

LOW JOB SATISFACTION AS A LIVED EXPERIENCE FOR VETERAN MIDDLE
SCHOOL TEACHERS IN RURAL TENNESSEE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
STUDY

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of rural veteran middle school teachers in Tennessee with low job satisfaction. Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (EST) was the theoretical framework guiding this study. EST is composed of five environmental systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. This study included participation from 10 veteran teachers with 5 or more years of experience who demonstrated low job satisfaction in Tennessee according to the results of a questionnaire given prior to conducting the study. The central research question guiding this study was, What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction as a lived experience in rural Tennessee? The four subquestions were designed to investigate how teacher workload, collegial experience, administrative leadership and support, and student behavior impact job satisfaction. Data for this study were collected through individual interviews, an online focus group interview, and a reflective journal, and produced four major themes: (a) unrealistic expectations, (b) middle school environment, (c) students, and (d) middle school teacher challenges. The findings revealed participants' perceived administrators and policy makers had unrealistic expectations on their teachers due to being disconnected from their teachers. The findings also indicated participants' environment at the middle school level was challenging as they dealt with the basic needs of students before educating them. Participants expressed that collegial support was vital to the profession and that they loved teaching but had negative perceptions about the challenges they often encounter on the job.

Keywords: ecological systems theory, low job satisfaction, middle schools, rural schools, veteran teacher

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List of Abbreviations

Basis Education Program (BEP)

Ecological Systems Theory (EST)

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS)

National Education Association (NEA)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Tennessee Education Association (TEA)

Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Researchers note one of the most important and influential professions in society is the teaching profession as teachers play a significant role in shaping the nation's future and developing adolescents into citizens who can contribute to society (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Scholars suggest that despite being a rewarding profession and a valuable asset to an advancing society, teaching has multiple challenges (Huang, Hongbaio, & Lv, 2019; Przybylska, 2016; Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Teachers in middle schools encounter problems that differ from those in elementary and high schools (Mee & Haverback, 2014). In addition, rural schools deal with problems that are different than those in urban schools (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018; Zuckerman, Campbell, Schiller, & Durand, 2018). Sometimes the challenges middle school teachers encounter can take a toll on them and eventually lead them to experience low job satisfaction, which in turn may impact their job-related experiences (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

Chapter One includes background information on the problem researched in this transcendental phenomenological study. The historical, social, and theoretical concepts of middle school education and rural education in Tennessee are presented to provide a framework for the research which was focused on low job satisfaction in rural, veteran, middle school teachers. This chapter also includes discussion of my interest as a middle school teacher studying low job satisfaction in veteran middle school teachers. Due to the lack of research and literature giving a voice to veteran teachers in rural middle schools who experience low job satisfaction, this study was conducted to answer how rural, veteran, middle school teachers with low job satisfaction describe their job-related experiences. In addition, Chapter One addresses

how this study contributes practically, empirically, and theoretically to the field of education; specifically concerning teacher job satisfaction. A list of terms and definitions that are significant to the study are also provided.

Background

This section encompasses discussion of the historical, social, and theoretical contexts of this study. First, the historical background covers the history of middle school education and its progression from the 1960s to the 2000s. Next, the social section includes background on education in Tennessee within the last 20 years and how policies and expectations for teachers have changed. Last, the theoretical section addresses the current literature about middle school education and teacher job satisfaction and what future research is needed concerning these topics. This section also contains an explanation of the theoretical connection to Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) theory on human development.

Historical Context

Throughout the early years of middle school education in the 1960s, teachers and administrators focused on determining what elements should set middle schools apart from elementary and high schools (Schaefer, Malu, & Yoon, 2016). Identifying the roles of middle school teachers and curriculum was also discussed in the first decade of establishing these schools. The movement of middle school education progressed in the 1980s. During this time, recommendations and policies concerning these schools were emphasized (Schaefer et al., 2016). Throughout the 1990s, engaging students, advising, teaming, and cooperative learning were four prominent practices focused on in middle school education. The practice of engaging students was an effort to meet the individual learning needs of middle school students through differentiated instruction, which consisted of implementing various methods of instruction to

accommodate diverse learning styles (Schaefer et al., 2016). Advising was focused on building effective programs for middle school students. The teaming practice emphasized incorporating common planning time for educators and administrators. Cooperative learning was focused on establishing learning environments that promoted success for all middle school learners (Schaefer et al., 2016).

In the early 2000s, the federal government became more involved in middle school education and relied on research to determine the most effective practices to produce knowledgeable and successful citizens for the 21st century. Due to pressure from the federal government through the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), later replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; Tennessee Department of Education, 2018; Tennessee State Board of Education, 2017), middle school teachers had to account for the instructional practices they used. Middle school teachers voiced concerns about standardizing the curriculum and implementing standardized assessments to measure student achievement due to federal mandates affecting their classroom practices (Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, & Harrington, 2014; Schaefer et al., 2016). These policies and pressures from the federal government sparked the rise of low job satisfaction in teachers that would continually increase over the next decade.

Social Context

In the state of Tennessee, many educational laws have been passed within the last 2 decades that have changed the way schools function and the way teachers view their profession (Pund, 2015). In 2002, the NCLB was passed, which was replaced by the ESSA in 2015 (Tennessee Department of Education, 2018; Tennessee State Board of Education, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). As a result, rural education was severely impacted; more so than were urban schools (National Education Association [NEA], 2017). These laws increased

the federal government's role in education by holding schools more accountable for student achievement; increasing pressure for teachers (Grissom et al., 2014; Pund, 2015; Shoulders & Krei, 2016).

To hold teachers accountable for student outcomes and to improve the quality of teaching, the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) was established. The TEAM was a new evaluation system which consisted of frequent observations of educators, constructive feedback, student data, and professional data (Tennessee Department of Education, 2018). Despite the intent to improve the quality of students' learning and teachers' performance, there have been many negative outcomes, especially concerning rural school districts. According to the NEA (2017), although rural schools serve numerous students in Tennessee and nationwide, they receive less funding. The NEA (2017) also stated that rural schools serve over 40% of students throughout the country, but only receive 22% of federal educational funding, resulting in less money and resources to properly support teachers.

Some of the challenges rural school teachers face that involve job-related experiences include: lower salaries and benefits, lack of professional development, professional isolation, preparation for multiple subjects and grade levels, and taking on multiple extracurricular activities (NEA, 2017; Reilly, Dhingra, & Boduszek, 2013; Tang, He, Liu, & Li, 2018; Teague & Swan, 2013). As a result of these challenges, teacher job satisfaction has become a major concern (Drummond & Halsey, 2014; Lindqvist & Nordanger, 2016; Liu, Aunguroch, & Yunibhand, 2016). Teacher job satisfaction effects students and schools and when teachers experience low job satisfaction, it negatively effects schools (Banerjee, Stearns, Moller, & Mickelson, 2017; Gulosino, Jones, & Franceschini, 2016).

The Tennessee State Board of Education (1998) established policies for middle school education as well as expectations that middle school teachers are expected to fulfill. The focus of middle schools is to help students become responsible learners prepared to participate and meet the challenges of society. The Tennessee State Board of Education (1998) also declared that these types of schools must accept teachers who are not only academically prepared, but also committed to working with middle school students. Teachers of middle school students are expected to implement technology, real-world applications, and problem-solving throughout the curriculum. Tennessee's vision for middle schools is to provide education programs of high quality that produce academically rigorous content and are appropriate for middle school adolescents (Tennessee State Board of Education, 1998). This vision can be hindered if teachers are struggling to perform at the highest quality due to experiencing low job satisfaction (Balwant, 2016).

The study of low job satisfaction is critical, particularly in rural education. Causes of low job satisfaction in teachers in rural schools include lack of social resources, isolation, and small-town dynamics (NEA, 2017). Teachers who experience low job satisfaction typically show signs of exhaustion, lack of self-esteem, reduction in accomplishments, and less patience (Przybylska, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Troesch & Bauer, 2017). Due to a lack of literature concerning rural education and job satisfaction in middle schools, studying the job-related experiences of rural veteran middle school teachers who have low job satisfaction will add to the existing body of literature.

Theoretical Context

Teacher job satisfaction has been a growing concern in the field of education within the last decade (Liu et al., 2016). Within rural school districts, obtaining high-quality teachers and

retaining them has been an issue. Scholars have explored what contributes to teacher job satisfaction and what motivates high quality teachers to remain in the profession; however, there is a need to examine low job satisfaction among teachers (Gulosino et al., 2016). The study of teacher job satisfaction connects to Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) ecological systems theory (EST) as it deals with how an individual's development is influenced by his or her environment.

The EST consists of five ecological systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Each system plays an effective role in the development of an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979). The ecology, or habitat, as Costigan (2014) explained, is the place where a living being resides. Teachers are living beings who live in a unique environment that consists of an educational landscape. Smith, Hayes, and Lyons (2017) described the environment in which educators live consists of students, social groups, family, and school faculty, which make the microsystem ecological system. In the mesosystem of teachers, microsystems such as the classroom and family, may collide with one another due to the high demands each require. The exosystem in teachers' lives consists of administration, the school system, and the federal government. The macrosystem contains public policies often established by the federal government and the chronosystem is it involves all major microsystems and events surrounding the teachers' lives (Smith et al., 2017). This research study may add to the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST by providing a unique perspective on the ecology of teachers.

Situation to Self

According to Creswell (2013), researchers inevitably bring philosophical assumptions to their research. Philosophical assumptions are consistently present in research studies as they are

established beliefs about issues that need to be studied and how to collect data. Furthermore, they also influence the researcher's choice of theories that guide the research (Creswell, 2013). My motivation for conducting this research study was the result of accumulated encounters and experiences with rural veteran teachers in Tennessee. Whenever I attended in-services, I met multiple teachers from various grade levels throughout the state of Tennessee who expressed once loving their profession before becoming highly dissatisfied with teaching. Upon reflection, there were multiple job-related experiences that contributed to my own dissatisfaction with my profession. One job-related experience included the workload and time pressure to perform my duties as an educator (Richards, Levesque-Bristol, Templin & Graber, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). I was expected to continuously update student information, prepare rigorous lessons aligned with standards (Tennessee State Board of Education, 1998), teach nearly 80 students daily, advise extracurricular activities (NEA, 2017), and complete the required hours needed for professional development. Performing my job-related responsibilities became a daunting task and I often wondered what the job-related experiences were like for veteran teachers with low job satisfaction who had taught for 5 or more years.

The philosophical assumptions used to guide this study were ontological, epistemological, and axiological. Creswell (2013) explained that ontological assumptions surfaced when the researcher embraced the idea of multiple realities. When conducting this research study, it was possible that participants would emphasize different job-related components that contribute to having low job satisfaction. For instance, one participant may have a more negative experience with administrative leadership and support than a participant who experiences problems with student behavior. As the researcher building upon Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) theory on human development, it was important to consider the

participant as an individual, the process of interactions, multiple circumstances, and time (Burns, Warmbold-Brann, & Zaslofsky, 2016).

Ostman and Wickman (2014) stated that epistemological beliefs play a significant role in learning and teaching. My epistemological beliefs consist of the evolvement of knowledge in research (Manu, Osei-Bonsu, & Atta, 2015). When it comes to conducting research, Creswell (2013) stated that knowledge is known through the personal experiences of participants. My knowledge concerning job-related experiences in the teaching profession comes from my personal experience as an educator; however, that knowledge may be expanded by spending time with participants in their environment and gathering evidence from their personal experiences with various job-related components (Creswell, 2013). These beliefs are connected to Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST, which addresses human development and is focused on the role the environment plays in an individual's development. Similarly, veteran teachers are immersed in their environment, which can impact their development and could potentially determine whether they experience high or low job satisfaction in the teaching profession.

Creswell (2013) stated axiological assumptions are present in a qualitative study as researchers make their values and biases known. As the researcher of this study, I felt there was value in studying the job-related experiences of rural veteran middle school teachers with low job satisfaction in Tennessee as educational stakeholders may be able to examine what supports to offer these educators. Hearing the lived experiences of veteran teachers' job-related experiences while having low job satisfaction may be valuable in the field of education for educational stakeholders such as teachers, administrators, school board members, and federal government officials. Due to the impact the environment has on human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979), it may be possible veteran teachers are impacted by their school

environments. Understanding the ecology of schools could lead to further development of teacher education programs (Costigan, 2014).

The research paradigm guiding the study is social constructivism as it is the theory of knowledge and understanding of the world which is developed by individuals. Social interactions between individuals play a vital role in developing significance, meaning, and understanding (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Lynch, 2016). According to Creswell (2013), research implementing this worldview relies as much as possible on participants' views of the situation. Social constructivism was the worldview used to guide this study as the goal is to understand the world in which veteran middle school teachers with low job satisfaction live and work on a regular basis.

Problem Statement

Teaching is a demanding profession, especially at the middle school level (Gray, Wilcox, & Nordstokke, 2017; Mee & Haverback, 2014). The study of job satisfaction among teachers has increasingly become an area of interest concerning the teaching profession. Research has indicated job satisfaction is a major factor in teacher commitment, teacher retention, and school success (Imran, Allil, & Mahmoud, 2016; Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2014). Ford, Van Sickle, Clark, Fazio-Brunson, and Schween (2017) stated that within the last few years, job satisfaction among teachers has continuously declined. Recent studies have revealed multiple causes of low levels of job satisfaction among teachers, especially rural veteran educators (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Benoliel & Barth, 2017; Bogler & Nir, 2014).

Numerous research studies have been conducted with elementary and high school veteran teachers examining job satisfaction and components that contribute to them remaining in the profession (Gray et al., 2017). Some of these studies also focus on elementary and high school

teachers who experience low levels of job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Currently, there is not enough literature concerning job satisfaction in middle school teachers who teach in rural schools. The problem of this study is veteran middle school teachers' lived experiences with low job satisfaction in rural Tennessee.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand veteran middle school teachers' lived experiences with low job satisfaction in rural Tennessee. At this stage in the research, low job satisfaction was generally defined as the negative feeling an individual has toward his or her job (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Banerjee et al., 2017; Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017; Spector, 1997). Job-related experiences were defined as experiences individuals have on the job that contribute to high or low levels of job satisfaction (Ford et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). The theory guiding this study was Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST, which explains human development and how the environment effects the individual's development.

Significance of the Study

Many scholars have highlighted characteristics of veteran teachers who demonstrate high levels of job satisfaction and why they stay in the profession (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Evers, Yamkovenko, & van Amersfoort, 2017; Gray et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Researchers have also identified causes of low levels of job satisfaction among teachers (Gius, 2015; Gkolia, Belias, & Koustelios, 2014; Huang et al., 2019; King, 2017; Przybylska, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Unfortunately, there is little research on middle school teachers and rural schools. Due to the focus on giving a voice to rural veteran middle school teachers who have low job satisfaction, this study will add to the literature by providing a unique perspective

on teachers with low job satisfaction. In addition, administrators, novice teachers, school board members, and federal government officials may benefit from the findings from this study of veteran middle school teachers' lived experiences with low job satisfaction in rural Tennessee.

Theoretically, studies have shown that teachers who indicate low levels of job satisfaction are usually isolated, apathetic, indifferent, or show a lack of energy and passion for life (Costigan, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Understanding the job-related experiences of rural veteran middle school teachers could be beneficial to administrators, novice teachers, school board members, and federal government officials in education as they may be prompted to examine what role they may play in effecting a teacher's job satisfaction. Furthermore, this study may raise administrators' awareness about the personal lives of their teachers and how microsystems outside of school such as family and friends could also affect the job satisfaction of teachers.

Overall, this study has practical implications with the potential to improve the field of education. The results of this study may provide a fresh perspective on low levels of job satisfaction among rural veteran teachers in middle schools by understanding the essence of their experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). As a result of this research study, administrators may be able to offer needed support for veteran teachers, or any teachers, with low job satisfaction. Administrators may also become aware of job-related components within their schools that could contribute to experiencing low job satisfaction and provide support to assist in the possible prevention of teachers experiencing low job satisfaction. Novice teachers may be able to recognize and avoid low job satisfaction early in their careers. Educational stakeholders in central offices may be able to provide additional support and those at the federal

level may examine curricular policies as well as ways to support teachers in rural school districts in Tennessee.

Research Questions

This phenomenological study of veteran middle school teachers' perceptions of low job satisfaction as a lived experience in rural Tennessee was guided by one central research question and four additional research subquestions.

Central Research Question

What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction as a lived experience in rural Tennessee?

Rural school districts face different challenges in recruiting and retaining educators. Some of these challenges are present in rural teachers' job-related experiences, which include preparing for multiple grades and subjects simultaneously, workload, time pressure, disruptive student behavior, and sponsoring multiple extracurricular activities (NEA, 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). This question was used to explore what job-related experiences are like for rural, veteran, middle school teachers who experience low job satisfaction.

Research Subquestions

SQ1. What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions in rural Tennessee of the ways their workload and work environment impact job satisfaction?

There are multiple causes of low job satisfaction among teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). One of these causes includes the workload and time in which teachers are pressured to perform their job-related tasks. Teachers often experience busy workdays and an increase in their workload such as meeting the individual needs of students, preparing for multiple grade levels and subjects, and managing extracurricular activities (NEA, 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik,

2015). This research question was aimed to describe the workload of rural veteran middle school teachers with low job satisfaction in Tennessee.

SQ2. What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions in rural Tennessee of the ways their collegial experience with other teachers impacts job satisfaction?

A collegial climate in a school environment is a climate that is embedded within an entire school and can form between a teacher and other teachers or a teacher and administration (Pogodzinski, Youngs, & Frank, 2013). Rapport with colleagues can play an effective role in the job satisfaction of teachers. Collegial support is vital for educators and the school environment as teachers have opportunities to strengthen relationships among colleagues as well as improve the environment within the school. This research question was used to describe how rural, veteran, middle school teachers with low job satisfaction in Tennessee describe their collegial experience.

SQ3. What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions in rural Tennessee of the ways that administrative leadership and support within their school environment impacts job satisfaction?

The rapport with administrators determines a teacher's level of dedication to the profession and experience or lack of experience with low job satisfaction. Administrative leadership plays a significant role in teacher performance and satisfaction with the teaching profession. Research has shown a lack of administrative support contributes to teachers experiencing low job satisfaction or ultimately leaving the profession. This research question was used to answer how rural veteran middle school teachers with low job satisfaction in Tennessee describe administrative leadership and support within their school environment.

SQ4. What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions in rural Tennessee of the ways that student behavior impacts job satisfaction?

Gray et al. (2017) stated that teaching is a demanding profession. One aspect in teaching that has been linked to low job satisfaction among educators and their decision to leave the profession is student behavior (Fernandez, Gold, Hirsch, & Miller, 2015; Richards et al., 2016). Dealing with students presents multiple challenges which add to the stress of teaching. Common behavior problems in students include disrespect and a lack of attentiveness (Gray et al., 2017). As a result of challenges brought on by students, teachers experience high stress levels and often leave the profession at a high rate. This research question was aimed to describe veteran middle school teachers' experiences in dealing with student behavior in Tennessee.

Definitions

The following definitions are vital in understanding this research study and they relate to the study of ecology and teacher job satisfaction.

1. *Chronosystem*: The chronosystem is one of the five environmental systems in which all microsystems overarch (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979).
2. *Ecology*: The study of ecology focuses on the place where a living being resides (Costigan, 2014).
3. *Environment*: An environment consists of multiple structures arranged together in which each structure is in inside the next structure (Bronfenbrenner, 1976).
4. *Exosystem*: The exosystem is the third environmental level that consists of one or more settings that do not directly involve the developing individual, but contain events that influence what happens in that setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979).

