided to drop out. However, this was not the only reason she dropped out of high school. What will be revealed later in this chapter are the additional reasons as to why she dropped out.

<div align="center">

Data Collection

</div>

To obtain data for this research study a semi structured interview was conducted with the participants. The researcher selected participants for this study through the use of purposive-volunteer sampling strategies via Facebook, Twitter postings and

multimedia texting. Announcements were posted on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and

LinkedIn. In addition to the aforementioned mainstream social media sites

announcements were placed on various gifted and high intellect websites and blogs. For,

example "Hoagie" and MENSA were a couple of the sites used to announce this study,

whose population are documented persons with a high IQ. This announcement was sent,

via email, to over 100 urban school districts and 30 states with gifted and talented

departments, as well as, 10 programs that cater to students that dropout of school. By

posting the recruitment materials online and through multi-media texting, I was able to

initially randomly acquire the necessary number of participants for this study.

Data Analysis and Coding

Over the course of the interview process there were 7 participants scheduled to

participate in this study. While conducting interviews, 2 participants decided not to

participate at all and 1 decided to drop out of the study. The remaining participants

consisted of 2 women and 2 men. All the participants identified as gifted students whom

dropped out of an urban high school. The racial makeup of group consisted of 1 African-

American, 1 Caucasian, 1 Haitian-American, and 1 Filipino, with them ranging in ages

40-77 (*Figure 1*).

After completing the interviews, I used the following data analysis strategy. First,

I transcribed each individual telephone interview into a word document to combine with

the recorded interview data. Once, all interviews were transcribed, I used the qualitative

analysis program Dedoose to begin coding the data collected. According to Saldana (as

cited in Miles et. al., 2014) there are two major stages of coding, First Cycle and Second

Cycle. Each of these stages can employ a variety of methods. With this understanding of

cycle coding, I carefully perused through the interview syntax to obtain analogous

keywords and phrases used by the interviewees. This process allowed the researcher to

develop *figure 1 Word Cloud*, which formed a basis for a deeper coding process.   These

keywords and phrases were further analyzed and used to develop the codes for the

interviews. As, I moved through the process of coding, patterns and themes began to
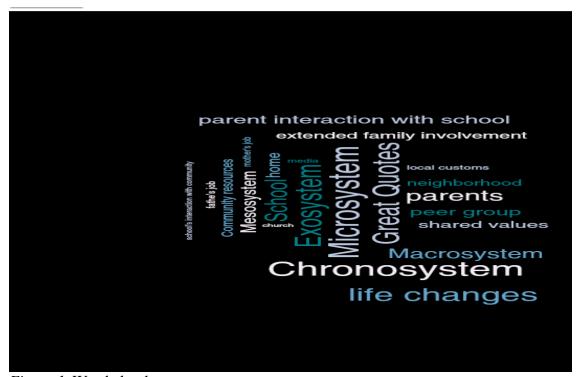
emerge.

Figure 1. Word cloud.

First cycle coding. For this research I used the method of "In Vivo" coding at the

First Cycle stage of coding. In Vivo coding uses the words of the individual participant

as codes (Miles et al., 2014). This method helps secure the rich thick descriptions the

researcher is attempting to identify within the data. The key words found in this data set

were family, parents (mother and father), peer group (friends), community, school, culture and neighborhood. Many of these key words found will be correlated to the conceptual framework used for this research.

This research used Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as the conceptual framework, as a mean to study a group of former gifted urban high school dropouts. This theory purposes five system types that are present during the shaping of the psychological development of adolescents (Darling, 2007; Hong & Eamon, 2012). Each of the five systems are made of roles, norms, and rules that determine the developmental outcomes of the individual and groups centered in the ecological systems (Darling, 2007; Hong & Eamon, 2012).

Second Cycle Coding. At this stage the primary goal is take the codes already developed and recode them to categorized and narrow the array of codes developed during the first cycle (Saldana, 2015). Many of the same methods used during first cycle coding will be used in second cycle coding (Miles et al., 2014). This process is, seemingly, a reorganization of your first set of codes. For clarity imagine, as the researcher, you have initially created 100 different uncategorized codes. Second cycle coding will assist in creating categories for the codes. During this stage the data is being analyzed for emerging patterns and/or themes (Miles et al., 2014).

Pattern Coding. According to Saldana (2015) pattern coding is the process of searching for reoccurring themes in the data. These themes can represent relationships, communities, schools, and various environments. Stenner theorized (as cited in Saldana, 2015) that, "At a basic level, pattern concerns the relation between unity and multiplicity.

A pattern suggests a multiplicity of elements gathered into the unity of a particular arrangement" (Stenner, 2014, p. 136). As qualitative researchers, we seek patterns as somewhat stable indicators of humans' ways of living and working to render the world "more comprehensible, predictable and tractable" (p. 143). They become more trustworthy evidence for our findings since patterns demonstrate habits, salience, and importance in people's daily lives. They help confirm our descriptions of people's "five Rs": routines, rituals, rules, roles, and relationships. Discerning these trends is a way to solidify our observations into concrete instances of meaning. What follows are the findings resulting from first, second, and pattern coding used during data analysis.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the findings of this study will be validated rather verified (Creswell, 2013; Sousa, 2014). Schou, Høstrup, Lyngsø, Larsen, and Poulsen (2012) posit the validation of the findings allows for the integrity of qualitative inquiry to remain intact. The strategies used to validate the findings of a researcher; which are prolonged engagement and persistent observation triangulation, peer review or debriefing, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias, member checking, rich and thick descriptions, and external audits (Schou, Høstrup, Lyngsø, Larsen, & Poulsen, 2012). In addition, Creswell (2013) theorized that credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability can be used to measure trustworthiness.

To show heightened credibility of the findings I implemented the strategies presented in Chapter 3. Clarifying researcher bias, member checking and rich, thick descriptions. For this study the researcher used clarifying researcher bias, member

checking and rich, thick descriptions to validate the findings; therefore, ensuring

evidence of trustworthiness. Member checking was accomplished by providing each

participant with a paper copy of the interview transcripts for the purpose of allowing the

participant to verify their responses. Sousa (2014) noted this strategy will allow the

participants of a study to provide their views of the credibility of those findings, as well

as the interpretations. By having the participants verify their responses ensure the

researcher use of the rich and thick descriptions are validated.

Results

In this section the results from the interviews will be presented in the order they

were asked of the participants. The two central research questions and the theoretical

framework were used to formulate the interview questions. This study is designed to be

guided by to main research questions. Table 2 displays the disposition of each research

question. These two questions will formulate the discussion in this section. The

discussion in this section will be detailed using themes and correlations, which will be

supported by direct quotes taken from the participants. Using direct quotes will provide

thick rich descriptions and details, as well as validation. Initially the data collected from

the participants did correlate with the codes developed during first cycling coding.

However, additional codes did formulate during second cycling coding, which were used

to support the connection between the two central research questions, the theoretical

framework, and the interview questions. The data, which was coded, developed into

themes and formed a relationship between the them and the theoretical framework.

These relationships will be presented in Chapter 5.

Table 2.

Reasons for Retaining Research Questions

Research Questions	Disposition and Reasons
RQ1: Why do gifted urban high school dropouts decide to drop out of high school?	Retained. Each participant responded to questions that formulate an analysis to potentially answer this question.
RQ2: How do gifted urban high school dropouts, from an ecological systems theory perspective, decide to drop out of high school?	Retained. Each participant responded to questions that formulate an analysis to potentially answer this question.

Microsystem

As mentioned early, this is the first of the five ecological systems identified by

Bronfenbrenners' theory (Darling, 2007; Hong & Eamon, 2012). This system consists of

the interpersonal interactions in an individual's life (Feinstein, Driving-Hawk, &

Baartman, 2009). According to Hong, Woodford, Long and Renn (2016) the primary

concern of the microsystem are the perceived social support from friends. These are the

day to day interactions with family, friends, community, school, and culture. What

follows are the rich thick descriptions as they pertain to the five ecological systems and

the subheadings established by the word cloud.

Family. Family, as depicted by societal norms, usually comprise of parents and

the children they are rearing (Powell, 2017). This definition has evolved of the years, as

the nuclear family is forever changing. In this study each of the four participants were

raised in a single parent home. The two male participants, Jason and Shaun, were raised

by their mothers' only and neither participants father was involved in their lives. While the two female participants, Kelli and Sonya fathers were involved in their rearing to some extent. In the case of Sonya her parents divorced when she was 12 years old, while Kelli's parents never divorced; however, they separated at a very period in her life. Kelli, Shaun, and Sonya all had older and younger siblings, all, whom they were very close with growing up. The data shows the nuclear family to be strong, but not without some specific personal issues. These issues will reveal themselves in the parents' subheading.

Parents. What was found in the data is 3 out of 4 of the participants were raised completely single parent homes lead by the mothers. While one participant lived with both parents until the age of 12, when her parents divorced. In analyzing the data associated with women and their parents it was revealed that all 100% of the women participants had a strained relationship with their mother and that their mothers were directly responsible for their dropping out. While, the two male participants seemingly had a good relationship with their mothers. However, unlike their female counterparts, they did not have any type of relationship with their fathers before the age of 18. Jason did not know his father at all, nor does he know that side of his family. According to Shaun, "…I knew of my father after his death, through family members on his side. He goes on to state, his father was an Inman at a Mosque. This position is considered a highly respected position.

Peer Group. For this study a peer group can be considered both a social and a primary group of people who have similar interests, age, background, or social status (Ellis, Dumas, Mahdy & Wolfe, 2012). Within in these groups the individuals tend to

influence the person's beliefs and behaviors (Ellis et al., 2012).   In this study the participants identified as individuals with friends. Each participant talked about being their own person and not being influenced by their friends, whom they really considered associates. The participants spoke about making life altering decisions without consulting with their associates/friends. Each participants actions and statements differ from the definition of a peer group.

       Community. Loosely defined, community can be described as the geographical area in which a person lives. In addition to the geographical location people, places and things make up the community. All of the participants describe their community as low to middle income with not much to do. Each participant speaks about the lack of activities for children not interested in athletics or activities for children interested in learning outside of school hours. Shawn saw his community as those that looked like him were the low-income families. While those that did not look like him were the middle-income families. He does believe, regardless of the labels that they all were experiencing some form of poverty. Kelli's view of community does differ from the other participant from an exposure point of view. Growing up as a Haitian-American her sense of community was centered around her family, which she had at an early age while living with her Aunt. She talks about knowing other children and families in the area but was not allowed to go out and play with them. Kelli remembers most of her interaction with her community centered around attend church. According to Jason his community became smaller when he dropped out of school. While in school his community was broad and included vast array of people from different backgrounds. Once he dropped

out of school and moved out on his own that vast array of people became much more concentrated. It is at this time he became fully engulfed with the negative aspects of is community. For example, he was drinking, selling drugs, and robbing people. Sonya describes her community a little different from the other participants. She saw her community as diverse and socially structured. Sonya believed the social structure was based on respect and not race, religion, ethnicity nor socio-economic status.