5. *Low Job Satisfaction*: In the measure of contentedness toward one's job, low job satisfaction is the negative perception teachers have about their jobs (Banerjee et al., 2017).
6. *Macrosystem*: The macrosystem is the fourth environmental system composed of a developing individual's culture or subculture (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979).
7. *Microsystem*: The microsystem is the first environmental system which consists of the immediate setting containing the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979).
8. *Middle School*: A middle school is a student-centered facility which is focuses on students in Grades 6–8 (Tennessee State Board of Education, 1998).
9. *Mesosystem*: The mesosystem is the second environmental system in which major microsystems are connected (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979).
10. *Veteran Teacher*: A veteran teacher is someone who has five or more years of teaching experience (Darragh & Boyd, 2018).

Summary

The study of job satisfaction in the teaching profession is important because teachers play a vital role in society and shaping the nation's future (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017). When discussing the challenges of elementary, middle school, and high school education, middle schools face unique challenges that differ from elementary and high school (Mee & Haverback, 2014). Chapter One contained an explanation of the significance of this study as well as the historical, social, and theoretical background on middle school education and rural education in Tennessee. In addition, Chapter One highlighted the rising start of low job satisfaction in rural middle school teachers as the topic of teacher job satisfaction has become an alarming concern due to the difficulty in obtaining highly qualified educators and retaining them. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the job-related experiences of

rural veteran middle school teachers in Tennessee with low job satisfaction. Additionally, this study served to investigate how the school environment impacts the individual development of teachers who experience low job satisfaction.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Teaching is a demanding profession, which often has a high turnover rate for educators in all grade levels (Desouky & Allam, 2017; Gray et al., 2017; Lindqvist & Nordanger, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Although teaching can be rewarding, job-related experiences within the profession can take their toll on educators; especially veteran teachers who often experience low job satisfaction as a result of job-related stressors and experiences in their environment (Huang et al., 2019; Przybylska, 2016). Chapter Two includes the theoretical framework used to guide this study, which was focused on describing the job-related experiences of rural, veteran, middle school teachers in Tennessee who have low job satisfaction. The theoretical framework for this study was built upon Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST as it has a focus on the study of human development. This theory consists of five systematic components which includes the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979).

The literature relating to EST is presented in this chapter as well as literature concerning job satisfaction and job-related experiences of educators. Topics in the literature relating to the teaching profession include (a) job satisfaction, (b) chronic teacher absenteeism, (c) professional efficacy, (d) school performance, (e) rural education, (f) working environment of middle school teachers, (g) job-related responsibilities of middle school teachers, (h) teacher autonomy, (i) teacher pay, (j) teacher workload, (k) collegial experience with other teachers, (l) administrative leadership and support, (m) disruptive student behavior, (n) parental involvement, and (o) extracurricular activities. Throughout Chapter Two, the connection between Bronfenbrenner's

(1976, 1979) EST and low job satisfaction in rural veteran middle school teachers in Tennessee are discussed. A summary of the literature review for this study concludes this chapter.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979). In developing EST, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1979) studied human development and how an individual's environment plays a significant role in his or her development. Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1979) sought to understand the way individuals developed and he believed it was important to observe their behavior in their natural settings or environment while interacting with familiar people such as family, friends, and colleagues. According to Costigan (2014), the ecological environment is the place in which an individual resides. The ecosystem of an individual comprises multiple systems. Bronfenbrenner identified these systems as microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Within each ecological system, individuals experience transitions in their roles or settings throughout their lifetimes. When describing the transitional roles of an individual, roles can have an impact on how an individual is treated, behaves, thinks, and feels (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979).

Since Bronfenbrenner's theory was first proposed in the 1970s, there have been important changes that have influenced the theory's development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The EST went through three critical phases during its development. According to Rosa and Tudge (2013), the first phase took place between 1973 and 1979 when the EST was known as the ecological model of human development, or the ecological approach to human development. The strong interest in social policies regarding children and their families by politicians as well as limitations in psychological research motivated Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1979) to develop the environmental theory. During this phase of developing the theory, Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1979) analyzed and

discussed previous research concerning human development and psychology. In his publications, Bronfenbrenner argued that research conducted in laboratories produced inadequate and invalid results due to being performed by researchers unknown to the children participating in the studies in unfamiliar settings (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

According to Rosa and Tudge (2013), Bronfenbrenner coined new terminology from Brim's terminology of structures. These terms were known as microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner focused more on the ecological system that involved the developing child or individual rather than on just the environment, and stated that research studies regarding the development of individuals needed to be focused on more than the participants and more on the environment in which they live and work. Without studying the environments of individuals, it would be difficult to truly understand how an individual develops (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979; Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Between 1980 and 1993, the second phase in the development of Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) theory transpired with the goal of showing how the environment played a significant role in human development. According to Rosa and Tudge (2013), to accomplish this task, Bronfenbrenner created ecological paradigms by studying the previous works of others; specifically assessing the process of development and the passage of time. One paradigm Bronfenbrenner created was the "person-process-context," which is focused on individual characteristics such as one's biological condition and gender. He also created the "process-person-context" paradigm with which development is viewed as a function that involves interactions with an individual and the people he or she interacts with in the immediate setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979; Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Between 1993 and 2006, Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1979) focused on proximal processes. These processes are also known as the “engines of development” and used to examine how individual characteristics influence development. According to Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1979), proximal processes can develop successfully in stable environments. Similarly, proximal processes would slowly develop in unstable environments. Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1979) determined that human beings are producers in their own development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Researchers have used EST as the framework in studies concerning the development of children and impact of school violence (Chan, Hollingsworth, Espelage, & Mitchell, 2016). When studying the job-related experiences of rural, veteran teachers in Tennessee with low job satisfaction, it is important to recognize the teachers as individuals whose environment is the school setting (Burns et al., 2016; Sapkova, 2014; Smith et al., 2017). As previously mentioned, Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1979) argued early in the development of the EST that research concerning human development needed to be focused more on the immediate setting of an individual and how it impacts his or her own development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The significance of this current study was not just its focus on veteran teachers with low job satisfaction, but its focus on the environment in which these teachers live and work. By understanding the immediate setting of veteran middle school teachers, it may be possible to understand how the environment in which teachers live and work influences their job satisfaction levels. In Bronfenbrenner’s (1976, 1979) EST, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem are structures that play a vital role in an individual’s development and may influence the development of veteran middle school teachers.

Microsystem

In the EST, the microsystem consists of the interrelations of other people within the immediate setting of an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979). Within this system, an individual directly interacts with microsystems in his or her environment. Agents within the microsystem include family, friends, and teachers. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) theory, individuals not only go through experiences when interacting with the people associated with their environment, but they also contribute to shaping their own environment.

When examining job satisfaction among veteran teachers, it is important to consider the environment in which they live and work. According to Smith et al. (2017), the social agents in the microsystems of a teacher's environment consist of family, social groups, students, and school faculty. Of these social agents, students and faculty have a distinct quality as they are not present in every individual's environment. Because students and school faculty are agents in the teaching profession, it is reasonable for them to be immediate agents with whom teachers have direct contact within their environment.

Disruptive students and administrative leadership contribute to low job satisfaction among teachers (Mee & Haverback, 2014; NEA, 2017; Pogodzinski, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Thibodeaux, Labat, Lee, & Labat, 2015). When applying Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST, if teachers continuously have negative interactions or experiences with these social agents, they may likely experience deep dissatisfaction in their careers. Furthermore, rapport with other teachers can contribute to teachers experiencing low job satisfaction in the teaching profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). If collegial experience with other teachers is negative for a teacher, he or she may develop a negative attitude toward his or her profession over time (Evers, van der Heijden, Kreijns, & Vermeulen, 2015; Evers et al., 2017; Graham, 2015). Because

Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) theory deals with the development of an individual, it is applicable to the study of low job satisfaction among rural, veteran, middle school teachers as social agents in the microsystem play a significant role in the development of teachers throughout their careers.

Mesosystem

In EST, the mesosystem consists of interactions between the microsystems of an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979). According to Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) theory, the mesosystem deals with the relationships between the social agents of an individual. Within this system, a teacher's experience with family may be connected to his or her experience at school (Smith et al., 2017). If a teacher has a negative experience at home with family, he or she may leave with a bad attitude. Upon arriving at school, that bad attitude may still be present, which could affect interactions with students and school faculty (Liu & Cheung, 2015; Smith et al., 2017).

Liu and Cheung (2015) stated that balancing the responsibilities of family and work can be challenging. Furthermore, conflict between family and work can be draining and exhausting for teachers. Dealing with this type of interaction between microsystems can negatively affect the performance of teachers when they are at home or school. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015) also pointed out that when teachers experience low job satisfaction, they may be less sensitive to the individual needs of students. This concept could be applied academically or behaviorally.

The interactions between microsystems may cause stress for teachers and may negatively influence their job satisfaction (Smith et al., 2017). When applying Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST, if teachers have a negative interaction with family, they may take out their frustration on their students, which could contribute to students' disruptive behavior (Howes &

Goodman-Delahunty, 2015). Similarly, if teachers have a negative experience with students or school faculty, they may bring their frustration home with them. Even though a teacher's microsystems do not directly interact with one another, they are connected through the teacher and how he or she interacts with each one.

Exosystem

In EST, the exosystem consists of consequences from links an individual may not directly contact, but his or her setting or environment may be impacted as a result of the events that occur from those links (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979). In other words, the exosystem involves the connection between an individual and his or her environment. The environment in which the individual is associated affects them, even though there is no direct contact between the individual and his or her environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested an example of the system included a child as the individual and the parent's place of work as the setting. Even though the child may not be in direct contact with the parent's workplace, he or she may still be influenced by that environment if the parent was asked to transfer work locations or was laid off from employment. This developmental level can also be applied to the development of teachers in their work environment.

The environment of teachers can be significantly impacted by administration, the school system, and the federal government (Smith et al., 2017). Teachers in a school setting may not have direct contact with administrators on daily basis; however, they can still be influenced by the decisions made by administrators, such as scheduling (Pogodzinski, 2014). Bronfenbrenner (1979) also suggested an example of the exosystem regarding the field of education that involves the activities of the local school board. Teachers may not see school board members or the superintendent directly, but they can be impacted by decisions made by these educational

stakeholders. For instance, the superintendent's decision to introduce a new program may affect teachers within that school district (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

The involvement of the federal government is another example in which teachers have no direct contact, yet are influenced in their environment, such as with educational policies established by the federal government (NEA, 2017). These policies often influence the development of teachers in their careers as they are expected to make necessary changes in the curriculum and their instruction. Concerning the state of Tennessee, multiple policies have been established by the federal government, including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA; U. S. Department of Education, 2018), the NCLB (Pund, 2015), the ESSA (Tennessee Department of Education, 2018), and the TEAM (Tennessee Department of Education, 2018).

The pressure brought on by these policies can play a significant role in the low job satisfaction of rural veteran middle school teachers in Tennessee (NEA, 2017). Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) theory is applicable to this study when examining the effect outside social agents have had on veteran teachers throughout their careers.

Macrosystem

In EST, the macrosystem is a sociocultural environment which consists of the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem. Within this system, the economy, political realm, and sociocultural status of an individual affects an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979; Nand, 2017). According to Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) theory, there are multiple cultural components that influence an individual's development. Some of these components include the economy, politics, cultural values, and poverty (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018; Zuckerman, Campbell, Schiller, & Durand, 2018). Even though these components exist throughout the world, they influence ecological settings differently as well as the individuals

who live in them. Regarding the teaching profession, these components impact the careers of teachers differently across the world as well as their job satisfaction or lack thereof.

In the state of Tennessee, there are multiple rural school districts. Components in the macrosystem affect rural communities differently than urban communities. For instance, rural schools receive less funding from the federal government than do urban schools (NEA, 2017). Rural school teachers also face the challenge of a lack of resources (NEA, 2017). Another challenge that rural educators face is a lack of student motivation. As a result of a lack of resources, teachers' classroom instruction may be impacted (Azano & Stewart, 2015).

According to Matteson (2014), teachers who deal with unmotivated students may also have classroom management difficulties. As a result, teachers may become frustrated and develop a bad attitude toward the teaching profession over time. Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) theory is applicable to this current study as it serves to examine the connection between cultural components that influence veteran teachers' development throughout their profession.

Chronosystem

In EST, the chronosystem consists of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, which all occur at various times throughout the lifespan of an individual (Nand, 2017). Major events that impact an individual's development occur in this system. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) theory, a life-changing event such as parents going through a divorce, not only affects the relationship of the parents, but it can affect the child as well. When applying Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) theory to this study, it is important to consider life-changing events that a teacher may experience throughout his or her career. For instance, teachers may experience marriage, divorce, having children, the loss of a family member or friend, transferring schools, or change in educational position at some point in their careers

(Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979; Price & McCallum, 2015). Whether these events take place inside or outside the school environment, they may play a role in teachers' job satisfaction, which also makes Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) theory applicable to this study.

Related Literature

As previously mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, literature relating to job satisfaction and various aspects of teaching will be discussed. Components that influence the job satisfaction of teachers involve (a) job satisfaction, (b) chronic teacher absenteeism, (c) professional efficacy, (d) school performance, (e) rural education, (f) working environment of middle school teachers, (g) job-related responsibilities of middle school teachers, (h) teacher autonomy, (i) teacher pay, (j) teacher workload, (k) collegial experience with other teachers, (l) administrative leadership and support, (m) disruptive student behavior, (n) parental involvement, and (o) extracurricular activities. Although three of these components served as research topics in this study, it is important to discuss multiple facets in education that contribute to veteran teachers experiencing low job satisfaction in order to gain a greater understanding into this study. Examining each of these aspects provides a greater understanding of the job-related experiences of teachers, particularly those who have low job satisfaction in their profession.

Job Satisfaction

According to Liu et al. (2016), employees are more likely to be creative, productive, and remain in their profession longer when they are highly satisfied with their jobs. The study of job satisfaction has been widely studied across various disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and healthcare (Liu et al., 2016). Multiple studies on job satisfaction have been conducted in the medical profession as well. Many of the studies in the medical field have indicated low job satisfaction as a leading cause in nurses leaving the profession, and these studies have also

shown job satisfaction in the nursing profession is significantly linked to patients' care and satisfaction (Atefi, Abdullah, & Wong, 2016; Liu et al., 2016). Similarly, it may be valid to compare job satisfaction in nursing to job satisfaction in teaching. If patients are influenced by the job satisfaction of their nurses, it could be that students are influenced by the job satisfaction of their teachers, which further increases the importance of this current study.

The study of job satisfaction in the field of education has increasingly become a topic of interest for researchers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). According to Bota (2013), dedication, sensitivity, and professional skills are expected in the teaching profession; however, these attributes may be influenced if a teacher experiences chronic dissatisfaction with their profession. Some causes of teachers being dissatisfied consist of a lack of opportunities for advancement, a lack of encouragement and recognition, stress, a nonsupportive work environment, and a lack of work-life balance (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017). When discussing the negative outcomes of dissatisfied employees, Sahito and Vaisanen (2017) also stated organizational performance, motivation, and job satisfaction are connected and dependent on each other. Performance and efficiency levels may decrease, and the work environment may be sabotaged, which could also lead to dissatisfied employees leaving their jobs. Song and Mustafa (2015) suggested that the study of job satisfaction is important as it impacts the productivity in the work environment. When applying this concept, Song and Mustafa also explained that student learning and achievement are increased when the productivity and effectiveness of teachers is increased.

An employee's perception of job satisfaction directly impacts employee productivity, turnover, and the overall sustainability of an organization (Spector, 1997). The study of job satisfaction began in industrial organizations before being studied in educational settings. In the

1900s, motivation in studying job satisfaction increased as industrial workers began showing signs of fatigue (Spector, 1997). In the 1970s, researchers studying job satisfaction believed that if fatigue was reduced and salary increased then job satisfaction would increase. Spector (1997) defined job satisfaction as, “how people feel about their jobs and different aspects of their jobs. It is the extent to which people like (satisfaction) or dislike (dissatisfaction) their jobs. As it is generally assessed, job satisfaction is an attitudinal variable” (p. 2).

Job satisfaction is multidimensional as it contains many facets that impact an individual’s feelings and attitude toward his or her profession (Bota, 2013; Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017; Song & Mustafa, 2015; Spector, 1997). Spector (1997) identified 14 “facets” which make up job satisfaction: appreciation, communication, coworkers, fringe benefits, job conditions, nature of the work itself, organization itself, organization’s policies and procedures, pay, personal growth, promotion opportunities, recognition, security, and supervision. Together, these facets influence job satisfaction in any organization (Spector, 1997).

Spector (1997) stated there was a positive correlation between job satisfaction and an organization’s success, and that job satisfaction helps attract and retain teachers. Teachers experiencing low job satisfaction are likely to become disengaged in their profession (Dou, Devos, & Valcke, 2016). Dou et al. (2016) explained that teachers who become disengaged have given up commitment and put little effort into their work. Educators can become disengaged when they dislike school initiatives and begin to enjoy work less (Dou et al., 2016). Administrators may consider working on unifying the school culture to build job satisfaction in their schools (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Evers et al., 2017).

Chronic Teacher Absenteeism

One of the negative effects of low job satisfaction in an organization is chronic absenteeism. According to Shapira-Lishchinsky and Ishan (2013), absenteeism in human resources is a significant problem. Employee absenteeism could prevent organizations from reaching their goals (Sezgin, Kosar, Kiline, & Ogdem, 2014). Chronic absenteeism is also a growing concern in education (Balwant, 2016; Griffith, 2017; Shapira-Lishchinsky & Raftar-Ozery, 2016). According to Griffith (2017), teacher absenteeism can best be defined as the practice of a teacher missing work on a regular day during the school year instead of teaching students in an assigned class. This behavior becomes chronic when it is a constant occurrence (Griffith, 2017).

Studies have shown that chronic absenteeism in teachers has a negative impact on schools, particularly on student learning (Balwant, 2016; Kronholz, 2013; Sezgin et al., 2014; Shapira-Lishchinsky & Raftar-Ozery, 2016). Researchers have noted if teachers are not committed to coming to class, students' commitment to class may decrease and cause student achievement to decline (Balwant, 2016; Sezgin et al., 2014). Furthermore, when teachers are chronically absent, it may cause a financial burden on school districts as the need to hire more substitute teachers increases. Although substitute teachers are vital in schools, they may be less qualified if they lack the skills the teachers have in their regular classes (Balwant, 2016; Sezgin et al., 2014; Shapira-Lishchinsky & Ishan, 2013). According to Bristol (2017), school challenges such as weak administrative leadership and poor working conditions contribute to teacher absenteeism. Sezgin et al. (2014) stated that a negative school climate is categorized by isolation from teachers or administration, lack of support from school members, and limited communication and cooperation from employees.

Professional Efficacy

Scholars have suggested job satisfaction influences the professional efficacy of teachers (Lauermann & Konig, 2016; Troesch & Bauer, 2017; Wang, Hall, & Rahimi, 2015). According to Lauermann and Konig (2016), teacher self-efficacy refers to a teacher's belief in his or her capability to produce desired outcomes in the classroom and school community. Professional efficacy in education is influenced by challenging classroom experiences, school climate, school policies, working conditions, and years of professional experience (Troesch & Bauer, 2017). These components are part of the working environment in which veteran middle school teachers are immersed consistently. As a result, teacher job satisfaction can be impacted, which can change the professional efficacy of educators (Wang et al., 2015). According to Wang et al. (2015), the higher a teacher's self-efficacy, the higher the job satisfaction is for that teacher.