School. While the participant attended schools in various parts of urban areas in the United states, they each talked about the lack of school support. Each participant describes feeling isolated at times. Shawn cannot remember visiting a guidance counselor to strategize about his future. While Kelli talks about having feelings of disconnect. She states, not having much in common with her peers and those she did hang around were nothing but trouble. Then, there is Jason, who had a simple emphatic one-word response, which was NO. Jason believed his strongest social support was his first long-term relationship.

Mesosystem

The second stage of the human ecological system is that of the mesosystem (Hong et al., 2016). This system is focused on the various interrelationships that surround the individual; for example, the relationship of an individual's parents and their friends or with a teacher (Hong & Eamon, 2012). At this level researchers examine the various interpersonal relationships of the participants (Cecchet & Thoburn, 2014). The following data attempts to describe the interpersonal relationships of the participants.

Interrelationships. At first glance this researcher viewed the data obtained as showing no or minimum interrelationships; however, after greater analysis relationships come in different forms. These interrelationships can be viewed as positive or negative, cordial or adversarial. The data obtained shows that each participant parents did not have any type of positive relationship with their teachers. The interrelationship described by the participants was that of addressing negative behaviors versus attending positive events being held at the school. None of the parents of the participants attended "Back to School Nights" or other things of that nature. This could be said for the interrelationship with their children's peers.

While having a very minimal relationship with their children's peers. This is true for all of the participants except Kelli. Kelli reports that her mom allowed the "bad" neighborhood kids to hang at their house. During our interview Kelli acknowledges that her mother did not like the kids she was hanging with and believed they were trouble but did nothing to stop the interaction. Jason's story is like that of Kelli's. Each were hanging around the "wrong" crowd, which caused them to get into some trouble. Jason talks about moving out at 15 yrs. old and getting his own place. He admits to participating in illegal activity to support himself and his girlfriend.

Exosystem

The exosystem refers to the numerous formal and informal social structures that can have an influence on an individual, but does not contain the individual in that structure, although these structures can have a direct affect (Hong & Eamon, 2012). Hong et al (2016), as well as, Hong and Eamon (2012) posit that, in this system the

formal and informal social structures directly influence the microsystem, not the individual. The following describes the indirect forces of the exosystem.

Indirect forces. For the participants in this study the indirect forces are numerous. These indirect forces stem from the lack of family-school, school-community, family-community types of relationships. However, the lack of these relationships are not evident with all of the participants. The data does show that indirect forces do play a major role in the decision-making of these participants. For example, while Shawn and his family had strong ties in the community, he did not know his father nor his fathers' side of the family until he passed away. At this time Shawn was an adult. Shawn states, he learned that is father was an Inman in the Nation of Islam, established several Mosque in the south and was extremely intelligent with a photographic memory. This is very different than Kelli. Her interview revealed a sense of loneliness, once her home life became unstable. As a child of immigrants, the family-community relationship was important; however, the community was that of other Haitian immigrants her parents knew prior to migrating to the United States. Kelli spoke of how her mother would rather work than volunteer at her school. She states the order of importance for her mother was her job, her boyfriends, putting on fronts and then her children. This is the same for Jason and Sonya. Jason's story is very similar to Shawn's, while Sonya's is very similar to Kelli's. Sonya like Kelli had both parents involved her life, but neither of them had any connection to family-school relationship. She states her mother was very unstable emotionally and her father was a traveling salesman that lived in a different part

of the state. Jason's mother new very little English; therefore, she stayed away from the school.

Macrosystem

Studying the macrosystem will focus on the effects the individuals' cultural values, customs, and societal laws have on decision-making when it comes to their education (Hong & Eamon, 2012; Cecchet & Thoburn,2014). Cecchet and Thoburn (2014) theorize that it is at this level that influences of individuals shape decision-making. According to Hong et al. (2016) this can possibly reflect the ideas of a much larger environment. An example of this would be the availability of an educational resource center for at-risk-youth.

Ideological and organizational patterns. Here the data shows a distinct difference between male and female acceptance of cultural values and societal laws. Shawn, an African-American male and Jason, a Filipino-American male do not remember any since of cultural values being instilled them while growing up. At the same-time they adapted to the societal laws of the streets. While Kelli, a Haitian-American female and Sonya, a Caucasian-American remember having cultural values pounded into them daily. They also, mentioned how they were giving an understanding of societal laws and how they may change dependent upon community make-up.