Due to teachers' professional efficacy, consisting of their beliefs about their own work performance, teachers are likely to respond differently to challenges and goals within their school environment (Lauermann & Konig, 2016). Teachers who demonstrate high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to embrace challenges and changes within their schools due to the belief in their ability to successfully master those challenges (Troesch & Bauer, 2017). On the contrary, teachers who demonstrate low levels of self-efficacy are more likely to experience stress and worry about challenges and changes within their school (Lauermann & Konig, 2016). Furthermore, Troesch and Bauer (2017) stated that as classroom stress increases, job satisfaction decreases. If teachers are satisfied with their jobs, they will demonstrate greater commitment and productivity toward their jobs. If teachers are dissatisfied with their jobs, they will likely show unproductive work behavior or look for employment with more satisfying work conditions.

School Performance

Teacher commitment is vital to school performance (Collie, Granziera, & Martin, 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). School performance does not just pertain to student academics, it also encompasses how teachers perform various responsibilities in a school system (Collie et al., 2018; Dou et al., 2016). According to Dou et al. (2016), job satisfaction impacts teachers' attitudes and behaviors. If teachers are not satisfied with their jobs, they are not likely to be committed to the profession, which can impact school performance. Within a school, teachers have the responsibility of maintaining frequent communication with a variety of microsystems such as students, parents, colleagues, and administrators (Collie et al., 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Many of these social interactions are constantly changing as teachers communicate with multiple parents of a different class of students each school year, as well as colleagues changing to a different position or transferring from another school (Collie & Martin, 2017). Most of these interactions are related to unpredictable circumstances, which over time, could cause teachers to become emotionally exhausted and less committed to the profession, impacting school performance as a result (Collie et al., 2018).

Teacher job satisfaction can have a significant impact on a school's performance as it impacts school culture (Dou et al., 2016). One of the components that develops school culture is collaboration, which allows teachers to share teaching methods and resolve conflict in a simpler manner (Banerjee et al., 2017; Dou et al., 2016; Farooqi, Iqbal, & Tahir, 2015). For collaboration to be effective, all teachers must take responsibility and actively engage in working with their colleagues; however, teachers who experience low job satisfaction may find it difficult to perform their responsibilities, which impacts school performance (Banerjee et al., 2017; Farooqi et al., 2015). Due to the multiple responsibilities within a school, it is important for

educational stakeholders to establish a strong school culture (Banerjee et al., 2017; Dou et al., 2016). Establishing school culture can form a relationship between the job satisfaction of teachers and students' achievement. Furthermore, it can shape how teachers view their ability to contribute to their schools as well as expand satisfaction beyond the classroom (Banerjee et al., 2017).

As previously mentioned, chronic teacher absenteeism is one result of low job satisfaction. A teacher who is absent impacts a school because regular classroom teachers develop and implement classroom management skills and instructional methods to accommodate the learning needs of their students (Banerjee et al, 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Research studies have shown if teachers are chronically absent, they put the learning experience of their students at risk (Banerjee et al., 2017; Farooqi et al., 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Furthermore, teachers and other educational stakeholders sometimes have to redirect their focus, time, and energy from their own responsibilities to fill in the gap of an absent teacher resulting in the school community not performing at its fullest potential (Banerjee et al., 2017; Farooqi et al., 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

Rural Education

Although rural communities are often seen in a positive light, they do face challenges such as poverty, economic changes, demographic changes, and educational accountability (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). These environmental challenges effect rural communities, including rural schools. As a result of the challenges rural regions face, teachers can often run into difficulties educating children from a rural area (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018).

Wieczorek and Manard (2018) stated that schools in rural communities are influenced by elements in the environment which include poverty, accountability, involvement from the

community, educational policies, and financial constraints. According to the NEA (2017), rural school districts serve over 40% of the nation's students, but only 22% of federal education funding is provided for these school districts. In addition to the financial constraints placed on rural schools, educational policies also affect these rural schools (Zuckerman et al., 2018). Many of these policies emphasize holding teachers accountable for what is taught and preparing students to be college and career ready upon graduating (NEA, 2017; Parsley & Barton, 2015; Zuckerman et al., 2018). For instance, Parsley and Barton (2015) pointed out that the ESEA has encouraged those in the education system in America to focus on improving in a variety of ways such as providing high-quality learning experiences early on for students, establishing accountability and support systems for low-performing schools, implementing rigorous standards that ensure students are college- and career-ready, and providing high-quality teachers. Although retaining high-quality teachers is a challenge for any school system, it is especially difficult for rural school districts (Parsley & Barton, 2015).

Working Environment of Middle School Teachers

Middle school teachers work in a unique environment as they work with early adolescent students in a challenging setting (Huang et al., 2019; Przybylska, 2016; Waterman, 2013). The work environment of educators is constantly changing. In many cases, teachers are encouraged to keep up with current trends in learning and curriculum development (Collie & Martin, 2017). Although there is some consistency within the teaching profession, it is not a profession in which events and activities are consistent. According to Collie and Martin (2017), drills, weather, and other unforeseen circumstances take place, and teachers are expected to make adjustments to daily activities. Another area that involves constant change in the teaching profession is interactions with microsystems of teachers' environment (Collie & Martin, 2017). For instance,

educators must be able to meet the needs of their students. They also encounter diverse interactions with parents. Not only are interactions with students and parents likely to differ within the school year and every year thereafter, new students and parents are introduced each year (Collie & Martin, 2017).

Im, Hughes, and West (2016) stated that middle schools consist of students in Grades 6–8 who are typically characterized by rapid emotional, cognitive, and biological changes the adolescents experience as well as changes in their school, family, and peer relationships. As previously discussed, young adolescents who demonstrate disruptive behavior often come from troubled homes (Waterman, 2013). Along with this challenge in the working environment, teachers also face additional challenges in their physical environment, including temperature, limited restroom breaks, lunch, classroom, supplies, and safety (Waterman, 2013).

According to Waterman (2013), many teachers have limited control in adjusting thermostats in their classrooms. In most cases, the temperature is controlled by higher authorities in the school district. This can cause classrooms to be too hot or too cold in certain seasons throughout the school year. Waterman (2013) pointed out that teachers also have limited restroom breaks during the day. Due to their responsibility of supervising students inside and outside the classroom during breaks, teachers cannot easily take a restroom break without finding someone to cover for them. Many teachers do not have access to the restroom until their lunch break or planning period. For lunch, teachers normally get about a 20–25-minute break. In some schools, teachers are expected to supervise students during this time, which can be a noisy environment (Waterman, 2013).

Waterman (2013) stated the primary working environment of teachers is the classroom. Sometimes classrooms can be overcrowded as they typically consist of 30 desks in a small

setting. To effectively establish a successful learning environment, teachers must have school supplies accessible for students, especially those who live in poverty. Although schools often provide school supplies or funds to purchase necessary items in the classroom, teachers frequently spend their own money on school supplies (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Waterman, 2013). Safety in the school system has been an increasing concern for educational stakeholders. Safety in the work environment generally involves locked doors throughout the school day. Many schools have a fence built around the property and have a school resource officer on-site (Waterman, 2013). These challenging working conditions in the work environment may not be favorable for teachers, particularly those with low job satisfaction.

Job-Related Responsibilities of Middle School Teachers

Within the teaching profession, there are multiple job-related responsibilities teachers are expected to perform. According to Glover et al. (2016), teachers wear multiple hats and are expected to juggle various tasks on any given school day. Although similar, job-related responsibilities may vary among elementary, middle, and high school educators as middle school educators teach students in Grades 6–8 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) stated educators at the middle school level create and implement lesson plans, evaluate the abilities, strengths, and weaknesses of students, grade assignments and exams, and communicate with students' parents about their progress. Along with these job-related responsibilities, middle school teachers implement student discipline, maintain records, and provide coverage for teacher shortages (Desouky & Allam, 2017). Middle school teachers also work with students individually to help them overcome learning challenges, prepare students take standardized tests required by the state, and establish and enforce classroom rules (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

Although the school year consists of teachers working 10 months and having a 2-month summer break, some educators may teach summer programs (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). In addition, some middle school teachers have additional job-related responsibilities such as extracurricular activities. These teachers may coach sports or advise clubs, all of which typically take place before and after school (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018; NEA, 2017). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) also suggested to effectively perform these job-related responsibilities, middle school teachers must demonstrate certain qualities. For instance, they must be patient when dealing with students as their classrooms may be filled with students who come from diverse cultures and backgrounds and demonstrate academic abilities at different levels. Middle school teachers must also have physical stamina as it can be emotionally, mentally, and exhausting dealing with middle school students (Collie et al., 2018).

Scholars have suggested that teachers who believe they do not have the stamina to deal with student behavior ultimately leave the teaching profession (Im et al., 2016; Waterman, 2013). This is largely because middle school students are developing into adolescents and deal with different issues than they did when they were in elementary school (Waterman, 2013). Teachers at the middle school level must also possess communication skills as they interact with multiple educational stakeholders such as colleagues, parents, and administrators (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). If teachers have low job satisfaction, these desired qualities may be severely impacted (Im et al., 2016). Concerning Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST, the immediate environment of teachers may impact their ability to successfully perform their job-related responsibilities.

Teacher Autonomy

Autonomy is one of many aspects needed for the well-being of individuals that allows him or her to grow, develop, and live life with passion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Job autonomy is the extent to which any particular work can provide independence, freedom, and decision-making of an individual, who can determine the procedures necessary to implement in his or her work (Johari, Yean Tan, & Tjik Zulkarnain, 2018). This aspect of teaching is significant in understanding job satisfaction, specifically low job satisfaction in rural veteran middle school teachers. In fact, autonomy has been positively linked to job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2018; Dou et al., 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Dou et al. (2016) stated that teacher autonomy is related to work outcomes. When work outcomes at school are positive, teachers often demonstrate more humane qualities, creativeness, and less condemnation of students.

According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014), when autonomy is present in the educational setting, teachers have the freedom to choose instructional practices that best meet the needs of their students. When there is a lack of teacher autonomy, educators have little input in curriculum development and they are expected to follow guidelines of policymakers (Sadeghi, Amani, & Mahmudi, 2013; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Although teacher voice is often limited to the classroom, there is value in implementing teacher voice in decision making due to their daily work in the classroom and working with their students (Sadeghi et al., 2013).

According to Sadeghi et al. (2013), one way to strengthen job satisfaction in teachers is to allow teachers to have a voice in making important decisions. Environments that support teacher autonomy promote decision-making, take advantage of nonrestrictive measures, and place emphasis on the beliefs of teachers (Sadeghi et al., 2013). When administrators support teachers

and teachers feel a sense of teaching autonomy, teachers are more likely to be sensitive to the needs of students (Kiefer & Pennington, 2016).

Teacher Pay

Compared to urban teachers, one of the major challenges rural educators face is lower salaries (Tang et al., 2018). According to the Tennessee Education Association (TEA, 2019), the minimum average salary for rural teachers in Tennessee during the 2018–2019 school year was \$38,009. In the same school year, the average salary for Tennessee teachers with a bachelor's degree was \$44,635 and \$48,823 for Tennessee educators with a master's degree (TEA, 2019). Studies have shown that salary level is a positive factor in teacher retention as it impacts job satisfaction and an individual's well-being (Saiti & Papadopoulos, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2013; Tang et al., 2018).

According to Karim, Khan, and Shamim (2017), job satisfaction not only depends on total salary, but pay raises as well. Teachers who are dissatisfied with their pay and benefits are less motivated, but when teachers are paid what they feel they deserve and work in a supportive work environment, they are more likely to work harder (Karim et al., 2017). Although teachers are salaried employees, they work numerous hours throughout the week. Many of these hours occur after school and on weekends (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Teachers who coach or participate in after school programs are typically paid for their service; however, teachers who preside over clubs or groups are not, as these services are considered volunteer work (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). According to Saiti and Papadopoulos (2015), teacher salaries are linked to work performance. When teachers feel they are paid according the amount of work they put forth, they are likely going to feel satisfied and work harder (Saiti & Papadopoulos, 2015; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2013).

Teacher Workload

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015) stated that teacher workload is a contributing factor in low job satisfaction among teachers. Some of a teacher's workload includes grading papers, managing student behavior, fulfilling professional development requirements, planning lessons, and often sponsoring extracurricular activities (Desouky & Allam, 2017). Along with the workload teachers are expected to perform, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015) added that the time in which teachers are expected to perform their job-related responsibilities also plays a significant role in job satisfaction among educators. In the teaching profession, there is a high demand on time, and as Waterman (2013) pointed out, teachers are expected to attend faculty meetings and participate in professional development activities often after school hours and cover all skills and content that are associated with standards from educational policymakers. Performing these job-related tasks is already challenging without the additional challenge of performing them in an emotionally exhausted state of mind (Collie et al., 2018; Johari et al., 2018). Heavy workloads for educators have an impact on morale, the quality of life, and job satisfaction (Johari et al., 2018). A heavy workload and pressure to complete tasks within a short time frame can be damaging to an individual's health. Yu, Wang, Zhai, Dai, and Yang (2015) indicated that teachers can feel the effects of a demanding workload psychologically, physically, and behaviorally.

Psychologically, teachers may experience anxiety and depression (Marshik, Ashton, & Algina, 2017). Physiologically, teachers may suffer from constant headaches or feel excessive stress. Behaviorally, teachers may suffer from various health problems, sleep problems, and live unhealthy lifestyles (Yu et al., 2015). Marshik et al. (2017) pointed out that supporting the psychological needs of students may be difficult if their own needs are not met. As previously

mentioned, if teachers believe they do not have the physical stamina to effectively manage a classroom then they will eventually leave the teaching profession (Johari et al., 2018). To be more effective in their profession, teachers often spend hours in school as well as extra hours after work performing job-related responsibilities (Johari et al., 2018). Research has shown teachers believe they would be more effective if they could focus more on teaching instead of paperwork (Thibodeaux et al., 2015). Additionally, teacher workload is a component that impacts the environment of a teacher as sometimes macrosystems can influence the amount of work he or she may have. The workload can interfere with interactions with the teacher's microsystems according to Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST.

Collegial Experience With Other Teachers

Pogodzinski (2014) stated that colleagues are vital in offering support and resources to other colleagues. Collegial relationships in education include teacher to teacher and teacher to principal (Pogodzinski et al., 2013). In the field of education, colleagues will receive positive gains when they work with satisfied teachers (Thibodeaux et al., 2015). This concept is especially important as teachers must collaborate with their colleagues on a consistent basis. For instance, middle school teachers must be able to work together to find a solution if they have the same student who is struggling academically or behaviorally (Pogodzinski, 2014).

Research has shown schools with positive working conditions consist of a supportive culture in which everyone is on the same page, whereas a school with negative working conditions may involve disrespectful treatment from administrators and colleagues (Cucchiara, Rooney, & Robertson-Kraft, 2015; Rankin, 2017). Such treatment from colleagues can impact job satisfaction (Cucchiara et al., 2015). As a result of collegial support contributing to low job satisfaction in veteran teachers, Rankin (2017) suggested focusing on a positive perspective

rather than a negative attitude and also recommended avoiding colleagues who spend more time complaining instead of trying to find solutions to problems in the school or classroom.

Colleagues who constantly blame students, parents, or administration for issues within the classroom should also be avoided (Rankin, 2017). Furthermore, a bad attitude can go a long way in creating a negative atmosphere. Teachers who constantly complain increase the likelihood of feeling exhausted, as Rankin (2017) indicated.

Collegial experience with other teachers is a major factor emphasized in this study as it connects to Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST. Because school faculty is considered an immediate social agent in the environment of teachers, it is important to describe how veteran teachers with low job satisfaction interact with their colleagues and how those interactions may affect their job satisfaction level.

Administrative Leadership and Support

One significant factor in determining teacher job satisfaction is administrative leadership and support, and administrative support affects the attitudes of teachers because that support has an impact on educators' access to resources, work assignments, and evaluations (Pogodzinski, 2014). Song and Mustafa (2015) pointed out that when it comes to administrative leadership and support, teachers often desire greater support in implementing instructional methods, accessing curriculum materials, and dealing with student-discipline problems. In positive school environments, a supportive culture is developed by administration as opposed to disrespectful treatment from administrators in negative school environments (Cucchiara et al., 2015). Not only is administrative support vital, but the leadership is equally influential in increasing commitment and impacting teachers' intent to stay in the profession (Song & Mustafa, 2015; Thibodeaux et al., 2015). For instance, administrative leadership may impact teachers

emotionally. If educators constantly encounter negative leadership in their school environments, they are likely to experience emotional exhaustion (Dou et al., 2016).

Administrative support consists of a variety of elements such as coaching, mentoring, and providing emotional support (Graham, 2015). Administrators often coach teachers in helping to establish a positive learning environment. Coaching educators involves telling teachers how to reach goals within the school environment (Graham, 2015). Thibodeaux et al. (2015) noted that administrators also mentor teachers and help them grow professionally. Because teaching is often a challenging profession, administrators provide emotional support for teachers when needed. If administrators do not lead effectively or offer proper support, the job satisfaction of teachers can be greatly impacted (Dou et al., 2016; Thibodeaux et al., 2015).

Administrative leadership and support is another factor that was examined in this study as it is closely connected to Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) theory. As previously stated, school faculty is an immediate social agent in the environment of middle school teachers. Although administrators would fall into the microsystem level, when they make decisions that impact their teachers, they become part of the exosystem.

Disruptive Student Behavior

Disruptive student behavior is another contributing factor of low job satisfaction among teachers (Fernandez et al., 2015; Gray et al., 2017; Rocchi & Camire, 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Because middle school teachers typically teach one subject, they are faced with the challenge of teaching a large number of students daily. In addition to the stress of dealing with disruptive students, teachers must meet the needs of all learners. Effectively managing classrooms and responding to the diverse needs of students is a major source of teacher stress (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2015). Low job satisfaction in teachers not only affects themselves,

but it also affects students. Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2015) stated that teachers with heavy workloads may constantly feel negative, exhausted, and irritable toward students.

According to Waterman (2013), teachers who have disruptive students in their classrooms often deal with students who live troubled lives at home, which often interferes with their ability to function in a classroom setting where structure and discipline are necessary. Furthermore, troubled adolescents are less likely to function appropriately in society (Waterman, 2013). Research has shown teachers often complain about students who have a lack of respect for authority and peers, self-control, ability to properly deal with frustration, and empathy (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Waterman, 2013).

Disruptive students demonstrate various behaviors that negatively affect the learning environment. Some of these behaviors include fighting with other students, damaging school property or other people's belongings, frequently getting out of seats at inappropriate times, using profanity or providing disrespectful responses, arguing and bickering with teachers, and chronic talking (Waterman, 2013). Teachers encountering these behaviors regularly in the classroom risk experiencing emotional exhaustion (Collie & Martin, 2017).