Chronosystem

Lastly, the chronosystem will afford the researcher the opportunity to gain a socio-historical perspective of the participants' life (Cecchet & Thoburn, 2014). It is here the researcher

Life changes. The data shows that despite dropping out of high school each participant has achieved success, according to societal norms. For example, Shawn has a master's degree and works with special needs children in an urban school district. Jason works as a software engineer at Microsoft. He describes most of his colleagues as Ivy league educated, which makes him somewhat of an outsider. Sonya dropped out of high school to enroll early into Stanford. Although she did not graduate from Stanford or another college, she went on to own a very successful secretarial services business. Then there is Kelli, despite having two children by the age of 18, she went on to earn her college degree and works at a state university on the east coast. In addition, Kelli has only had one job for the past 20 years, which speaks to her desire for stability in contrast to her upbringing.

<center>**Summary of Findings**</center>

Through this study, the researcher sought to identify the how and why former gifted urban high school students decide to dropout. The interview questions were derived from Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems theory that were closely related to the two central research questions. A case study design was selected for this study, because it allowed the researcher to apply the selected theory to the phenomenon of former gifted urban high school students dropping out. After collecting and coding the data obtain from participants, it was discovered that the microsystem and mesosystem were the two main systems that influenced the decisions to drop out of school. In addition, the macrosystem played a major role in their decisions to dropout, while the exosystem and chronosystem seemed existential in nature.

In Chapter 5, I will relate the findings of this study to the research literature. By relating the findings to the research literature, I will be able to place the context of what was learned from exploring this phenomenon into the stream of knowledge. Next, I will discuss the limitations of this study and possible implications for policy makers and practitioners. Following the discussion on limitations and implications, I will make recommendations for further research. This chapter will conclude with the possibilities for positive social change, regarding former gifted urban high school dropouts.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This study offers an in-depth view into the lived experiences and understanding of former gifted urban high school dropouts. Emerging from a theoretical framework based in, Urie Bronnenfedder's human ecology theory (Bronnenfedder, 1997), two research questions were used to guide the study: (a) Why do gifted urban high school dropouts decide to drop out of high school?; and (b) How do gifted urban high school dropouts, from an ecological systems theory perspective, decide to drop out of high school? A qualitative case study analysis was conducted using a conceptual framework.

As described in Chapter 4, the data indicates that these participants faced similar peer, familial, school, and community issues, that had both negative and positive effects on their individual life's. In this chapter I will focus on interpreting the findings using the themes and correlational patterns discussed in chapter 4. Following the interpretation of findings, I will examine the limitations of the study, I will present recommendations for action and future research. Lastly, I will discuss some implications for positive social change.

Interpretations of the Findings

The results of this study confirmed many of those in the literature regarding why and how high school students choose to dropout, from a microsystems perspective. In addition, this study has confirmed why there is a lack of data associated with the remaining human ecology theory subsystems. These revelations will be discussed later in this chapter. As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this study, and Span and Rivers (2012) theorized boredom, lack of parental and guardian engagement, and a variety of

psychosocial factors contribute to why and how high school students choose to dropout. Some of the psychosocial factors are, but not limited to motivation and personality (Span & Rivers, 2012). This research provided an understanding as to why and how former gifted urban high school students choose to dropout. The findings were interpreted using its two questions as a framework. All themes and aspects of this study were intertwined.

Research Question 1

Why do gifted urban high school dropouts decide to drop out of high school? Four major themes emerged from the exploration of this overarching research question: (a) family discord, (b) school not interesting, (c) no role model, and (d) minimum family participation. Themes 1 and 2 are gender specific, while themes 3 and 4 encompasses all the participants.

Theme 1 – family discord. All the participants seem to have family issues during this stage of their lives. Neither of the male participants has their fathers in their lives, while each female participant had extremely poor relationships with their respective mothers. The fact that both female participants had great relationships with their fathers also stood out. Sonya remembers her reasons for dropping out:

> Well, I'll tell you I planned to get out from under my mother at the earliest possible opportunity…she wasn't really a healthy, mentally healthy person ever. We were just at odds the entire time I was a teenager and somewhat before that…she didn't have a good word to say about me and I resisted. And, uh with that in mind, I wanted to go to college early…well, I actually started doing independent study…I really liked languages, so I did some French and Spanish

independent study with my teachers' cooperation of course…so, I got some extra

credit which would have been enough for me to graduate, except I didn't have the

extra year of PE (physical education) credit and the principal was an ass and

wouldn't let me graduate without that…my English teacher/counselor stuck her

neck out a mile and wrote letters for me…I was accepted to both Stanford and the

University of Chicago, they were the only two I applied to…well, if I didn't do

that I would have gone to live with my father, who had been working in Japan…I

could wait to get out from under my mothers' thumb.

Kelli had a similar situation in her home. She recalls her life experience as follows:

After high school I wanted to move far away from my dysfunctional family and

go to law school. Didn't know how but that's what I wanted. I obviously did not

graduate. Had a child at 17 and another at 18 and there went my dreams. My

mother didn't believe in my education. She had children that needed to be cared

for, so my education took a back seat. I had to get them to the babysitter before I

went to school. I was the sitter every time I quit. I had to cook clean and care for

my siblings. Do homework with the 1 in school wash clothes give them baths put

them to sleep start all over the next day…at 15 I left and haven't lived with her

since. We didn't get along for many years.

Also, what emerged from this first theme is that both male participants did not have their

fathers involved in their lives. This will be explored later Chapter 5.