Disruptive student behavior is another factor that was examined in this study. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST, students are microsystems in the environment of middle school teachers. Interactions with disruptive students can have a negative effect on the job satisfaction of veteran teachers. When applying Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) theory, the interactions between students and their parents may also affect teachers as disruptive students may act out in the classroom as a result of an event that occurred at home. Because disruptive behavior from students is a contributing factor in low job satisfaction among middle school

teachers, it must be addressed. Teachers who experience low job satisfaction may find it difficult to deal with these students or discipline them properly (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

Parental Involvement

One of the most vital elements in a successful school is parental involvement as it can strengthen the success of a school and increase student achievement (Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2016; Hall & Quinn, 2014; Im et al., 2016). Although parents are significant stakeholders in education, they can cause a great deal of frustration for teachers and even become one of the leading causes for leaving the profession. Waterman (2013) stated that negative perception of parental involvement often comes in two forms: a lack of parental involvement and adversarial parents.

According to Waterman (2013), a lack of parental involvement can be recognized if a school hosts a meeting, such as a parent-teacher conference, and only a few parents attend. As a result, teachers often feel frustrated due to the lack of support when dealing with a parent's child. Benner et al. (2016) suggested a lack of parental involvement could be the result of barriers between teachers and parents. Some of these barriers include a lack of understanding in cultural identity, communication, and organizational barriers. If teachers do not have an understanding of the parents' cultural identity, they may have difficulty interpreting a child's academic performance and behavior (Benner et al., 2016).

A lack of parental involvement may also be due to communication issues (Benner et al., 2016; Waterman, 2013). Sometimes communication between teachers and parents can be misinterpreted which causes greater problems and potentially effects the rapport teachers have with parents. When it comes to organizational barriers, parents may lack an understanding in school policies and procedures that may affect their child. Not understanding school policies and

procedures can cause parents to feel intimidated about being more involved in their child's education (Benner et al., 2016; Waterman, 2013).

Adversarial parents are another form of teacher frustration as Waterman (2013) suggested. These types of parents demonstrate behavior contrary to parents who show a lack of involvement. Unfortunately, teachers view adversarial parents as intrusive and find interactions with these parents difficult. Adversarial parents often blame teachers and administrators for issues concerning their child and rarely take responsibility for these issues (Hall & Quinn, 2014). Furthermore, continuous interactions with adversarial parents without solutions to solve problems in the interest of their children or students can become emotionally exhausting for teachers (Collie & Martin, 2017). Based on Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST, parents are microsystems in teachers' immediate environment; therefore, a negative relationship between teachers and parents can impact the mesosystem of teachers, which could then contribute to teachers experiencing low job satisfaction in the teaching profession.

Extracurricular Activities

According to Rocchi and Camire (2017), extracurricular activities are a significant component to the school environment as they influence school life. Rocchi and Camire (2017) stated some of the activities that take place after school hours include academic clubs, school involvement organizations, performing arts, and sports. Teachers facilitating or sponsoring extracurricular activities are expected to manage the needs of their students, plan meetings, organize transportation when traveling, and oversee administrative tasks (Rocchi & Camire, 2017). Sponsoring extracurricular activities may cause teachers to experience low job satisfaction due to the additional workload these responsibilities create. Although sponsoring extracurricular activities does have benefits such as developing relationships, there are negative

outcomes, including stress, burnout, and not enough attention to classroom responsibilities (Rocchi & Camire, 2017). As previously discussed, educators who facilitate or sponsor extracurricular activities are forced to spend hours away from their families, which impacts the mesosystem of Bronfenbrenner's EST.

Summary

Chapter Two included an examination of Bronfenbrenner's EST and how it connects to the study of veteran middle school teachers' lived experiences with low job satisfaction in rural Tennessee. Each of the five levels of Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) theory were discussed as well as their application to a veteran middle school teacher's environment. Along with examining EST and its connection to the development of teachers throughout their careers, this chapter was also focused on key components relating to the study of job satisfaction in middle school teachers. Literature relating to this study consists of multiple aspects concerning job satisfaction and vital areas in the teaching profession and they play a role in impacting educators' job satisfaction. This chapter also further emphasized the causes of low job satisfaction among rural teachers such as teacher workload, collegial experiences with other educators, administrative support, and disruptive student behavior.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

To fully understand the essence of an individual's experience, Creswell (2013) recommended qualitative inquiry for researchers. Chapter Three includes discussion of the various methods that were used to conduct this study. A transcendental phenomenological design was used to understand low job satisfaction as a lived experience for veteran middle school teachers in rural Tennessee. In addition to answering the central research question, this

transcendental phenomenological study was conducted to understand how veteran teachers' job-related experiences in their environment impact their individual development and their attitudes toward their profession.

This study included 10 veteran middle school teachers with 5 or more years of experience who self-reported as experiencing low job satisfaction. These participants came from different middle schools in rural school districts. Purposeful sampling was implemented to recruit participants who were veteran middle school teachers and self-reported as experiencing low job satisfaction. Chapter Three also includes discussion of procedures that were performed as well as my role in the research. The significance of the interviews, an online focus group interview, and reflective journal in this study will be emphasized. Data analysis and steps to ensure trustworthiness and to address ethical considerations conclude this chapter.

Design

It is important to understand the purpose of the research in order to implement the appropriate method, design, and approach. In this study, qualitative inquiry was used as this method is used to “empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). A transcendental phenomenological design was used to “understand the essence of the experience with the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology is valuable in research as it is focused on the study of human experiences, which cannot be completely understood through quantitative research. A transcendental phenomenological design was appropriate for this study as the primary focus was to understand the meaning and the nature of the participants' experiences. To obtain descriptions of participants and collect data, interviews with participants individually and in groups were

conducted (Moustakas, 1994).

A transcendental phenomenological research design was appropriate for the study as the goal was to understand veteran middle school teachers' perceptions of low job satisfaction as a lived experience in rural Tennessee. As a novice researcher and middle school educator, it was important for me to bracket my own experience and knowledge concerning the challenges associated with the phenomenon, which was low job satisfaction (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Because I am a middle school teacher in a rural school district and have experienced seasons of dissatisfaction during my career, I had to bracket myself from the research, so I could examine the phenomenon with fresh eyes (Moustakas, 1994) and without any presumptions.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction as a lived experience in rural Tennessee?

Research Subquestions

SQ1. What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions in rural Tennessee of the ways their workload and work environment impact job satisfaction?

SQ2. What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions in rural Tennessee of the ways their collegial experience with other teachers impacts job satisfaction?

SQ3. What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions in rural Tennessee of the ways that administrative leadership and support with their school environment impacts job satisfaction?

SQ4. What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions in rural Tennessee of the ways that student behavior impacts job satisfaction?

Setting

According to the 2010 Census, 93% of the state of Tennessee is considered rural (Tennessee Department of Health, 2018). Multiple school districts in Tennessee were contacted to obtain permission to conduct the study (see Appendix A). Two public school districts in middle Tennessee were selected to participate in the study as there is a need to examine the job-related experiences of rural middle school teachers with low job satisfaction. In one participating school district, the student-teacher ratio was 15:1. The other participating school district consisted of a student-teacher ratio of 16:1.

Student diversity varied among the participating school districts. In School District 1, student diversity is identified as the following: 81% White, 13% Hispanic, 3% African American, 2% Asian, and 1% other. Student diversity for School District 2 consisted of 93% White, 3% African American, 2% Hispanic, and 2% other. The middle schools in the selected school districts contained large student populations. In School District 1, two middle schools contained approximately 800 students each and 40 teachers each. One middle school in this school district has 46% of students receiving free or reduced lunch and 56% of the other middle school student body received free or reduced lunch. Overall, the county has a poverty rate of 24%. School District 2 contained a middle school consisting of 900 students and 50 teachers on staff. Nearly 75% of these students receive free or reduced lunch. The poverty rate for the county is 18%.

Participants

The phenomenon examined in this research study was low job satisfaction as a lived experience for veteran middle school teachers in rural Tennessee. A total of 12 participants were recruited to participate in this study; however, due the withdrawal of two participants from this

study, data was collected from 10 participants. Participants were selected because they were educators with 5 years or more of teaching experience, taught students in grades 6-8 in a rural middle school, and self-reported as experiencing low job satisfaction. Selected participants consisted of 10 white middle school educators in middle Tennessee. Two participants were males and eight were females. One participant was between the ages of 25-34, four participants were between the ages of 35-44, and five were between the ages of 45-54. One participant had 5-10 years of teaching experience, four had 11-15 years of teaching experience, one had 15-20 years of teaching experience, and four had 20 or more years of teaching experience. Two participants had teaching experience at the middle school level only and the other eight participants had experience both at the elementary and middle school level. To determine participants who qualified, a survey in the form of a questionnaire was used.

Questionnaire

Paul E. Spector's Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) was used to determine participants who met the criteria of experiencing low levels in job satisfaction (see Appendix B). This survey is accessible to anyone conducting research; however, Spector (2011) requested that the results of the survey be shared. According to Spector (1997), job satisfaction reflects the function of an organization: "Job satisfaction is simply how people feel about their jobs and different aspects of their jobs. It is the extent to which people like (satisfaction) or dislike (dissatisfaction) their jobs" (p. 2).

Coworkers, job conditions, nature of the work, organization, policies and procedures, communication, appreciation, personal growth, pay, fringe benefits, recognition, supervision, promotion opportunities, and security are job satisfaction facets the JSS measures (Spector, 1997). The JSS contains 36 items, which are measured from 1 (*strongest disagreement*) and 6

(*strongest agreement*). High scores indicate job satisfaction and low scores indicate low job satisfaction. Before being scored, items that are negatively worded must be reversed. Spector (1999) stated the cut score for the JSS is broken into three categories. A score of 144–216 shows high job satisfaction and a score of 36–108 indicates low job satisfaction. A score of 108–144 reveals feelings of doubt concerning the job. To determine the years of teaching experience of potential participants, an additional question was added to the survey.

Procedures

While conducting this transcendental phenomenological study, it was important to plan the procedures properly and deliberately. Upon receiving approval from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix C) to conduct the study, approval from superintendents was granted to conduct the study at middle schools in their school districts. Principals were asked for permission to send a link to a questionnaire to teachers to complete. Spector's JSS was used as it consists of 36 items to measure job satisfaction of individuals. This instrument was used to identify veteran teachers who self-reported as experiencing low job satisfaction. The JSS has been implemented in multiple studies concerning job satisfaction. To encourage responses, a follow-up reminder was sent to middle school teachers in selected school districts. Teachers were notified they had been selected to participate in the study via email. They received a consent form notifying them of the conditions to participate in the study and were informed they could withdrawal from the study at any point (see Appendix D).

This transcendental phenomenological study included individual open-ended interviews, an online focus group interview, and a reflective journal. In a phenomenological study, epoché and bracketing are vital methods as the researcher must set aside any biases or presumptions about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Gathering data from participants

consisted of the individual interviews and an online focus group interview. A reflective journal was completed by participants to provide additional information about participants' experiences with the phenomenon (Todd-Gibson, 2017). Interviews were audio-recorded and stored electronically on a password protected computer. Participants were interviewed individually in their schools. The online focus group interview was conducted online as participants remained at their schools and discussed the interview questions. Reflective journals were conducted electronically as participants were emailed the prompts. Participants responded to the prompts and emailed their journals back to me.

The Researcher's Role

As the researcher of this study, it was important to recognize my role as the key instrument. I collected data through interviews with participants and journal responses from participants. It was also vital to address potential biases that might have been present as well as my relationship to the participants (Creswell, 2013). One commonality presented in this study is position in the educational system. Although I am a novice teacher and my participants were veteran teachers, we are all rural middle school teachers. Through teaching in a rural middle school in Tennessee and attending multiple professional development opportunities, I have encountered veteran teachers from rural school districts who have expressed deep dissatisfaction with the teaching profession. As the researcher, my relationship to the setting is emic as I am an insider, or full participant, in the rural school system. My relationship concerning my participants is etic because I am an outsider as a novice teacher. Furthermore, I am also objective when it comes to the job-related experiences of veteran educators as I have not experienced the phenomenon in the way my participants have (Orey & Rosa, 2015).

Data Collection

For this research study, a variety of data collection was used to gather significant information that will contribute to expanding the literature on teacher job satisfaction as well as literature concerning rural education. The methods used to conduct this study included: (a) individual interviews, (b) a focus group interview, and (c) a reflective journal.

Interviews

Interviews are dialogues conducted between the interviewer and the interviewee. According to Høffding and Martiny (2016), interviews in phenomenological research provide a distinct source of information as they are focused on understanding participants' experiences. In teacher research, interviews are a powerful method in data collection as the goal is to gain detailed descriptions and interpretations of teachers' experiences and to understand those experiences (Dignath & Buttner, 2018; Donaldson, 2019; Høffding & Martiny, 2016.) In addition, Xerri (2018) explained that interviews in teacher research present more in-depth information than do other methods of data collection. Following are the standardized open-ended interview questions with the central research question (CRQ) and/or the research subquestion (SQ) noted in parentheses for each.

1. Please introduce yourself as if we have just met. Describe your profession, including how long you have been teaching and what grade(s) and subject(s) you teach.
2. When did you decide to pursue a career in education? What motivated you to become a teacher?
3. Why did you choose to teach at the middle school level? If you previously taught at an elementary or high school, how is middle school different?
4. What are your job-related experiences as a middle school educator? (CRQ)

5. What is your experience with workload as a teacher? (SQ1)
6. What is your experience working with your colleagues? (SQ2)
7. What is your experience with administrative leadership and support? (SQ3)
8. What is your experience with students, particularly disruptive students? (SQ4)
9. What successes or accomplishments are you most proud of as an educator?
10. What do you see yourself doing in 3 years?
11. What final thoughts would you like to add to this interview?

Questions 1 through 3 served as icebreakers to not only get participants comfortable with the interview process, but also to gain important background information about each participant. Romm (2016) discussed psychologist Anton Villado's philosophy on incorporating icebreakers, and suggested icebreakers can be effective when used properly. Using icebreakers can make participants feel less anxious about being in a new situation. Romm also stated that icebreakers set the tone for the session in which participants are involved; therefore, the facilitator can control the first impression. Participants are also encouraged to talk about themselves using this effective tool (Romm, 2016). Through these questions, I hoped to learn about the participants' position in teaching, motivation to become an educator, and their educational philosophies.

Question 4 represented the central research question, prompting participants to describe their job-related experiences as middle school educators. Teachers have a variety of responsibilities they are expected to fulfill such as planning lesson plans, evaluating diverse student abilities, and communicating with multiple educational stakeholders (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018; Desousky & Allam, 2017). The NEA (2017) provided multiple causes of low job satisfaction among rural educators such as a lack of resources, isolation, and small-town dynamics. This question was significant to the study due to the participants sharing their lived

experiences of a common phenomenon of their job-related experiences as rural veteran middle school teachers with low job satisfaction.

Questions 5 through 8 elicited responses about participants' job-related experiences and how their environment impacted their individual development and attitudes toward their profession. For instance, research has shown how teacher workload (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015), collegial experience (Rankin, 2017), administrative leadership and support (Dou et al., 2016; Thibodeaux et al., 2015), and disruptive student behavior (Waterman, 2013) contribute to teacher job satisfaction. Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that the immediate environment of an individual impacts his or her development. The working environment of teachers is one of the immediate environments as they spend long hours after school performing job-related responsibilities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

Questions 9 through 11 were reflective questions and served to close the individual interview. They allowed participants to reflect on their careers thus far and think about future endeavors concerning their careers. The final question allowed each participant to provide any final thoughts concerning the interview. This encouraged participants to reflect on their previous responses and potentially elaborate on points made during the interview.

Online Focus Group Interview

The purpose of a focus group interview is to observe and obtain additional information through the participants' experiences and reactions to the phenomenon that might not be gathered through other methods of data collection such as questionnaires or individual interviews (Creswell, 2013; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010; Gulliksen & Hjardemaal, 2016; Hofman & Sutherland, 2018). According to Woodyatt, Finneran, and Stephenson (2016), when compared to in-person interviews, online focus groups have equal potential to gather high-quality

information. Within this method of data collection, participants could potentially reveal additional insight or information concerning their job-related experiences that may not be revealed during the individual interviews.

Online discussion forums also allow participants to share their thoughts and feelings anonymously (Sroufe, 2013). Using an online discussion forum to conduct the focus group interview was also beneficial for this study as participants resided in distant locations in Tennessee. The following questions (with the central research question (CRQ) and/or the research subquestion (SQ) noted in parentheses for each) were asked in the focus group interview:

1. What comes to mind when you think about teaching?
2. What do you think is the most difficult aspect of being a rural middle school teacher in Tennessee? (CRQ)
3. What role do standards and standardized assessments play in your profession and how you feel about teaching? (SQ1)
4. What do you wish educational stakeholders outside the classroom (i.e., parents, administrators, school board members, and policymakers) knew about your job? (SQ3)
5. What would you like to add to previous comments or statements made in this online focus group interview?

These questions allowed participants to reflect on their experiences in the teaching profession. Because these questions were asked in a group setting, they provided an advantage in gathering the best information because participants are likely to be cooperative and comfortable. In an individual setting, they may have been hesitant to provide information (Creswell, 2013).

Question 1 served as the icebreaker to get participants comfortable with each other (Romm, 2016). Questions 2 through 4 dealt more with job-related experiences and components that contribute to low job satisfaction in the teaching profession (NEA, 2017). Question 5 allowed participants to reflect on the accuracy of their responses (Creswell, 2013).

Reflective Journal

A reflective journal was a beneficial method of data collection in this study as journals encourage reflective thoughts (Lindroth, 2014). According to Bashan and Holsblat (2017), reflective journals are effective methods of data collection in phenomenological studies. When it comes to documentation in research studies, reflective journals have contributed to the field of business administration, nursing, and education (Bashan & Holsblat, 2017). In this study, participants responded to four journal prompts. The journals were in an electronic format and viewable only by the researcher. Reflective journals provide a researcher with the opportunity to enhance awareness of thoughts and feelings as well as demonstrate purposeful thinking concerning information gathered from experiences (Lindroth, 2014; Woronchak & Comeau, 2016). This data collection method provided additional information regarding participants' experiences with the phenomenon. Participants were asked to respond to the following journal prompts (with the central research question (CRQ) and/or the research subquestion (SQ) noted in parentheses for each):

1. If a visitor assisted you at school for a day, what could they expect? (CRQ)
2. How do you manage your workload as a teacher? (SQ1)
3. How do you relate to colleagues, students, administrators, and parents? (SQ2, SQ3, and SQ4)
4. What expectations do you have of school administrators? (SQ3)

Question 1 was designed to understand participants' perceptions of their lived experiences. According to Desouky and Allam (2017), teaching is a demanding profession as it can be challenging physically and mentally as well as require a great deal of energy in the classroom. By reflecting on their perceptions of lived experiences in a school setting, participants had the opportunity to reveal additional information through this journal prompt. Question 2 was designed to understand how participants manage their workload in school. According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015), teacher workload is a contributing factor in low job satisfaction among educators. In addition, heavy workloads influence job satisfaction, morale, and the quality of life among teachers (Johari et al., 2018). This question garnered a greater understanding of participants' workloads and how they manage their responsibilities.

Question 3 was designed to understand participants' connection with microsystems in their work environment. Research has shown teachers often interact with administrators, students, and parents (Benner et al., 2016; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Song & Mustafa, 2015; Thibodeaux et al., 2015), and this question elicited additional information concerning administrators, students, and parents. Question 4 was designed to understand participants' perceptions of administrators. According to Song and Mustafa (2015), teachers desire greater support from administrators, including accessing curriculum materials, implementing instructional methods, and dealing with student-discipline problems (Song & Mustafa, 2015; Thibodeaux et al., 2015). This question served to create the opportunity for participants to provide additional information about how they perceived administrative leadership and support in their schools.

Data Analysis

In this transcendental phenomenological study, a process of data analysis was followed to properly conduct the study as well as analyze data collected and observed. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research examines firsthand accounts of real-life experiences from participants; therefore, knowledge and interpretations must go through processes to understanding the meanings and essences of the experience. For this study, the meanings and essences were teachers' perceptions of low job satisfaction as a lived experience in rural Tennessee.

According to Creswell (2013), bracketing out personal views and relating personal experiences with the phenomenon before describing the experiences of participants is an important process. To eliminate biases in the study, I kept a researcher journal to record my preconceived ideas of low job satisfaction as a lived experience prior to conducting research (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) recommended a modified version of van Kaam's (1959, 1966) method of data analysis for transcendental phenomenological research, which was used in this study. The first step of data analysis used in the study was horizontalization, which gives everything in a research study equal value (Moustakas, 1994). After conducting interviews with participants individually and the online focus group interview, the interviews were transcribed using Weloty transcription services and placed before me. After receiving the reflective journals electronically, they were uploaded to Nvivo 12. Every relevant statement from the interviews and journal prompts concerning participants' experiences of low job satisfaction was listed and irrelevant statements were ignored (Moustakas, 1994; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015).

I wrote memos in the form of key concepts or short phrases in the margins of the transcripts and printed copies of the reflective journals to allow me to fully absorb the data in

front of me before breaking it apart (Creswell, 2013). Upon identifying relevant statements, reducing and eliminating those expressions took place (van Kaam, 1959, 1966). Statements that were not vital to the study were eliminated and those that remained were categorized into themes. Using Nvivo 12, coding was implemented to label important words or phrases and to make sense of data (Elliott, 2018). Codes were categorized into themes (Creswell, 2013). Nvivo 12 allowed me to look at statements from participants line by line as well as retrieve memos related to codes or themes (Creswell, 2013). After coding and determining themes, I constructed textural descriptions of participants' experiences with low job satisfaction. The final step of analyzing data for the study was to explain the meanings and essences of each participants' experience with the phenomenon and how those experiences occurred (Moustakas, 1994; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015).

Trustworthiness

Ensuring the validity of this research study was critical and was established through trustworthiness. Polit and Beck (2014) stated trustworthiness is the extent to which assurance in methods, data, and interpretations are used to protect the quality of a study. Various methods were used to strengthen credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. These elements of trustworthiness not only contributed to the validity of this study, but they also contributed to ethical considerations that will be addressed in the following sections.

Credibility

In this study of veteran teachers' perceptions of low job satisfaction as a lived experience in rural Tennessee, establishing credibility was essential. According to Polit and Beck (2014), credibility is the assurance in the truth of the findings of a study. Using triangulation is suggested to confirm credibility as this process utilizes multiple methods and different sources to

provide valid evidence (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation was appropriate for this study as individual interviews, an online focus group interview, and reflective journals were used to collect data. Member checks, peer review, and a researcher journal were also used to further establish credibility in the study.

Dependability and Confirmability

Not only was it important to demonstrate credibility, but it was also vital that this study showed dependability and confirmability. Polit and Beck (2014) stated that dependability is the stability of data over time. To ensure findings of the study were dependable, triangulation was used. The interviews with participants individually and the online focus group interview were audio-recorded to decrease the risk of misquoting or misinterpreting participants. Creswell (2013) encouraged the implementation of member checks, which is a method that provided participants of the present study an opportunity to view the credibility of the findings and interpretations from this researcher. Upon completion of the individual interviews, participants received a transcript of the interviews to verify accuracy and credibility. This method was used for the reflective journals as I shared with participants my findings and interpretations from their responses. For the online focus group interview, participants were asked to reflect on the accuracy of the account rather than view transcripts (Creswell, 2013).

According to Polit and Beck (2014), confirmability is the extent to which the findings of a study are consistent and could be repeated. For the present study of teachers' perceptions of low job satisfaction as a lived experience in Tennessee, an additional set of eyes were beneficial to confirm meanings and interpretations of data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended implementing peer reviews in the research process. In the present study, experts in the field of education who hold advanced degrees assisted in analyzing data and reports from this researcher

(Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). In addition, I kept a private researcher journal to bracket my own presumptions and knowledge of low job satisfaction as a lived experience (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a study are useful to individuals in other settings (Polit & Beck, 2014). Creswell (2013) stated transferability in a study occurs when details in the development of the study as well as themes found are discussed. For the present study, terms frequently used throughout the study such as *veteran teacher*, *middle school*, *job-related experiences*, and *low job satisfaction* were clearly defined. The transferability of the study will allow educators in other schools to examine their own experiences in the teaching profession. Furthermore, the results of this study will allow administrators in other school settings to become more aware of the needs of their teachers, especially those experiencing low job satisfaction, and provide them adequate support.

Ethical Considerations

Protecting the rights of participants and maintaining their confidentiality was the top priority in this study of teachers' perceptions of low job satisfaction as a lived experience in rural Tennessee. Prior to conducting the study, IRB approval was obtained to further protect participants' rights and ensure the study was ethical. In addition, permission from participating school districts was granted for the right to conduct research at their middle schools. Upon approval from the IRB, participants were provided an informed consent form prior to conducting the study (see Appendix D). This form provided details of the methods to be used in the study, such as an individual interviews, an online focus group interview, and a reflective journal. Participants were informed of the confidentiality of the study such as the use of pseudonyms for

the setting and participants so statements from participants would not reveal their identities. Furthermore, participants were given the right to review transcripts of their interviews and analysis of their journal responses and had the opportunity to reflect on their responses from the online focus group interview. In addition, the informed consent form included a statement of participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time. To keep statements from participants confidential, a password-protected computer was used and data will be securely stored for 3 years. When not in use, the computer software and researcher journal will be kept locked. After 3 years, research data will be destroyed electronically or shredded, as appropriate. At the conclusion of the study, incentives in the form of \$50 Amazon gift cards were provided for participants to express gratitude for their time and participation (Creswell, 2013).

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand veteran teachers' perceptions of low job satisfaction as a lived experience in rural Tennessee. Information on the rural school districts in Tennessee participating in the study, including student populations and the number of educators on staff for each middle school, was provided in this chapter. In addition, a description of the participants recruited for the study was discussed. Participants had 5 or more years of teaching experience, taught in a rural middle school, and self-reported as experiencing low job satisfaction as indicated by Spector's JSS. Steps for analyzing data through the process of horizontalization was also discussed in this chapter. Chapter Three also detailed the use of interviews, an online focus group interview, and a reflective journal and how data collected from these research methods contributed to the study. The steps taken to ensure trustworthiness in the study such as the use of triangulation, member checks, peer review, and a researcher journal were discussed. Furthermore, Chapter Three highlighted the process of

protecting the rights of participants and keeping their identities confidential, which consisted of gaining IRB approval, providing participants with a detailed informed consent form prior to conducting the study, and using a password-protected computer to store the collected data.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of veteran middle school teachers with low job satisfaction in rural Tennessee. This chapter contains a summary of participants, including their teaching experience and grade level taught. Theme development and responses to research questions are presented in the results section. Data collected from interviews, online focus group interview, and reflective journals were analyzed to develop themes. The themes and subthemes developed from the data are presented in the form of a narrative. Responses from participants are also presented in narrative form to support themes and subthemes discovered. In addition, direct quotes from participants' interviews and journal entries are included to provide greater insight into their lived experiences concerning job satisfaction in rural Tennessee and perceptions of various aspects in the teaching profession and how they impact job satisfaction.

Participants

A total of 10 middle school teachers in rural Tennessee agreed to participate in the study. All participating teachers worked with students in Grades 6–8 at their middle schools. Requirements of the research study were met as all participants taught in rural middle schools in Tennessee, had 5 or more years of teaching experience, and self-reported as experiencing low job satisfaction. Teachers interested in participating in the study completed Spector's JSS and the results were scored by this researcher following Spector's (1994) scoring instructions. Teachers were informed via email of being selected to participate in the study and were sent a consent form which was collected prior to the first interview with each participant. Selected teachers participated in individual interviews, an online focus group interview, and a reflective journal.

To protect the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms were provided and used throughout the study rather than using teachers' actual names. Schools and school districts were not mentioned in the results to further protect participants' confidentiality.

To gather information about participants' teaching experience, teachers were asked to describe what grade they were currently teaching and if they had teaching experience at another grade level. Eight of the participants had experience teaching students at the elementary level before transitioning to the middle schools where they were currently teaching. The other two participants had only taught at the middle school level. Gathering information about participants' teaching experience prior to the grade they taught at the conduction of this study was important to determine as they would likely be able to provide additional information about the pressures and challenges at the middle school level and how their experiences at the middle school level compared to the elementary level. Three teachers were responsible for teaching more than one grade and the other seven teachers were responsible for teaching one grade.

Educators' years of teaching experience varied as at the time of the study, one had 5–10 years, four had 11–15 years, one had 16–20 years, three had 21–25 years, and one had 26–30 years. All participants had a different path that led them to teach at the middle school level, which is discussed in each middle school teacher's biographical summary. Table 1 provides a summary of the information about participants in this study. Included in Table 1 are participants' years of teaching experience, the grade levels they currently teach, and school level experience at the elementary, middle school, or high school level.

Table 1

Teaching Experience of Participants

Name	Gender	Years of experience	Grade(s) taught	School level experience
Annie	Female	14	6	Middle only
Carol	Female	22	8	Elem. & middle
Denise	Female	30	6–8	Elem. & middle
Joe	Male	13	8	Elem. & middle
Kelly	Female	21	6	Elem. & middle
Kevin	Male	15	8	Elem. & middle
Mary	Female	13	6–8	Elem. & middle
Olivia	Female	19	7–8	Elem. & middle
Suzie	Female	6	6	Middle only
Veronica	Female	21	8	Elem. & middle

Annie

At the time of the study, Annie had taught for 14 years. She was a counselor and Spanish teacher before her current position of teaching sixth grade math. Annie originally pursued a career as a CPA, but decided that was not what she wanted to do. She discovered her love of teaching when she reluctantly taught Sunday School at her church due to the need for more teachers. It took only two Sunday Schools for her to realize she wanted to become a teacher professionally. Annie had a wonderful experience student teaching her sixth grade class and knew she wanted to teach at the middle school level:

I particularly enjoy it because at elementary school if you teach the lower grades, there's a lot of wiping noses and stuff like that. The middle school, students tend to catch the puns and things like that. So, I just enjoy them.

Carol

At the time of the study, Carol had been teaching for 22 years. She has taught eighth grade social studies for 18 of those years. Prior to her current position, Carol taught second grade and fourth grade at the elementary level and sixth grade at the middle school level. Her motivation to become a teacher was her love of history. She mentioned that her goal in education was always to end up at a middle school. When describing how middle school students are different than elementary students, Carol stated:

Elementary are needy, more needy than middle school as far as basic, “tie your shoe, wipe your nose,” that type of thing. I enjoy the middle school better because I’m not tied to the mama as much as more educator, but with the middle school level you deal with the hormones and the boyfriend and girlfriend scenarios. So, you’re still acting more like mama, but it’s not in the same role as in elementary.

Denise

At the time of the study, Denise taught math intervention for middle school students and she had been in the teaching profession for 30 years. For the first three years of her career, Denise taught third grade before teaching math for sixth–eighth grades. She also participated in extracurricular activities such as coaching basketball and softball. Along with her current position, Denise is the positive behavior support coordinator for her school. When asked what motivated her to pursue a career in education, Denise mentioned the influence of great teachers when she was in school. When she was in college, Denise majored in computer science before switching to education. She spoke highly of one of her professors and the influence she had on her decision to change majors. Denise stated, “She was absolutely wonderful, and so I thought that would be just amazing to be able to have a job like that. You could just tell she loved it.”

At the time, Denise also worked at a daycare and loved being around the children, which also played a role in changing her major.

Joe

At the time of the study, Joe was an eighth grade math teacher with 13 years of teaching experience. He stated that he did not have the typical journey most teachers have when pursuing a career in education. Prior to becoming a teacher, Joe worked at a factory for 23 years. He was motivated to pursue a career in education when he thought about his teachers. One teacher in particular taught history in a way that made him feel as though he were there in time. From there, Joe felt like teaching would be an intriguing job to have even though he went another direction in life. When describing his desire to change careers, Joe stated, “I really thought about teaching and I thought, ‘What a great job that would be dealing with youth and young people and trying to help shape and mold young minds.’” Joe also said that he remembers what it was like as a middle school student and he wanted to be someone who could help provide some stability in their lives.

Kelly

At the time of the study, Kelly was a sixth grade math teacher and had been teaching for 21 years. Prior to teaching, Kelly worked in accounting for 2 years before going back to school to become a teacher. Originally, she had wanted to pursue a career in education, but she wanted to make more money. Kelly taught elementary school children for 10 years before transitioning to the middle school. When describing the differences between elementary and middle school students, Kelly stated,

I taught all the subjects when I was at the elementary school. So, you could kind of pace yourself during the day if you wanted to spend 2 hours on math and 30 minutes on

reading or whatever that you could. Here, you're more confined to a specific time limit, but the students are more independent than they were at the elementary school.

Kevin

At the time of the study, Kevin was a social studies teacher and had taught for 15 years. Growing up with parents who were educators influenced him to pursue a career working with children. Kevin worked as a social worker for many years, but did not feel that was his calling in life, so he entered into the education profession. At the time of the interview, Kevin was teaching eighth grade social studies. Prior to teaching eighth grade, Kevin taught sixth grade for 3 years. Kevin stated that he hopes people see “a person who wants his kids to succeed,” if they were to visit his classroom.

Mary

At the time of the study, Mary was teaching social emotional learning to students in Grades 6–8 in her school district. Prior to her current position, Mary taught special education reading and mathematics. At the time of the interview, she was in her 13th year of teaching. Mary was motivated to become a teacher simply because she wanted to be a special education teacher even though she originally majored in nursing. She was in her mid-20s when she went back to school to finish her degree and switched her major to education. Although the elementary level was more ideal for Mary, she believes the nature of her job is what caused her to focus primarily on middle school level children: “Elementary would have been my first pick but I guess just the assignment of my job is really what led me to middle school. They just have a different maturity level which takes a different train of thought.”

Olivia

At the time of the study, Olivia was teaching seventh and eighth grade English language arts. Before earning her bachelor's degree in education, Olivia had an associate degree and had the opportunity to work with AmeriCorps where she worked with at-risk students and those who were failing. When describing her experience with AmeriCorps and her motivation to pursue a career in education, Olivia stated,

So, I had the opportunity to be in the school system and work with at-risk children whether it be an educational deficit or some factor at home that affected their truancy and that type of thing. It really opened my eyes to the fact that that's what I wanted to do because I wanted to make a difference.

At the time of the interview, Olivia had taught for 19 years. For the first three years of her career, Olivia taught art for K-8 before teaching English language arts. She stated that she enjoyed teaching art to all grade levels, but the upper grades, which consisted of middle school level students, were more difficult to teach. Olivia mentioned students in the upper grades were often more hesitant or resistant when it came to schoolwork.

Suzie

At the time of the study, Suzie is a sixth grade English language arts teacher and had taught for 6 years. She was inspired by her first and sixth grade teachers to pursue a career in education. When describing her motivation and influences in education, Suzie stated,

For as long as I can remember, I've always wanted to be a teacher even, like, looking back in kindergarten when they would ask us what you want to be when you grow up. I've always said, "teacher." My sixth grade ELA teacher, or reading teacher, she inspired me to love reading and that's when I first started really reading for the fun of it. So, I've

always wanted to be in education, but I think those two teachers probably motivated me to actually become a teacher later on.

Veronica

At the time of the study, Veronica had been teaching for 21 years. She taught elementary school students before transitioning to the middle school level where she has taught eighth grade English language arts. When asked about her motivation to become a teacher, Veronica stated,

It's kind of funny, I have always wanted to be a teacher. From the time that I was a little girl, I played school and being a teacher is just something that I have always felt like I was called to do. Having good teachers along the way, having crossed my path has been the biggest reason why I've wanted to become a teacher I think over the years, but I personally believe that it's a calling and not just a job.

Veronica felt like it was time for a change in her career, so she moved to the middle school in her district. She mentioned that one of the biggest differences at the middle school level compared to the elementary is that it is a highly trivial level of education. Veronica believed that, at the middle school level, the focus is on trying to get the students to buy into what the teacher is doing. She also believed that establishing relationships with colleagues and students is critical in middle school.

Results

It was important to thoroughly analyze all collected data to determine emerging themes. Codes were identified from teachers' responses and categorized to aide in presenting themes. Four major themes emerged from the data to present the narrative of the lived experiences of veteran middle school teachers in rural Tennessee. The following section details the theme

development of this study and includes direct quotes from participants to describe their lived experiences.

Theme Development

All individual interviews and the online focus group were transcribed using Weloty transcription services and uploaded into NVivo 12 during data analysis. Reflective journals were conducted electronically and uploaded to NVivo 12 upon receiving all of them. Over the course of 2 weeks, data from interviews and journal entries were attentively reviewed. Significant statements, words, and phrases were highlighted and categorized into individual nodes. Using NVivo 12's memoing feature, memos were used to connect thoughts and ideas about the nodes and identify relationships between the nodes. NVivo 12's word frequency feature was used to assemble 100 of the most frequently used words in all data collection methods for this study.

Figure 2 displays the results of the word frequency feature.



Figure 1. Word frequency chart of recurring words as indicated using NVivo 12.

The words displayed in Figure 2 were used in the coding process. When analyzing the word frequency chart, it was evident students were the at the center and were surrounded by teachers, administrators, and parents. In addition, the job-related responsibilities and aspects that are part of the teaching profession such as planning, teaching, evaluations, and activities surrounded students. Change was another word that was at the center of the chart just below students. Noticeably, this word was used by middle school teachers when describing the changes they have seen from students in the last few years and when emphasizing the need for change in the teaching profession in the interest of teachers and students. After generating and analyzing the word frequency chart, the coding process began. Nodes were used during the coding process to help identify relevant ideas that were present across collected data. The four themes that emerged from data were unrealistic expectations, middle school environment, students, and middle school teacher challenges.

The first major theme identified was unrealistic expectations. Through participants' responses, it was evident that they believed expectations of them were unrealistic. According to the participants, these expectations came from administrators, parents, central office employees, and policymakers. Two major educational stakeholders discussed by participants were administrators and policymakers, which collectively emerged as a subtheme. When describing administrators and policymakers, participants used the word *disconnect* which was noteworthy. This word was specifically used when participants described how they related to their administrators. In addition, some participants went beyond administration and discussed policymakers at the federal level and again used the word *disconnect*. Responses from participants supported the development of disconnect as a subtheme.

The second major theme discovered from the data was middle school environment. In this theme, middle school was emphasized as teachers described their lived experiences at their middle schools rather than the environment of an elementary school or high school. The responses of participants helped create a clear image of their work environments. Teachers frequently mentioned ways in which they were restricted such as having a tight schedule. This helped to identify restrictions as a subtheme. In addition to restrictions in their middle school environments, participants discussed how their work environments were impacted in a rural setting. Teachers frequently mentioned a lack of access to resources, which aided in the development of resources as another subtheme. The way participants described the colleagues they closely worked with as supportive and important indicated that colleagues were essential in their work environment even though at times there could be unfavorable interactions with other colleagues they were not as close to in their middle schools. This helped the development of colleagues as a subtheme in middle school environment.