Theme 2 – school not interesting. Both female participants loved school and had

ambitions of attending college once they graduated; however, for Shaun and Jason,

school was more of a chore, something they had to do. Jason and Shaun each possess a unique perspective on their school experience and how it shaped the decision to drop out. Jason talks about his school experience:

>…I didn't spend a lot of time in high school, so when I dropped out…I essentially just stop at (umm) and I wasn't sure how I was (eeh) going to get into the workforce. So, I sold a lot of weed to pay rent and stuff. I was 14 years old when I dropped out of high school. I dropped out in the 9th grade. I dropped out for about 3 yrs. and went back to get a high school equivalency diploma… I had gotten arrested and as part of my probation I had to go to school and they had given us the opportunity like, hey you can take this test and you don't have to go to school. So, I just did that.

Shaun viewed school as a chore, something he was forced to do. What stood out about Shaun's lived experience was his take on school, which he describes as follows:

>The two biggest reasons why I decided to drop out…the first one being I didn't see myself in education there was no... nothing about me. I wasn't learning about myself, my culture, that really had...that was the biggest impact. The second part was I didn't see myself gaining any marketable skills while I was there. Yeah, I could learn and talk about Columbus, but that wasn't going to earn me any money or that wasn't a skill I could go build a house with or anything. I was sitting in a classroom not learning any skills that were marketable and then, I was learning about everybody else that didn't look like me. Those two things were the biggest reasons why I left school. Well...ummm...I think I started bringing it up. Now

those feelings, those two feelings of not seeing myself and not learning...not

gaining any marketable skills they were always there, but I couldn't quite

verbalize them at the time. But it was like a nagging thing that was always there.

But it was aahh...we were assigned in 9th grade to read Huckleberry Finn and in

the book, it was supposed to be written in the vernacular of the time and the slave

character "Jim", I couldn't understand what he was saying and the way that it was

written, and I was an avid reader. So, I was like why I can't understand what he is

saying, but I could understand what Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer I could

understand what they were saying easily. So, I confronted the English teacher

and said, why do they have the black slave or former slave-whatever "Jim"...Why

is his part written like that and their part isn't written like that? Her justification

was, that's just the way they, they meaning the black people talked back then. I

said, well the problem I have with that is that these black people learned how to

speak English from those white people and those country white boys never went

to school, so they weren't formerly educated either. So, why is their speech

written so much better than that of the black slave that they spoke to all the time,

so they had to speak similar. And, she couldn't answer the question. Just read the

book is what she said, it was that authoritative - READ THE BOOK. And I said

if you can't answer my question I'm not reading this damn thing and I threw the

book at her and I walked out of school and I didn't turn back.

Shaun goes on to say his mother was not too happy with this decision and he moved out

at the age of 14, just like Jason did.

Theme 3 – no role model. When asked about who their role models were, none of the participate had one. While none of the participants could go into great detail in regard to the lack of having a role model. Each participant answered with an emphatic response. For example, when Kelli was asked, "Who was your role model while you were in school? She responded to the question as follows

"...I never had a role model", pushed further she responded with an emphatic, "Nope no one!"

While Jason remembers the idea of having a role model this way:

I didn't have any role models as far as I can remember. I mean, there were (aaagh)…I was kind of a delinquent, so I mean rappers (sounding surprised). there weren't very much in terms of role models and heroes to look up to. I was more about doing what every I wanted to do. I was kind of a jerk.

However, Sonya response seemed unsure as it relates to having a role model:

I'm not sure I had one, there was my English teacher/counselor I mentioned Mrs. D. not that I wanted to be a teacher, she was my role model as far as doing things on your own…she was single and I (inaudible), but I respected her a lot, so she was the one I turned to for help.

Now, Shaun seemed the most confident of all participants when responding to this question:

Wow, I didn't have any. I didn't have any role models. There was no one that I looked at in the educational sense to emulate at all. And, that really was a part of

the problem that's one of things that bothered me the most. In school, I never saw

myself in the curricula.

Besides school did you have any role models outside of school?

Responding with a (Small chuckle) ...I mean...hmmm, not necessarily. I wasn't

one to choose sports figures as a role model. I was pretty good at a lot of sports,

but I wasn't varsity type of material I believe you know. But I didn't really respect

a lot of sports figures to be my role model I wasn't built like them. And

educationally, not really, I knew that there were some smart people in a lot of

different places, not necessarily any role models that I can think of.

This theme possibly gives credence to the positive impact having a role model can have

and assist with preventing individuals from dropping out of high school.

Theme 4 – minimum family participation. Many scholars and researchers posit

that family participation in the educational process of a child can positive affects (Apostu,

2017). For each of these participants family participation was either nonexistent,

minimum, or superficial. Each participant describes their lived experiences with family

participation as follows:

Sonya stated, ell…umm…I was always an A student and they sort of took it for

granted… not much, I mean I wasn't involved in anything, like a performance for

them to come see…certainly not an athlete, the first time I ever gotten a C was in

the 7th grade… I was left to my own devices…(inaudible)…yeah, you know…my

parents divorced when I was 12. Kelli stated, None. they wasted tons of money

paying for a Catholic school elementary education. They asked my mom to skip

me 2 grade levels a few times she said no. I was a high honor student at my

school. Even though I missed a lot of school they wanted to test me to skip me she

said no. Eventually I became bored and resentful. My brother are my brothers not

my children. felt I slaved to care for children that weren't mine that I had no

authority to discipline couldn't say much about anything they did my mom would

be angry when she got in. I had no freedom no social life. She worked sometimes

19 -20 hrs. days. Shaun stated, Well, I pretty much go to school. Telling us to go

to school and get good grades. And...um, if the grades didn't look good having

some type of consequence. Whether that be a long stern talking too or more, but

stressing she wanted us to do well in school. Lastly, Jason remembers his

mothers' involvement in his academic career as "...was minimum, and I would

say that was partly my responsibility, because earlier on I learned how to sign her

signature. Any time there was something that tended to want to bring parents into

the school I would just sign it and say she was too busy or something like that…I

wasn't really interested in participating in any of that."