The third major theme discovered from the data was students. As previously mentioned, Figure 2 shows a chart created using NVivo's word frequency feature. At the center of that chart was students. Throughout the data sources, the topic of students was discussed. Behavior was identified as a subtheme due to the responses from participants about various behaviors demonstrated at the middle school setting. Another subtheme that was developed from the data was troubled lives. This developed into a separate subtheme as students' behavior often reflected their troubled lives according to responses from participants.

The fourth major theme that developed from the data was middle school teacher challenges. Responses from participants indicated they continued to work after school and on weekends, which goes outside the work environment at teachers' middle schools. Therefore,

overwhelming workload was developed as a subtheme under the major theme of middle school teacher challenges. It was evident from participants' responses that they believed they put in long hours for their work and received little pay compared to the work they do. Hours and pay developed into a subtheme for middle school teacher challenges. Roles emerged as a subtheme due to teachers' descriptions of a variety of roles they fulfill. Many of the themes and subthemes seemed intertwined as they showcased the lived experiences at the middle school level. After analyzing the data carefully, it became evident there were distinctions in participants' responses concerning various aspects of the teaching profession which helped categorize responses into appropriate themes and subthemes.

Major Theme One: Unrealistic Expectations

The first major theme that emerged through the data was unrealistic expectations. The two subthemes under unrealistic expectations were administrators and policymakers and disconnect (see Table 2). Research has shown teachers are expected to perform various job-related experiences on any given day (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018; Desouky & Allam, 2017; Glover et al., 2016). Teachers are expected to perform tasks such as grading papers, planning lessons, assessing strengths and weaknesses of students, and preparing students for standardized tests (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018; Desouky & Allam, 2017; Glover et al., 2016; NEA, 2017). From the data of this study, teachers discussed their job-related responsibilities and the expectations they perceived unrealistic by educational stakeholders.

Table 2

Theme 1: Unrealistic Expectations

Theme 1: Unrealistic expectations	
Subtheme	Code
Administrators and policymakers	Blanket statements (3)
	Lack of classroom experience (5)
	Lack of communication (5)
	Lack of support (6)
	Expectations (8)
	Disconnect (13)
Disconnect	Lack of understanding (3)
	Decisions (5)
	Policies (10)
	Transitions (10)

Subtheme 1: Administrators and policymakers. The first subtheme from the primary theme of unrealistic expectations was administrators and policymakers. In a teacher's work environment, administrators play a vital role as research has shown they deal with student-discipline issues and impact teachers' evaluations, work assignments, and access to resources (Pogodzinski, 2014; Song & Mustafa, 2015). Teachers' job satisfaction may be severely impacted if administrators do not lead effectively or provide needed support (Dou et al., 2016; Thibodeaux et al., 2015). In interviews and reflective journal entries, the participants discussed their frustration with administrative leadership and support in their schools. Two deficiencies administrators demonstrated that were pointed out by participants were lack of communication and lack of support.

During her interview, Veronica described what she perceives to be an issue in her school: "In this building, I think the intention is good. I want to say that I do think sometimes the

intention is good, but the lack of communication is the biggest issue.” Although participants expressed an issue with administrators communicating agendas or instructions for the day, they also discussed how administrators do not always communicate to teachers individually about what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong. Instead, administrators typically address individual issues or concerns in front of the entire faculty; leaving some teachers to question what they have done wrong. In her interview, Suzie stated,

I don't feel like if I'm doing something wrong in my classroom, my administrator will come and talk to me. Instead, they make a blanket statement at faculty meetings or in a weekly email instead of addressing me personally and so I never know what exactly I'm doing good on or what I need to improve on.

Without direct communication from administrators to teachers individually, teachers feel confused about the quality of their job performance and lack trust or confidence in their administration. In her journal, when asked how she relates to administration Veronica wrote,

Another thing that has made it difficult to relate is due to the lack of correction of individual teachers for misconduct. Everything that happens in our building is disciplined with a blanket statement to the entire faculty. This makes it difficult to trust administration because you are always disciplined for things that are not necessarily your problem.

For Kevin, administrative leadership and support affect how he views his profession. He believes the concept of administrators supporting teachers and making the time to address teachers individually would go a long way in helping them grow professionally:

If they get into the trenches with us and they're there to support us, I think that's important. To me, that's the biggest thing and it's that support coming down to help, to

brag on you. If you're doing something wrong, to tell you one-on-one; not in a faculty meeting or something as a whole, but talk to you as an individual. I think that gets you further.

Many teachers expressed their belief of too much governmental involvement in education as many policymakers have never been in the classroom, yet are making crucial decisions in education. For teachers who are in the trenches and see how educational policies impact their classrooms, they often feel frustrated. Joe stated, "I really feel like the politics has got way too involved in education . . . at the state level and the federal level. And I really think that politicians are using that, using education, more or less, to get elected." Olivia also shared her frustration with politics being involved in education: "It's really irritating when they start tying politics into education, which we went through all that with the standards. I don't know, you just see a lot of people making decisions about education who know nothing about the subject."

Subtheme 2: Disconnect. The second subtheme of the theme of unrealistic expectations was disconnect. Teachers expressed a disconnect between themselves and the educational stakeholders who are not in the classroom regularly, which results in unrealistic expectations of teachers. They explained the disconnect usually occurs when teachers transition to another role in education such as an administrator or a stakeholder at the district or federal level. Teachers explained educational stakeholders often become disconnected when they remove their "teacher hat" and put on another hat such as that of an administrator, superintendent, or employee at the federal level. These educational stakeholders often become disconnected and less likely to relate to their teachers as they seem to forget what it is like in the classroom and the expectations teachers are required to meet. The longer an educational stakeholder is away from the

classroom, the more evident the disconnect becomes to teachers, as Olivia stated in her interview:

I think the longer that they are away from the classroom the more prevalent that is. Not only that but it's just strange in that it's almost like when they come out of the classroom, they literally take that classroom teacher hat off and then they put on the administrative hat. They start seeing things completely different. Their perspective on things is different, which is understandable because they're in a position of administration at that point; however, it's also important to be able to relate to where your teachers are.

Before taking an administrative role, principals have experience in the classroom and understand the pressure and challenges that teachers often experience. Many teachers recognize that administrators begin to forget the pressure educators are under and what challenges they encounter in the classroom setting as administrators assign tasks that need to be completed in a short amount of time without taking into consideration teachers' other job-related responsibilities. Joe revealed that although he sometimes feels supported by his administration, he believed they begin to forget what teachers go through after being away from the classroom for a period of time: "I know if I was the administrator and you change positions, you go from the classroom to the office and I think you lose touch after a while." When describing the transition her administrators made from the classroom to the office, Carol shared that appreciation for what teachers do is often forgotten: "It's like when they crossed the line over at the administration, it kind of goes away. It's kind of . . . they've got to accomplish this, this, and this and they don't take into account what you're trying to accomplish."

Veronica shared how the time in which teachers are expected to complete tasks assigned by administrators is unrealistic:

One of the biggest responsibilities that I feel like that causes a hindrance in the performance of this job is the time schedule that they give us to create, not to create, but to complete the tasks that they give us to do. There's just not enough time to do what we're asked to do and so the responsibility of actually teaching three classes in one day is absolutely ridiculous.

Denise also noted in her journal the unrealistic expectations put on teachers:

Administrators should also stop making extra work for teachers that is of no benefit except to make them look good. Administrators, like many others, need to be able to remember what it is like to be in the classroom working with limited resources and funding!

Unrealistic expectations do not just come from administrators, but they also come from educational stakeholders at the district and state levels and even parents, at times, as they are not connected directly to the classroom.

During the online focus group, teachers were asked what they wish all educational stakeholders knew about their job. Carol explained that she wants understanding and support for stakeholders in education:

Parents need to understand the importance of education for their kids and help raise them to be respectful and behave in order to learn. Administrators need to understand my lessons may not fit into their rubric. Every class period is not a simple intro, activity, and closure. Life happens and things have to be dealt with regardless of standards, like counseling kids and dealing with peer issues. The school board needs to fully fund all classrooms. I need curriculum to teach by and test question banks to use and I have none of that.

Mary added to Carol's statement by sharing the various roles teachers fulfill in addition to being an educator: "I wish they knew the real demand put on teachers. We are truancy officers, child welfare checkers, moral supporters, mentors, advisors, and then educators." Olivia mentioned that teachers often make sacrifices for their students:

I don't think educational stakeholders outside the classroom realize the sacrifices that many teachers themselves, their families, or livelihoods to see that their students have what they need, are successful not only now, but in the future. Teachers are currently burning the candles at both ends with no end in sight.

Denise wanted parents, administrators, and policymakers to know:

that my hours are not 8:00 to 3:00 for 180 days a year! I take schoolwork home with me almost daily as well as work on school planning and grading on weekends! Plus, the money I spend out of my own pocket to buy supplies for me, my classroom, and my students.

Joe shared his frustration with the time he has to teach:

I just wish that we had the time to truly help our students with various issues and not have to feel we are on a treadmill going 30 miles an hour. What I mean by that is I wish we could take the time to make sure that students truly have it before moving on to the next lesson or skill. We do not have time to properly teach it let alone go back and reteach it.

Participants expressed that the disconnect is evident in the policies and curriculum teachers are expected to implement in their classrooms. When asked about the disconnect between teachers and other educational stakeholders, Denise explained,

Some of the people that are making the rules and that are trying to get you to go to these things and they're wanting you to do these things. They've never been in the classroom.

They've never been in the trenches, these people that are saying, "Well, let's do this."

Mary shared her belief of a disconnect between educators and policymakers and how that causes other educational stakeholders to have unrealistic expectations of teachers:

I think it's way too much. Not only that and then I think that, again, is whether it's a disconnect from not only admin, but at state level. You have state level making legislative policy and they don't have a clue what's going on in the classroom. That, in addition to our kids coming with more than just educational needs a lot of times.

Kevin also believes there is a disconnect between teachers and policymakers and that a great deal of pressure teachers experience comes from the state level. When discussing whether he sees a disconnect between teachers and other educational stakeholders, Kevin stated,

I definitely do at the state department and national because some of them, I really think, don't have a clue. They look at this in theory and a lot of them never been in a classroom besides just walking in bizarre domains past teaching. And I think there's so much pressure put at the county level and then it filters down to us.

Major Theme Two: Middle School Environment

The second major theme to emerge from the data was middle school environment. The environment of a middle school is a unique setting as teachers work with young adolescents and encounter many challenges (Huang et al., 2019; Przybylska, 2016; Waterman, 2013). The three subthemes under the theme of middle school environment were restrictions, colleagues, and resources (see Table 3). Middle school teachers are surrounded by constant changes within their immediate environment such as making adjustments to daily activities and keeping up with

current trends in learning and curriculum (Collie & Martin, 2017). In this study, teachers described their primary environment at the middle school.

Table 3

Theme 2: Middle School Environment

Theme 2: Middle School Environment	
Subtheme	Code
Restrictions	Lack of socializing (4)
	Limited restroom breaks (5)
	Limited lunch (7)
	Strict schedule (9)
Colleagues	Understanding (3)
	Trenches (7)
	Support (13)
	Family (15)
Resources	Lack of funding (5)
	Curriculum (7)
	Lack of supplies (8)
	Personal spending (13)

Subtheme 1: Restrictions. From the data analyzed, it was evident teachers felt restricted in their working environment. A lack of teacher autonomy may cause teachers to feel restricted in their environment as they have limited input in decisions and are expected to follow guidelines from policymakers and administrators (Sadeghi et al., 2013; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

Teachers shared how they often have little input in decisions surrounding their classroom and what input they do have is many times disregarded. In his journal response, Kevin wrote, “I want my school administrators to be respectful, fair, and willing to listen to our concerns and

problems.” Kelly emphasized the importance of listening to teachers and valuing ideas they have to offer as they are the ones in the classroom. In her journal, Kelly wrote,

Asking teachers what is or what is not working is probably as beneficial, if not more, than state tests. There are lots of common-sense ideas that teachers in the classroom can share. They are in the room daily. They know what works and what doesn't. Form teams to find out what those things are!! LISTEN!!! Don't ask opinions if you don't really want them. Don't speak sarcastically when you get an answer you don't want to hear. Eventually, everyone is going to stop communicating.

Some teachers do stop communicating because they do not see the point of offering their input since they are going to be told what to do regardless. As Denise shared, “We're not asked. We're just told. I can tell somebody my opinion, but nobody really cares and nobody really is listening.” In his journal, Kevin wrote, “With administration I just do what I'm told.”

Restrictions not only come from administrators and policymakers, but they also come within the nature of the work itself. Because teachers are responsible for up to 30 students in a classroom, they must be aware of what their students are doing at all times and monitor hallways between breaks. Teachers are also on a tight schedule which restricts them from being able to freely do things such as going to the restroom, taking a break, or socializing with a colleague. If teachers need to use the restroom, they must wait until their lunch or planning times, or get another teacher to cover their classroom. An example of this was provided in Veronica's journal entry:

Lunch is about 25 minutes where the assistant would have to help me take and pick up students from the cafeteria. One only ends up with approximately 20 minutes to actually

eat lunch. This time is also the only real time to collaborate or socialize with peers in which one teaches with.

In her journal, Olivia echoed the same experience of having a restricted schedule:

Daily, I have to monitor the restrooms at my scheduled time that we have worked out among our team of four. Because I am at the end of the hall, another teacher or staff member has to watch my classroom while I am supervising the restroom break.

Subtheme 2: Colleagues. In a teachers' work environment, interactions with colleagues may impact job satisfaction. Negative working conditions in a school environment may include disrespectful treatment from administrators and colleagues (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Rankin, 2017). Despite the negative impact that unfavorable interactions with administrators and colleagues can have on teachers, collegial interactions are significant as other teachers can offer support and resources to teachers (Pogodzinski, 2014). In this study, teachers discussed their experiences with colleagues and shared how their colleagues play a critical role in their decision not only to stay in the teaching profession, but also to remain at the schools in which they work. As Joe stated, "Honestly, that's one thing that keeps me here, just to be completely honest. A lot of the teachers work with you and help you and it's a good experience." Veronica shared the same belief about her collegial experience: "If it weren't for my colleagues, I'd probably . . . I would have probably already quit."

Participants described a familial relationship with their colleagues and how they face challenges within their schools and education together. As Annie explained, "We discuss issues pertaining to students. We discuss upcoming calendar events and we are like a family. Whenever there's a personal issue going on with one of us everybody is supportive of that person." When asked about the importance of collegial support in the education profession,

Carol stated, “It is because they’re your soldiers by your side. They understand more than anybody else what you deal with every day.” Veronica also emphasized the importance of collegial support:

The colleagues in this building and in this setting are what push the majority of the people, I think, to continue with the job. If it weren’t for that, I don’t know how you could continue on. . . . Our colleagues, our hallway is very helpful to each other. We’ll pick up pieces for each other when something happens in personal lives or whatever.

Teachers also expressed the collaboration with their colleagues. Kelly proudly stated, “So, we make a test together, we stay on the same exact subject every day. We do the same exact classwork every day and it’s just awesome.” Although the workload and responsibilities of teachers can be overwhelming at times, teachers work together to accomplish these tasks. Olivia explained, “As colleagues, we very much have a ‘team player’ mentality about things and it takes all of us to manage all of the outside administrative demands put on us.”

Not only do the participants share a bond with their colleagues professionally, but that bond expands outside of the workplace. In her journal response, Suzie revealed,

I think it is easiest to relate to my colleagues because we are all in the same position and working towards the same goal. I am lucky to truly enjoy spending time with my colleagues in and out of work. We also relate through personal experiences.

Subtheme 3: Resources. One of the subthemes within the theme of middle school environment was resources. In education, resources are a necessity for teachers and students. Though not directly mentioned in interview questions, the need for resources emerged from participants’ responses when they discussed rural education. Teaching students in rural areas

comes with many challenges such as poverty, educational accountability, financial constraints, community involvement, and educational policies (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018).

Rural schools often have a lack of professional development opportunities (NEA, 2017). Although in-services help teachers develop professionally and offer ideas about programs to implement in classrooms, participants expressed that they do not find the sessions meaningful, as they do not have the resources they need from educational stakeholders. When asked about what expectations participants have of school administrators, teachers mentioned that administrators should help provide resources. In her journal, Mary stated, “I expect reciprocal accountability. If you expect me to be an effective teacher, then give me the resources and time needed to make this happen.” Although participants receive money every school year for their classroom, it is not enough to last teachers and students for the school year. During the online focus group, Kevin explained that money from the Basic Education Program (BEP) was not enough for rural schools: “Yeah, I work in a rural school and the only money I receive is \$200 from BEP.”

Due to not being provided enough money for classroom supplies, teachers are often forced to use their own money for supplies and materials they need for the classroom. In his journal, Joe described his experience with a lack of resources: “I would like more support with resources, or monies. My wife and I are spending approximately \$1,000 together, maybe more, a year for classroom supplies.” For Carol, it is not just classroom supplies she spends money on, but also curriculum: “I have nothing. I have spent over \$500 of my own money on Teachers Pay Teachers up to this point in the year and I’m not even done.”

Teachers mentioned some of the common challenges that rural school educators encounter. They emphasized that, as rural educators in Tennessee, there is often a lack of resources they need for classroom instruction and many times they use their own money to buy

school supplies due to a lack of financial funding and support. Teachers also shared that they do not feel adequately supported by communities due to education not being valued. Participants shared that teachers and administrators do not get the same level of respect from members of the community as they once received. These points were emphasized during the online focus group when participants were asked about the difficulties of teaching in a rural school. When asked what they perceived was the most difficult aspect of being a rural middle school teacher in Tennessee, Carol immediately replied, “Resources. I don’t have the materials I need to teach the standards and also the attitude of rural areas toward education.” Joe emphasized a lack of support for educators: “Teachers do not have the support that is needed. We are responsible for our classroom supplies and we have to buy them if something is needed. Also, teacher accountability and pressure that is on student performance.” Suzie added, “The most difficult thing is having support and having resources that are going to add rigor.” Mary also shared that a lack of support is the most difficult aspect of being a rural middle school educator: “I think the most difficult thing of being a teacher in a rural area is lack of funding for needed programs and supports.” Joe further explained, “The community does not respect teachers and school administrators like they did 10–15 years ago.”

Major Theme Three: Students

The third major theme that emerged from the data was students, with two subthemes, including disruptive behavior and troubled lives (see Table 4). Middle schools comprise students in their early adolescent years in Grades 6–8 (Waterman, 2013). This may present teachers with a set of challenges that are different from those at the elementary and high school levels. Veronica taught elementary students prior to teaching middle school students. She discussed how elementary students are more willing to accept help whereas middle school students

typically move away from accepting help in what can be a challenging time in a young adolescent's life: "I think it's . . . middle level is a very hard place to be and then by the time they get bigger and they get in high school, they pretty much can fend for themselves and take care of themselves."

Table 4

Theme 3: Students

Theme 3: Students	
Subtheme	Code
Behavior	Fighting (2)
	Excessive talking (3)
	Defiance (3)
	Socially unstable (12)
	Disruptive (13)
Troubled lives	Bullying (2)
	Drugs (2)
	Homelessness (2)
	Self-harming (3)
	Lack of parental involvement (7)

Subtheme 1: Disruptive behavior. One of the factors that impact a teacher's job satisfaction is the behavior of disruptive students, which was one of the subthemes for the theme of students. Some of the disruptive behaviors that teachers have complained about concerning students include a lack of self-control, inability to manage emotions, and a lack of respect for teachers and peers (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Waterman, 2013). Disruptive behavior negatively impacts teacher job satisfaction as teachers' classroom instruction is interrupted and they often feel they have a lack of support in dealing with student discipline. In her journal response, Kelly stated,

We do have quite a few students this year that have major discipline issues. In our school, we do not really have a means to deal with these students. We need a behavior classroom where these students can go if there are issues that repeatedly occur.

Participants expressed that they strive to be there for students when they are needed and enjoy building relationships with students as they help students grow academically and personally. As Veronica stated, “I take pride to build relationships where students feel safe and accepted in the learning environment.” In her journal, when describing how she relates to students, Carol wrote, “I have tried through the years to create good working relationships with my students. I treat them with respect and try to do what’s right for them.” Although participants shared their experiences relating to their students, they also described their lived experiences in dealing with students who were disruptive. When journaling what a visitor could expect if assisting her, Suzie wrote,

While the visitor would see most good, they would also see minor student behavior problems. He or she would see me standing over one student so that he would complete his independent work. He or she would see me quieting my talkative kids and telling them to get back to their work. The visitor would see students who can’t sit still and move 24/7. The visitor would see my frustration come out with a student who constantly wants to pick a fight with another student.

In the teaching profession, students can bring forth a demanding task for educators. teachers may have up to 30 students in a classroom (Waterman, 2013). Each student may be on a different level academically and teachers are expected to meet their academic needs. This can especially be challenging when disruptive students are in the classroom. Participants shared their

experiences trying to meet the academic needs of all their students while dealing with disruptive students. In her journal response, Carol revealed,

By my last class I am exhausted, and it is my greatest challenge. It is the smallest class I have ever had in 22 years of teaching, but I have so many resource students and nonreaders. I do not have a teacher's aide and the behavior of this group is awful. When I leave and get in my car, most times I am in tears.

Although teachers expressed frustration in dealing with disruptive students and student discipline, they also shared how the challenges students are faced with today likely contribute to discipline issues displayed in school.

Subtheme 2: Troubled lives. One of the subthemes in the primary theme of students was troubled lives. Middle school students often experience emotional, cognitive, and biological changes in a short period of time (Im et al., 2016). Many of these changes are experienced in the school and family settings of young adolescents as well as in their relationships with peers. Although young adolescents can experience positive changes in their early developmental years, they can also go through negative changes. Students encounter rapid changes at an early age and they may not know how to properly deal with those changes. For students who go through detrimental changes, it is likely they may retaliate by acting out; as Waterman (2013) suggested, students who are disruptive often have troubled lives at home. Participants shared what kind of baggage disruptive students bring to the classroom from home. Annie described the challenges she sees students face, pointing out how the issues students face today are different than they were years ago and how those problems affect her ability to teach: "Over the 20-odd years I've been teaching, I have seen the behavior problems escalate from students who would talk or pass notes to issues such as self-harming, tobacco use, possible drug use." Denise shared the same

point of view: “When I started 30 years ago, you didn’t have kids coming in starving. You didn’t have kids that were sleeping in a motel that were sleeping on the floor.” Mary, who teaches social emotional learning said, “You just have to realize that all behavior is communication and they are trying to tell you what is wrong.”

Major Theme Four: Middle School Teacher Challenges

Study participants described their lived experiences as veteran middle school teachers and the challenges they encounter in their profession. Three subthemes that emerged from the data were overwhelming workload, hours and pay, and roles (see Table 5). Teaching is a demanding profession that comes with a unique set of challenges (Desouky & Allam, 2017; Gray et al., 2017; Mee & Haverback, 2014). Educators have multiple job-related responsibilities they perform on a regular basis. Some of these job-related responsibilities consist of planning lessons, grading papers, evaluating abilities of students, sponsoring extracurricular activities, and completing professional development requirements (Desouky & Allam, 2017). Many of these tasks are performed after school (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018; NEA, 2017).

Table 5

Theme 4: Middle School Teacher Challenges

Theme 4: Middle School Teacher Challenges	
Subtheme	Code
Overwhelming workload	Extracurricular activities (3)
	Stressful (5)
	Analyzing data (8)
	Overwhelming (8)
	Planning (12)
	Grading (14)
Hours and pay	Undervalued (3)
	Lack of promotion (3)
	Weekends (8)
	After school (10)
	Low salary (14)
	Long (15)
Roles	Welfare advocates (2)
	Mentors (3)
	Police officers (3)
	Counselors (7)
	Parents (8)

Subtheme 1: Overwhelming workload. One of the prominent subthemes of the theme middle school teacher challenges was overwhelming workload. As previously mentioned, a typical workload for teachers includes planning lessons, grading papers, assessing needs of students, sponsoring extracurricular activities, and fulfilling professional development requirements (Desouky & Allam, 2017). Some participants used the word *overwhelming* to describe their workload as a middle school teacher. When asked to describe her experience with workload, Carol replied, “Overwhelming. That’s the best way to say that.” Annie described

how it takes quite a bit of preparation throughout the school year and the work it takes to help struggling students be successful in their academics. She summed up her workload as,

Overwhelming. There is preparation. There is making your lesson plans, keeping your plan book up to date, and then revamping that for things such as the closing of school. At our school we have a policy where if a student fails a test, we provide a second version of that test so they have a second opportunity to take that test. So, it's constant creating. Then we have to have those students miss P.E. to come to us to retake the test. Before they retake the test, we need to reteach them that concept.

For Mary, it is not so much the demands of her job, but the mental and emotional aspects of her job, as she shared in her journal: "I can actually somewhat manage the job demands, but the mental and emotional demands seem to be overwhelming at times."

For teachers who sponsor extracurricular activities, the workload can be more demanding. Teachers who take on the responsibility of sponsoring extracurricular activities either advise clubs or coach sports (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018; NEA, 2017). When describing what job-related responsibilities she has, Suzie discussed what she does in addition to teaching:

I do the yearbook, so that takes a lot of planning for pictures for yearbook. Planning what the pages are going to be, making sure the students get included in the pages and their portraits. Dealing with sports pictures, dealing with money; that's probably one of the biggest responsibilities with yearbook is the money aspect of it.

Olivia also takes on an additional responsibility aside from teaching as she is a sponsor for the entire eighth grade class:

I'm also an eighth grade sponsor where we are involved with fundraising and we work toward having an end-of-the-year trip and trying to make that last year for our eighth grade middle school students something that they remember before they go on to the high school.

Subtheme 2: Hours and pay. The second subtheme of the theme of middle school teacher challenges was hours and pay. Teachers are pressed for time fulfilling responsibilities such as teaching content, attending faculty meetings, and completing professional development requirements (Waterman, 2013). Due to the demanding workload placed on teachers and the time they have to complete their work, teachers frequently spend countless hours working. Many of these hours are spent in and out of school (Johari et al., 2018). Unfortunately, the time in which teachers are expected to complete tasks impact job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). In this study, teachers described their lived experiences with workload and responsibilities.

Participants described how teaching is not an 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. job and shared completing their workload and performing responsibilities often takes hours. In order to meet deadlines on tasks they are given, teachers must take work home. Many participants expressed that teaching is a never-ending job and that they do just as much work after school hours as they do during the day. Denise provided an example of this: "A lot of times I'll go home and I'll work on stuff till probably seven o'clock." She provided more details about her workload in her journal response:

As far as managing my workload as a teacher, I do that by bringing my plan book, laptop, and necessary binders home with me each night and on weekends to complete work I am not able to complete during the school day. While at school, I try to deal with each

student on an individual basis and do not have a lot of time to complete the necessary plans and data that must be done for each of my students.

Another example of continuous hours spent on completing job-related tasks was revealed in Joe's journal:

The easiest part of my job is when I am teaching. The true work begins at 3:10 every day. In addition, we are expected to come up with a homeroom activity, call parents (if students are in danger of failing), prepare for any school activity that is coming up, assessing students daily, and looking at data from every test that they are given trying to figure out how I can help those who need catching up with the class.

Veronica's journal response also echoed the same struggle of having too much work to do and not having enough time given to complete assigned tasks despite having a 1-hour planning period:

In order to do my job and do it halfway effective, things **MUST** go home and work must be completed at home. The hour that we are awarded daily for planning time does not scratch the surface to be enough time to do anything that must be done. Anytime my students write an essay and I multiply that times 90, I have hours of essays to grade. That one hour does nothing to even put a dent in the surmountable amount of paperwork that goes home.

Veronica further revealed in her journal that her children often need her attention and help for a variety of tasks at home and that she is left with no choice but to wait until her children are in bed before she can focus on her job-related workload: "I find that many times it is not until after my children are in bed that I am able to finish the work that I have."

Although not directly mentioned in research questions, interview questions, or journal prompts, participants made a point to discuss teacher pay. Research has indicated teachers' salary level is a positive factor in retention and job satisfaction (Saiti & Papadopoulos, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2013; Tang et al., 2018). Teachers often make lower salaries and although they are salaried employees, they spend countless hours after school and on weekends tackling their workload (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Some teachers shared that the pay scale does not amount the education they received. When discussing teacher salaries during the online focus group interview, Kelly stated, "And we do not pay experienced teachers for time invested in the system. With the number of degrees I have and the years I attended college, I could've been a doctor by now." Denise shared, "I could make just as much without a degree as what I make here . . . 30 years and I finally hit \$50,000." Annie mentioned that the pay teachers receive does not align with the significance of the teaching profession: "I would like to add that teaching is the most challenging profession as far as physically and mentally that has the least pay scale, but yet has the most impact on our future."

Teachers discussed not receiving the pay they deserve for the amount of work and hours they spend fulfilling their job-related responsibilities. As Veronica explained,

The responsibility of lesson-planning and walkthrough evaluations around lesson plans and having everything put up on the board. I mean, just everything that they require, the workload is way more than the amount of money that you're paid and the amount of time that it takes to do the things you need to do doesn't match the amount of time given.

Mary summarized this subtheme: "Teachers are not paid near enough for what we do."

Subtheme 3: Roles. Teachers have multiple job-related responsibilities they perform daily. One of their responsibilities is educating young adolescents and helping them thrive in

their learning environment. In order to ensure learning and growth take place, teachers must assess the academic needs of their students and manage student behavior (Desouky & Allam, 2017). Unfortunately, teachers find that students' learning abilities and behavior are often impacted by troubled lives at home. Study participants addressed the various roles they often play before they are able to educate students. During the online focus group interview, Olivia stated, "We are no longer just an educator teaching curriculum in a content area. We have to be a nurse, psychologist, nurturer, monitor, mentor, interventionist, and many other things too numerous to mention." In her journal response, Veronica shared how having to supervise student behavior sometimes takes away the focus of educating students:

Between each class period teachers are responsible to monitor both hallways and restrooms in an attempt to stop illegal activities as JUULing [use of an electronic cigarette]. If a visitor helped out in our school and in my classroom, they would feel as if they are policing student activity rather than molding minds of young people.

Teachers also described how they frequently must take on the role of a parent or counselor before they can educate the students. Annie expressed, "I feel like I can't give them the support they need, like a counselor that I used to be, if I'm teaching in the classroom." Joe shared the same view: "I feel like at the middle level, as a middle school educator, we are here to counsel kids. We're here to be their mother and father, as an educator and basically any needs that they have." When discussing students' troubled lives and the lack of parental involvement, Denise stated, "We have lots of that and just coming in and the situations that the parents are not parents anymore. So therefore, we just can't be educators anymore. We have to be parent and educator, which is really sad." For these teachers, the love of teaching is often overshadowed by

troubled lives of students and their basic needs not being met. As Annie shared, “I love teaching, but it’s like I can’t teach because of all this other stuff going on and these students need support.”

Research Questions Responses

The research questions for this study were aimed to fill in a gap in the existing literature surrounding teacher job satisfaction and, more specifically, on job satisfaction among teachers at the middle school level in rural Tennessee. The CRQ was asked to understand the lived experiences of veteran middle school teachers in rural Tennessee. In addition, four research subquestions were included to address specific facets related to job satisfaction. SQ1 served to examine veteran middle school teachers’ perceptions of their workload and working environment. SQ2 addressed the perceptions of collegial experience of veteran middle school teachers. SQ3 addressed how veteran middle school teachers perceived administrative leadership and support and SQ4 served to examine the perceptions of student behavior. All four subquestions were used to determine how participants’ perceptions of these facets of the teaching profession impact job satisfaction. This section includes a final review and discussion of the connection between the research questions, the four research subquestions, and participants’ responses.

CRQ. What are veteran middle school teachers’ perceptions of job satisfaction as a lived experience in rural Tennessee? The purpose of this study was to understand veteran middle school teachers’ lived experiences of job satisfaction in rural Tennessee. Participants shared their lived experiences in interviews, an online focus group interview, and reflective journals. Through participants’ responses, a thorough and understandable narrative was presented. Four themes emerged from the data that provided greater insight into the lived experiences of participants: unrealistic expectations, middle school environment, students, and middle school

teacher challenges. Responses from participants supported the themes found within the study. All participants expressed that they love teaching, but are frustrated with circumstances surrounding their jobs. As Carol explained during the online focus group interview, “I love the challenge of helping kids learn, but it is also a struggle because of all the outside issues that influence kids, like their home life, social media, and thousands of other distractions.” Olivia echoed the same perception during the online focus group interview: “What comes to mind is making a difference with kids and having an impact on the future. Also, I think of the challenges associated with teaching because every year there are more and more demands.”

Although the participants love teaching, they revealed that their perceptions of the job were negative, overall. An example of this was evident in Joe’s journal response regarding what a visitor might expect in his classroom:

They would see a frustrated teacher that has to cover 90 minutes worth of material in 60 minutes. . . . I do all I can to help them be successful in life and academics, but someday I feel that is an impossible task for me.

Similarly, Carol stated she recognized a change in her attitude toward her job: “I’ve always loved what I do, but the past year or two . . . I don’t know if I’m just hitting those burnout years, but the past year or two, the pressure has really gotten to me. It’s affecting my health.” Veronica presented a different perspective on the negativity surrounding her job:

I think that we get that negative vibe to tell them not to go to school to be a teacher because so many things are negative for us. If we had the support we needed in a job it’s an ideal job, every job’s got pressure, but I feel like so many times we are selling our own career short . . . our own profession short because we haven’t had the support that we need.

SQ1. What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions in rural Tennessee of the ways their workload and work environment impact job satisfaction? Veteran middle school teachers' lived experiences were captured in Major Theme 1: Unrealistic expectations; Major Theme 2: Middle school environment; and Major Theme 4: Middle school teacher challenges. Participants' experiences discussed in these three themes clearly answer SQ1. In Major Theme 1, participants expressed their belief of unrealistic expectations from administrators, policymakers, and parents. They believed the workload they were expected to complete and the time given to complete those tasks were unrealistic as many of these educational stakeholders had either forgotten the pressure and challenges teachers encounter, or they have never been in a classroom setting professionally. An example of participants' perceptions of other educational stakeholders' unrealistic expectations was provided during the online focus group interview by Kelly: "I wish they had a clue about kids' ability levels. How are we supposed to teach in a classroom of 25 students ranging from 1st percentile to 99th?"

Participants also perceived that the concept and expectations of standardized testing were not only unrealistic, but unfair to teachers. Throughout the school year, teachers are expected to cover numerous standards on which students are tested at the end of the year to check for mastery. Although some teachers understood the importance of standardized testing, they believed too much emphasis was placed on test scores and results were not completely reliable. During the online focus group interview, Mary said, "I feel standards are important and essential. Standardized testing has too much emphasis placed on it. I think it should be used as a measurement for reference, but not carry the weight it does." Denise reiterated this perception in the online focus group interview:

If we didn't have to worry about the assessments, we would be able to do more teaching, but I do see the need for assessments. Just wish the importance would be focused on what the students need instead of how to evaluate the teachers.

Carol summed up the concept of unrealistic expectations and unfairness regarding standardized tests during the online focus group interview:

I hate standardized tests. They do not show a real reflection of what my students know. I don't mind having standards, but it is impractical for me to cover all the standards within the time limits I have as well as all the disruptions for behavior, field trips, drills, and such.

Major Theme 2 captured teachers' perceptions of their work environment. Although teachers talked about some of the positives of their jobs, they emphasized the negative aspects. Many teachers perceive their work environment to be mostly negative due to the stress and pressure placed on teachers from administration and having a lack of support and resources to meet their job demands. Many teachers shared that they have a mostly negative rapport with administration. An example of this was evident in one of Mary's journal entries: "Relating to administrators poses problems at times. I feel that there is no reciprocal accountability. Admin asks for many things to be done, but time/resources to carry out the demands are rarely given." The negativity within their work environment Kelly also revealed in her journal: "I feel like the majority of teachers are afraid to ask questions of both administrators in our school or those working in the central office." According to some teachers, rapport with administration can be fixed and turned into a positive experience if teachers receive the support and appreciation they need. As Veronica stated,

So, I think that if we had more of, “Hey, I appreciate you,” or, “That was good,” or just little things that said, “I appreciate what you’re doing,” or, “I see that,” or, “That didn’t go unnoticed.” Then I think you would see the atmosphere in the building change. When you see the atmosphere with your teachers change, you’re going to see the atmosphere with your children change.

Major Theme 4 captured how teachers perceived their workload. Many participants described their workload as “overwhelming.” In her journal, Olivia shared, “More often than not, the teacher workload seems overwhelming.” Unrealistic expectations and time to complete tasks contributed to teachers feeling overwhelmed by their workload. For Veronica, the workload is too much as she wrote in her journal, “I feel that I am drowning in work, and the only way I can survive is to be deprived of much needed rest to get done what needs to be done.”

SQ2. What are veteran middle school teachers’ perceptions in rural Tennessee of the ways their collegial experience with other teachers impacts job satisfaction? Veteran middle school teachers’ experiences with their colleagues were captured in Major Theme 2: Middle school environment. A response to SQ2 was clearly addressed within this theme. Participants’ responses indicated they had a mostly positive perception of their colleagues. Some of the teachers expressed that they consider their colleagues more like a family due to working closely together. This was evident in Kelly’s journal entry:

I truly love my work family in my grade. Most of us eat lunch together every day. A lot of us are also friends outside of school as well. We often do things together on the weekends. If someone is having a tough day, the other teachers will rally around us to make it better. You can depend on every teacher in my grade to have your back with personal and school issues.

Annie's perception of collegial experience was similar: "So, we are like a family that way. Like if we have teachers that retire and we know they're going to retire, we always have a little get-together and that kind of thing."

For Veronica, collegial support is important as she considers her colleagues a motivation in continuing her job. She also believes her colleagues hold schools together in the midst of challenges teachers often encounter:

So, I think it is the colleagues, or the people in the trenches as I like to call it, that holds the glue. It's the glue that holds the building together. If we didn't have each other I don't think we could make it. That is the strongest part, is the relationships you build with your coworkers to be able to surpass all the things that don't make sense in this job.