These participants were seemingly left to fend for themselves, when it came to their

educational process. The level of participation varied among the parents in this group of

participants. From superficial to hands off the level of participation was not indicative of

what may have been needed to ensure that their individual children graduated from high

school.

Research Question 2

How do gifted urban high school dropouts, from an ecological systems theory perspective, decide to drop out of high school? In answering this question themes 1 and 4 provide the best insight. While themes 2 and 3 provided insight, as well, themes 1 and 4 provide the greatest detail, regarding the ecological systems theory perspective. These two themes

Theme 1 – family discord. The microsystem of the ecological systems theory is shaped by the activities and interactions in the child's immediate surroundings: parents, school, friends, etc. (Fehler-Cabral & Campbell, 2013). Each participant had some type of family discord, whether it was caused by the relationships in the home or the lack of relationships outside the home. For example, Jason and Shaun did not have a male role model in their lives and did not feel as though they fit in at school. This differs from the experience of Kelli and Sonya, whom had both of their parents involved in their lives; however, this did not prevent dysfunction and chaos. Kelli and Sonya could not wait to get away from their mothers, but neither of them spoke about going to live with their fathers permanently. Each spoke about living on their own, once they moved out.

Theme 4 – minimum family participation. Here the minimum family participation is directly tied to the mesosystem. The mesosystem of the ecological systems theory is area were relationships among the entities involved in the child's microsystem (Ahlin & Lobo-Antues, 2015). The lack of meaningful interaction by the parents with the school of their children may have played a direct role in the decision of the participants to drop out. Table 3 shows the commonalities of these individuals reveal

how much of a direct and indirect influence parents, peers, and school can have on the

lives of children.

Table 3

Alignment of research questions, themes, and correlational patterns

Research Questions	Themes, Aspects, and Correlational Patterns
RQ1: Why do former gifted urban high school dropouts decide to drop out of high school:	Theme 1 – Family discord Aspects: • Students have poor relationship with parents • There is always chaos in the family Theme 3 – No role model Aspects: • Students did not look up to anyone • Students did not see their teachers as role models Correlational Pattern: Research shows successful gifted students had role models in place.
RQ2: How do former gifted urban high school dropouts, from an ecological systems theory perspective, decide to drop out of high school?	Theme 4 – Minimum family participation Aspects: • Parents took the students abilities for granted • Parents did not believe in education Correlational Pattern: Research shows successful gifted students have significant family participation in their educational process.

Limitation of the Study

As stated in Chapter 4 initial approval to conduct the research study was obtained

from the Walden University IRB on December 30, 2016 (#12-30-2016-0317762). After

gaining approval from the Walden University IRB preparations were made to begin the

recruitment process, which will be discussed in the next section in detail. However, this

population proved too difficult to locate and I determined that changes needed to be made

to my criteria. After 18 months of recruiting I requested an extension, as well as a

modification to my criteria; which were granted on January 8, 2018 (#12-30-2016-

0317762).

This research project is a case study analysis research design and with this type of

design there are several limitations that need to be considered. As a qualitative study that

is relying strictly on data derived from interviews the small sample size and purposive

sampling method are a limitation. A second limitation of this study is the potential lack

of understanding on the part of the participants. In addition, the research instrument and

potential for bias are also potential limitations of the study.

The small sample size and purposive sampling method together placed

tremendous limitations on this study. These two limitations could have a negative impact

on the credibility and transferability of the study. Only having four participants, all

spread across the United States, limits the researchers' ability to find local or national

patterns for this phenomenon. In addition, the interview method, via telephone, proved

limiting as well. Conducting an interview via phone did not allow for this researcher to

observe body language during question, which may have assisted in explaining questions

or understanding participant responses more thoroughly. As a former dropout prevention

officer in an urban school district it was important for this researcher to recognize his

own bias and not allow them to form themes or patterns not actually in the research data.

To eliminate any potential for bias this researcher adopted the stance of neutrality, as theorized by Patton (2002). The purpose of neutrality is to ensure that the researcher does not attempt to prove a particular theory or attempts to manipulate the data acquired to prove or support a predetermined position (Patton, 2002).

Lack of Data

The exo, meso, macro, and chrono systems of this study went unanswered, although the participants were asked direct, open-ended questions associated with these subsystems, which presented itself as an unintended limitation of this study. There are several reasons that may account for this lack of data. At risk youth, adolescent egocentrism, epistemic reasoning are a few realities associated with this lack of data (Abbate, Boca & Gendolla, 2016; Apostu, 2017). The focus of this study was to collect data from former gifted urban high school dropouts using the human ecology theory as the theoretical framework. While the participants were asked open-ended questions in an attempt to answer the research questions mentioned in chapters one and three with the hope that their responses would develop into themes for each of the subsystems, not just the microsystem. Based on the analysis of the data collected it appears that the lack of findings, as they would relate to the remaining four subsystems, may be the results of what is commonly known adolescent and/or adult egocentrism. What follows is a discussion addressing the perceived lack of data in relation to the four previously mentioned subsystems.

Egocentrism

Egocentrism is a term first introduced and defined by Jean Piaget in the mid-1920s', which was later interpreted extended by Eklind (Marin & Sokol, 2011). Piaget (1966) defines egocentrism as the inability of one to differentiate self from nonself. The research revealed additional definitions and interpretations of egocentrism. Galanaki (2012) posits "egocentrism is a differentiation failure between the subjective and the objective, a negative by-product of any emergent cognitive systems" (p. 457). While the concept of adolescent egocentrism began to draw the attention of researchers and psychologist in the late mid to late 1970s' (Cohn et al., 1988). It is here that this researcher sought an understanding, as to why the responses provided by the participants of this study were as such.

Adolescent Egocentrism

Research by Enright, Lapsley, and Shukla defined adolescent egocentrism as one being self-centered and only concerned with addressing their own needs (Krcmar, van der Meer, & Cingel, 2015). At the same time the authors theorized that adolescent egocentrism is made up of two distinct concepts; imaginary audience and personal fable ideation. While Rai, Mitchell, Kadar, and Mackenzie (2014) posited the additional concepts of; Illusion of transparency, simulation theory of mind, audience ideation and personal fable. Next, this researcher will take a look at these concepts and how they affect an adolescent's inability to think outside of their microsystem.

Concepts of Adolescent Egocentrism

According to Rai et al. (2014) the illusion of transparency is a concept where there is a tendency for individuals to have the belief that their lived experiences are more transparent to others than is the actual case. This concept, while nurtured during adolescence, rears itself adulthood, as well, more specifically in the manner of how adults overvalue the ability of others to detect their varying feelings and emotions (Savitsky & Gilovich, 2003). Endo (2007) posits adults misjudge how people are able to discern their preferences during face-to-face communication. While Kruger et al. (2005) theorized, in regard to written communication, adults misjudge their counterpart's ability to discern humor, sarcasm, sadness and anger over email. Therefore, the participants in this researchers' study may have believe, while responding to the questions, that I may have been able to infer their true meaning behind their individual responses. How does one develop the illusion of transparency? According to the research this is accomplished through the concept of simulation theory of mind.

Simulation theory of mind is a concept defined as, one's own cognitive ability to understand others as intentional agents (Artar, 2007). Thus, simulation theory of mind is one's ability to mirror on the contents of, not only their mind, but that of others' minds as well (Artar, 2007). Based on this research it appears the participants of this researchers' study should have been able to mirror the contents of my mind, when the various questions were posed. Better, they should have been able to understand stand my intentions when posed with the questions. Which did not happen, as the participants, when responding to questions surrounding the other subsystems they continually inferred

to their microsystem. In additions to simulation theory of mind the concepts of imaginary audience and personal fable play a major-role in explaining how adolescent egocentrism develops. According to Galanki (2012) both, imaginary audience and personal fable, are manifestations of David Eklind's analysis of adolescent egocentrism. Imaginary audience is where the individual believes their audience is preoccupied with their appearance and behavior and personal fable is the belief that I am unique and special (Marin & Sokol, 2011). Both of these concepts can help explain the difficulty participants had in identifying other factors associated with the decision to drop out of high school.

Most of the data cited in this section referred to adolescent egocentrism and how it forms thought processes and decision-making; however, it is the belief of this researcher that adolescent egocentrism travels with the individual into adulthood. According to Birch and Bloom, 2003; Epley, Morewedge, and Keysar, 2004; Fussell and Krasuss, 1991, 1992; Bernstein, Atance, Loftus, and Meltzoff, 2004; Harley, Carlsen, and Loftus, 2004, adult egocentrism mirrors that of adolescent egocentrism, even though, it is believed adults typical can overcome egocentrism (as cited in Thomas & Jacoby, 2013). Although it was believed that the participants of this study would be able to differentiate their responses to adequately answer each question, as they relate to the specific subsystem, this was not the case. According to McDonald and Stuart-Hamilton (2003) the various facets, emotional and social self-centeredness, contributed to their deviated responses, thus creating a lack of data.

Recommendations

This case study was inspired by the literature that 40% of high school students that drop out were identified as a gifted student at some point in their academic career (Jordan et al., 2012). Based on this research I sought to gain additional insight into former gifted urban high school dropouts. The additional insight into this phenomenon was to be obtained through the lived experiences of the participants. In the United States only one state, North Carolina, requires that all school districts keep data regarding gifted dropouts. Thus, the recommendations for action have been enhanced to policy makers, public administrators, educators, social workers, and the residents of the United States. The recommendations for future research are broad, surrounding educational policy, school curriculum, and social policy.

The findings of this study indicate a need for change in the following areas; public education, social policies, and community. If the goal is to make public education better, then a few changes should be made, or strategies added to the current educational policies. Many of these changes should occur at the federal level. Currently, North Carolina is the only state that collects comprehensive data on all their students, gifted or non-gifted, that drop out. Federal policy makers should require all states to collect this data. The way the state collects the data should be the same and not left up to the individual state. At this time, the creation and implementation of gifted curriculums are left to the guise of individual school districts in many states. In addition, although required, many school districts do not have a true gifted program for their students. However, the education system is not the only issue faced by the gifted urban dropout.

Future research studies should focus on how federal, state and local governments create and institute gifted programs. While the federal government provides a set of guides for these types of programs, they are subjective and can be misinterpreted. Thus, possibly causing unintended damage to gifted urban students. In addition, research studies should be conducted on why some urban districts do not have "gifted and talented" programs in their middle schools. This type of research may create the necessary dialog to promote positive social change regarding gifted urban students and their families.

Implications for Positive Social Change

This study has many implications for positive social change. By gaining a better understanding of how and why former gifted urban high school students choose to dropout allows for better human services and educational policies to be enacted. This research is capable of raising awareness of a small population of students, gifted urban dropouts, exist and are in desperate needs of services like that of the, so called at-risk student, since they are at-risk themselves. This specific at-risk population has traditionally been ignored, since many that have over seen their development believed the unique talents were enough to guarantee their future success (Quas, Dickerson, Matthew, Harron, & Quas, 2017). This study has highlighted the fact the aforementioned is not true.

The four themes that emerge from this study are: family discord, school not interesting, no role model, and minimum family participation. Each of these themes highlight the additional efforts that need to be made by all stakeholders involved in the

educational process of children. These stakeholders include, but are not limited to the federal, state and local governments, community partners and the nuclear family. While this is a broad list of stakeholders this list should be the start of meaningful collaborations in an effort to combat this phenomenon.

Implied in the findings is the notion that these students are at-risk just like the typical so-called at-risk student. Based on the perspective of the participants in this study; I conclude that more needs to be done to engage and keep engaged gifted urban students with meaningful and relatable curricula, as well as social services needs to be in place to support the student and their families before and after struggles arise. Lastly, teachers and administrators need to be well trained on how to spot and assist an at-risk gifted urban student. All these suggestions could be implemented with a universal training model that could assist the service providers and teachers with developing and implementing the necessary skills and strategies to address this phenomenon.

Conclusion

As parents, scholars, teachers, policymakers, and community leaders, we all can do more to recognize and respond to the needs of all at-risk youth regardless, of their documented or perceived academic abilities. This study explained how and why four former gifted urban high school dropouts made the decision to drop out of school. The four themes extrapolated from the data family discord, school not interesting, no role model, and minimum family participation highlighted the responses of the participants. This study revealed that, from a microsystem perspective, former gifted urban high school dropouts are faced with the same challenges as students not deemed gifted. In

addition, this study revealed the participants had a difficult time in explaining how the various subsystems, other than the microsystem, played a role in their decisions to drop out. Although the researcher attempted to gain an understanding of the decision-making process from all aspects of the human ecology system the data obtained from the participants focused more on the microsystem.

Through meaningful collaborations between, parents, educators, policy-makers, and community development organizations can be used to create a grassroots approach to developing a strategy to promote public awareness and understanding of this phenomenon. By considering the results of this case study along with the increasing evidence in the literature of dropouts, we are learning that there are a great deal of challenges that need to be addressed in order to solve this issue. It is important that no student is ignored or deemed alright or fine without truly assessing the entire student not just their cognitive ability.

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Appendix A

Letter to Participant

Date:

Name of Participant
Address

Dear (Name),

My name is Bradley M. Camper, Jr., and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research on former gifted urban high school dropouts. There are a great deal of studies detailing the phenomenon of high school dropouts. What is not known, however, are the factors leading to former gifted urban high school students choosing to drop out of high school. This research will elicit insight into what factors led to their choosing to drop out of high school.

I understand that your time is important and of great value to you and I appreciate your consideration to participate in this extremely important study. In order to gain a complete and full understanding of your experience we need to meet, maximum, on two separate occasions for just about 90 minutes each meeting. This meeting times can consist of, but not limited to, face-to-face, telephone, and/or virtual (i.e., Skype) and will not require you to do anything you do not feel comfortable doing. The meetings are strictly designed to simply get to know you and learn about your life experience of being a former gifted urban high school dropout. All information gathered during each of our meetings will be kept strictly confidential.

Please contact me at your earliest convenience to schedule a date and time that we can meet. My telephone number is (856)397-3356. You can also contact me via email at bradley.camper@waldenu.edu. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

XXXX XXXXXX
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Location: _____

Name of Interviewer: _____

Name of Interviewee: _____

Interview Number: One

1. What were your plans following high school?

2. Who was your role model while you were in school?

3. Why did you choose this person as your role model?

4. Describe your parents' philosophy towards education?

5. Describe your parents' level of participation in your education?

6. What were the attitudes of your friends regarding education?

7. Describe your relationship with your extended family before you chose to drop

    out of high school?

8. Describe your social support, during your high school years?

9. Describe your community before and after you dropped out?

10. How would you describe your experiences in the workforce?

Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Location: _____

Name of Interviewer: _____

Name of Interviewee: _____

Interview Number: One

1. What were your plans following high school?

2. Who was your role model while you were in school?

3. Why did you choose this person as your role model?

4. Describe your parents' philosophy towards education?

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6. What were the attitudes of your friends regarding education?

7. Describe your relationship with your extended family before you chose to drop

    out of high school?

8. Describe your social support, during your high school years?

9. Describe your community before and after you dropped out?

10. How would you describe your experiences in the workforce?