SQ3. What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions in rural Tennessee of the ways that administrative leadership and support within their school environment impacts job satisfaction? The response to SQ3 was certainly acknowledged in Major Theme 1: Unrealistic expectations. Research has shown administrative leadership and support is important in any school environment. In this study, teachers shared that they believed there was a disconnect or gap between them and administration. They expressed that administrators seem to forget what it is like to be in the classroom and to perform the job-related responsibilities of a teacher after transitioning into an administrative role. Oliva said, "I think some, quite frankly, lose sight of that." Denise shared a similar point of view: "I think it makes a world of difference when you've got somebody that's actually in the administrative role that has actually been in the classroom and knows what all the teachers have to do." In addition, Olivia explained, "Sometimes I also feel that administration can work one of two ways. They can either bring out the worst in

someone or it can bring out the best in someone.” Suzie described how issues involving administration sometimes brings out the worst in her:

I think students don’t overwhelm me, but being in a school that has low morale and there are a lot of unhappy teachers, even though we are happy if we stay in our hallways, once we reach the front office, it just kind of turns into a negative environment and that does carry over into my home life and it affects my nights and if I’m in a good mood or bad mood.

SQ4. What are veteran middle school teachers’ perceptions in rural Tennessee of the ways that student behavior impacts job satisfaction? The response to SQ3 was found in Major Theme 3: Students. Teachers briefly mentioned some of the behaviors they see demonstrated by students on a regular basis, including excessive talking, arguing or fighting with other students, acting out in class, and not doing classwork or homework. Disruptive behaviors like these can be frustrating and exhausting, according to Kevin: “You get frustrated with the lack of effort and other stuff sometimes and you’re just tired of it.” For Joe, energetic students and minor disruptions are not bothersome, but rather the lack of effort that students demonstrate: “What really bothers me with the students is students who defy what you ask them to do. When you ask them to do something and then they don’t. They choose not to do it.” He also shared that the time in which he has to teach a classroom full of students adds stress: “And with us being on such a tight schedule, that stresses me out and bothers me.” Some teachers shared that discipline is an issue concerning student behavior and that students are not being held accountable for their actions, which increases stress and frustration for teachers. Suzie explained that she can handle minor disruptions in the classroom, but for behavior that calls for administrative assistance, she does not see appropriate disciplinary action:

I think, for the most part, I do well handling those disruptions, but once it is moved past the students listening to me or having any respect for what I say, once it goes to the office, there is a lack of discipline and accountability on the students' part. The discipline that they might receive doesn't match with what the action was.

Another example of consequences not aligning to students' actions was found in Carol's journal as she wrote, "Our discipline system is the problem. Teachers no longer have the power to discipline. Administrators do not give out punishment based on what teachers explain to them." According to Suzie, "Our principals give too many chances for our kids and I don't think that's doing justice for our kids. I think we're doing them injustice by not making them understand their consequences and why they're getting those consequences."

Although student behavior can disrupt the learning environment and add stress for teachers, participants shared that they believe students who experience troubling issues at home do not know how to properly deal them. Teachers described that many students bring their issues with them to school, which impacts how they view their profession. An example of this was evident in Annie's comment: "I've often thought about retiring because of all the stuff the kids have to deal with that comes over into teaching." Mary, who teaches social emotional learning, explained how students' issues and disruptions impact her view of her profession: "I think it does a lot. I think it impacts my view a lot because it's becoming so commonplace. Teachers can't teach because of the behavior."

Summary

The lived experiences of veteran middle school teachers in rural Tennessee were presented in interviews, an online focus group interview, and reflective journals. Data collected were analyzed using NVivo 12. This qualitative data analysis software assisted in the

development of four major themes and 10 subthemes. The identified themes and subthemes clearly address the central research question guiding this study in addition to the research subquestions. Participating teachers revealed that administrators and other educational stakeholders place too many unrealistic expectations on them and believed there was a disconnect, or a gap, between them and other educational stakeholders such as administrators, policymakers, and parents. Teachers emphasized the importance of administrators relating to their teachers and that bridging the gap and relating to them would help change their negative working environment in their respective middle schools. Students also had an impact on how teachers viewed their profession as many teachers revealed they often have to serve in other roles to take care of students' basic needs before they could serve as educators. Teachers discussed the challenges they encounter as middle school educators in rural Tennessee. Some of their challenges were the workload which they perceived as overwhelming and the lack of resources they have to complete their workload. Teachers also shared that the salary they make is not enough for the hours they spend after school hours and on weekends.

This study will be concluded in Chapter Five as the connection between the research findings and theoretical framework will be discussed in detail. In addition, implications, limitations, delimitations, and recommendations for future research will also be provided.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of veteran middle school teachers in rural Tennessee. This researcher sought to understand how these teachers perceived job-related factors such as workload and work environment, collegial experience, administrative leadership and support, and student behavior impact job satisfaction. Chapter Five includes a summary of findings from this study as well as implications, limitations, and delimitations within the study. Recommendations for future research are also provided.

Summary of Findings

This study served to describe the lived experiences of veteran middle school teachers in rural Tennessee. Participants' experiences were recorded through interviews, an online focus group interview, and reflective journals. These data collection methods and the use of the NVivo 12 application were used to develop four major themes: (a) unrealistic expectations, (b) middle school environment, (c) students, and (d) middle school teacher challenges. The themes and subthemes clearly addressed the central research question and research subquestions which will be addressed in the following sections.

CRQ

The central research question guiding this study was as follows: What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction as a lived experience in rural Tennessee? This research question was used to understand middle school teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction as a lived experience in rural Tennessee. Overall, teachers expressed that they loved teaching and making a difference in students' lives, but they strongly disliked the job-related aspects that

impact their classroom. Each of the four themes developed from data analysis provided insight and clarity to the central research question. Major Theme 1 helped provide a deeper understanding of how teachers viewed expectations from administrators and other stakeholders as unrealistic. Major Theme 2 was focused on the work environment of middle school teachers in rural Tennessee and helped gain insight about how teachers' environmental components such as restrictions and lack of resources impact job satisfaction. Major Theme 3 provided additional insight about the students teachers work with at the middle school level by focusing on the connection between students' behaviors in the classroom and their lives at home. Major Theme 4 provided a deeper level of understanding of the challenges middle school teachers encounter such as their workload, providing students with the support they need, and the hours teachers spend performing their job-related responsibilities.

SQ1

SQ1 was as follows: What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions in rural Tennessee of the ways their workload and work environment impact job satisfaction? Major Themes 1, 2, and 4 developed from the collected data addressed this subquestion. Major Theme 1 was focused on the expectations middle school teachers perceived as unrealistic. Teachers revealed some of the unrealistic expectations were from their administrators as they believed their administrators forgot about the pressure and challenges teachers experience after transitioning into an administrative role. Teachers explained that some of the expectations from administrators were an indication of administration being disconnected to what really happens in the classroom and the job-related responsibilities teachers are expected to perform.

Major Theme 2 showcased the work environment of middle school teachers. Teacher responses indicated that they perceived their work environment as mostly negative due to the

strict time schedule, limited freedom to socialize or take restroom breaks, and unfavorable working relationship with administration. Teachers also discussed the lack of funding and resources they are provided being rural educators and how that negatively impacts job satisfaction. For many teachers, the finances they do receive is not enough for their classroom and they often use their own money to buy supplies and materials needed for their classrooms.

Major Theme 4 highlighted the challenges middle school teachers experience pertaining to their workload. Teachers perceived their workload as overwhelming and too much to handle. Many teachers shared that they felt overwhelmed and stressed by their job-related responsibilities. They are expected to plan lessons, teach to meet standards, and assess students' academic growth and achievement; grade papers, attend meetings, plan activities for school events, and contact parents. Workload plays a role in job satisfaction and when the workload is too much or overwhelming for teachers, it can negatively influence job satisfaction. When asked how the workload impacts how she views her profession, Annie stated, "I love teaching, but because of the workload it's like you can't enjoy your job as much anymore." Due to their strict schedules and occasional meetings during planning, teachers shared that they must take work home during the week and on weekends. For these teachers, the workload is endless, as many find completion of a task leads to the start of another.

SQ2

SQ2 was as follows: What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions in rural Tennessee of the ways their collegial experience with other teachers impacts job satisfaction? Major Theme 2 addressed this subquestion as colleagues are an important part of the middle school environment. Middle school teachers generally had a positive perception of collegial experience and considered colleagues an important aspect in their work environment. As for

relating with colleagues, Kevin explained, “I try to do what is asked and be helpful. I also like to have a good time with my coworkers because we have a stressful enough job.” Many teachers revealed their colleagues were a motivating factor to remain in the teaching profession.

Teachers’ colleagues offer support that no one else can because they are in the same position, help carry the burden, and understand the challenges and pressure teachers experience. Overall, teachers had a positive perception of collegial experience.

SQ3

SQ3 was as follows: What are veteran middle school teachers’ perceptions in rural Tennessee of the ways that administrative leadership and support within their school environment impacts job satisfaction? Major Theme 1 undoubtedly addressed this subquestion. Although teachers had nothing personal against their administrators, they expressed an immense amount of frustration with administrative leadership and support within their schools. As previously mentioned, Major Theme 1 highlighted the unrealistic expectations from administrators and other educational stakeholders. Many teachers shared how they perceived there was a disconnect between them and their administrators due to the transition administrators make from the classroom to the office. Teachers voiced that administrators often become more disconnected the longer they are away from the classroom and forget the challenges and pressure that come with being an educator in the classroom setting. Teachers emphasized the importance of administrators being able to relate to their teachers so they can make more effective school decisions. For many teachers, a lack of communication is a massive hinderance in administrative leadership. Some teachers revealed they have little input about the decisions that are made concerning their schools and are often confused about what their administrators want from them. The biggest issue teachers had regarding administration was the lack of support they receive

from them. Teachers perceived administrative leadership and support had a significant impact in their work environment and how they felt about their profession.

SQ4

SQ4 was as follows: What are veteran middle school teachers' perceptions in rural Tennessee of the ways that student behavior impacts job satisfaction? Major Theme 3 addressed this subquestion in detail as it highlighted student behavior in the classroom and some of the issues they deal with outside the classroom setting. Major Theme 4 also addressed this subquestion when various roles of educators were discussed. In Major Theme 3, teachers shared some of the behavior that students demonstrate in their classrooms such as excessive talking, fighting, and refusal to do assignments. They expressed that these behaviors caused stress mainly because they were disruptive to the learning environment and teachers had to stop during instruction and address behavioral issues. The tight schedule many teachers described also added stress in dealing with student behavior as they explained they do not have time to address student behavior and properly teach their standards.

Students who refused to do assignments bothered teachers the most for multiple reasons. Some teachers explained that they have more paperwork to complete when students do not do their homework, in addition to making time to talk to parents about grades and behavior. Teachers believed they were evaluated using unfair measures as students either lack understanding on the importance of standardized tests or are not concerned about their test performance. Despite the behaviors from students they found disruptive and stressful, teachers explained they believed students acted out to deal with some of the issues they face outside of the classroom. Major Theme 4 provided an additional aspect concerning the workload of middle school teachers by highlighting the various roles teachers fulfill before being educators. Some of

the teachers explained that teaching profession is not what it used to be and that students are coming into school with more emotional issues. Teachers perceived that student behavior impacted how they felt about their jobs due to feeling overwhelmed by some of the issues students deal with and not being able to provide them with the proper support students need. Participants expressed that teaching often seems like an impossible task when so many students have various needs that are not being met and they must play numerous roles before they provide students with an education.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived of experiences of veteran middle school teachers in rural Tennessee. This study was focused specifically on certain job-related aspects and how teachers perceived certain aspects of their jobs impacted job satisfaction. The findings revealed teachers perceived certain aspects of their profession influenced how they felt about their jobs. The findings also relate to empirical and theoretical literature discussed in Chapter Two. Empirical research was presented in the literature review to provide information on rural schools and issues concerning rural school districts and to explain various job-related aspects of the teaching profession. Theoretical literature was grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST as it is focused on the development of humans and how the environment can influence human development.

Empirical Literature

Accounts of veteran middle school teachers' lived experiences gathered in this study addressed many elements concerning teacher job satisfaction. Chapter Two highlighted various aspects of job satisfaction in the teaching profession which consist of the following: the working environment, job-related responsibilities, teacher autonomy, teacher pay, workload, collegial

experience, administrative leadership and support, disruptive students, and parental involvement. Data from this study corroborate previous research on the topic of teacher job satisfaction. Empirical literature has primarily been focused on the study of elementary education and secondary education at the high school level. Previous research also targets job satisfaction in urban schools. There is a gap in the literature concerning job satisfaction of middle school teachers in rural schools.

Empirical literature has indicated a lack of encouragement and recognition, nonsupportive work environment, lack of opportunities, lack of work-life balance, and stress contribute to teachers feeling highly dissatisfied with their jobs (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017). Furthermore, Troesch and Bauer (2017) suggested job satisfaction decreases as classroom stress increases. This current study validated some of these observational points concerning teacher job satisfaction. Participating middle school teachers emphasized the importance of school administrators relating to their teachers so they can properly support and encourage teachers when needed. An example of this was highlighted in Olivia's interview: "I think the stronger and more confident an administrative leader is, then the better they give support. I think that if they struggle in whatever areas it might be, then the support kind of falls to the wayside." Some teachers mentioned the lack of opportunities for advancement their profession offers as many positions in education require advanced degrees and there is little increase in teacher pay. This was evident during the online focus group interview as Denise and Kelly discussed their education and degrees and how they are still underpaid. Teachers also accentuated the significance of recognizing the hard work they do for their students and the future of society rather than always pointing out what they do wrong. As Veronica explained,

So, I think that if we had more of, “Hey, I appreciate you,” or, “That was good,” or just little things that said, “I appreciate what you’re doing,” or, “I see that,” or, “That didn’t go unnoticed.” Then I think you would see the atmosphere in the building change. When you see the atmosphere with your teachers change, you’re going to see the atmosphere with your children change.

A lack of work-life balance (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017) was also highlighted as participants described how they must take work home in order to meet their job demands. For example, Denise shared how her husband often asks how much work she is going to take bring home. Veronica wrote in her journal about her struggle of balancing her work responsibilities and her responsibilities at home. She stated that she often finds herself staying up late to catch up on work after she takes care of her husband and children.

One major divergence from previous research was teachers’ attitudes regarding their contribution to their schools while self-reporting as experiencing low job satisfaction. Previous research has shown that teachers who experience low job satisfaction are more likely to become disengaged in the teaching profession, put forth little effort into performing job-related responsibilities, and give up commitment altogether (Banerjee et al., 2017; Dou et al., 2016). Although teachers in this study self-reported as experiencing low job satisfaction, they also expressed their love for teaching and working with students. Their lack of satisfaction toward their jobs was directed more toward multiple aspects of their careers such as workload and work environment, administrative leadership and support, and dealing with student problems not related to the classroom. An example of this came from Annie: “I love teaching, but because of the workload, it’s like you can’t enjoy your job much anymore.”

Previous research has indicated the time in which teachers are expected to complete assigned tasks from administrators and other educational stakeholders plays a significant role in job satisfaction as well as the physical and mental health of teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Waterman, 2013; Yu et al., 2015). The responses from teachers corroborate these observations as many teachers explained that the time they have to perform job-related tasks is not enough. In her journal, Olivia wrote that by the time one task is completed, another one is added to the workload. Veronica wrote in her journal that the time they have for planning does not begin to scratch the surface of what is necessary to complete their workload and sometimes their planning is taken away due to various meetings. In her interview, Carol revealed that within the past 2 years, her workload and other stress-related elements concerning her job have had a significant impact on her mental and physical health. In her interview, Veronica said,

The mental part of being a teacher, the mental facet of it, it makes it so hard because everybody needs to detox from the day and I often find that you don't have time to detox because you're preparing for the next day and so it constantly stays in your mind.

Research on middle school education has provided a look into the work environment of teachers, which presents many challenges. Within their work environment, teachers work with young adolescents, make adjustments to daily activities, keep up with current trends in curriculum and instruction, and deal with physical and financial restrictions (Collie & Martin, 2017; Huang et al., 2019; Przybylska, 2016; Waterman, 2013). This current study authenticated previous research as participants shared the restrictions they experience in their work environment. According to Waterman (2013), the work environment of teachers can be restricting as they are on strict schedules and have limited restroom breaks and time for lunch. Veronica shared that lunch and sometimes planning make up the only real time teachers have to

socialize with colleagues and even that time is limited. Olivia explained that another teacher must cover her classroom whenever she is doing restroom duty during breaks or overseeing a fundraising event. All of these middle school teachers expressed how limited resources restrict the learning environment in their classroom and explained that they do not always have the materials and supplies they need. Furthermore, they revealed most of the materials and supplies they do have are paid for with their own money. An example of this was seen in the online focus group when Carol stated that she lacks the resources she needs to teach her standards and Joe added, “We are responsible for our classroom supplies and we have to buy them if something is needed.” This also confirms previous research on rural education and the issue of limited resources for rural schools (NEA, 2017; Wiczorek & Manard, 2018).

Within the school environment teachers have many interactions with their colleagues. Collegial experience can have a negative impact on job satisfaction if colleagues are disrespectful, not supportive, or complain too much (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Pogodzinski, 2014; Rankin, 2017). This study was diverse from previous research as teachers generally spoke highly of colleagues and emphasized the importance of collegial support in their profession. All participating teachers expressed that they had a good working relationship with their colleagues. Annie shared about teachers in her professional learning community (PLC): “My colleagues that I PLC with, we are also very close and supportive of each other.” The only negative collegial experience that was mentioned came from four teachers. Denise and Olivia shared that some colleagues seem to not have nearly the amount of paperwork they had. Joe and Mary discussed unfavorable interactions they have encountered with colleagues were likely due to stress; however, despite the negative impressions, these teachers had a positive perception of working with their colleagues. Many teachers shared that they had a family-like relationship with their

colleagues and that if it was not for the people they worked with, they probably would not be currently teaching. This was evident in Veronica's interview as she said, "If it weren't for my colleagues, I'd probably . . . I would have probably already quit." Participants also revealed that most of the support they received from their work environment came from their colleagues. This was due to the fact that they worked closely together and understood the stress each teacher was under and the challenges they faced; as Carol stated, "It is because they're your soldiers by your side. They understand more than anybody else what you deal with every day."

Previous research suggests that job satisfaction can be impacted by administrative leadership and support (Dou et al., 2016; Thibodeaux et al., 2015). According to Song and Mustafa (2015), teachers want more administrative support in dealing with student-discipline problems and accessing materials for their classroom. This current study confirmed these points as some teachers stated they wanted administrative support in disciplining students. When it came to describing their perceptions of how administrative leadership and support impacted job satisfaction, participants' responses diverged from previous research. All of the participants expressed that they perceived a disconnect between themselves and administration. They explained that the longer administrators are away from the classroom setting, the more they forget the pressures teachers are under and what challenges teachers face in their classrooms. They also stated that they believed being away from the classroom caused administrators and other educational stakeholders in higher positions to have unrealistic expectations of educators. All participants shared that the workload placed on teachers and the time in which they must complete it were unrealistic. Olivia and Joe stated that they understood administrators take on a role with a different set of challenges, but they also emphasized the importance of administrators relating to their teachers. Many teachers also revealed that interaction with administration was

the most difficult aspect of their jobs and believed their work environment would not be as negative if administrators adjusted their leadership skills and related better to their teachers.

According to Mary,

In my opinion, I think that if you are an admin, you should at least be in at least 1 day a month in the classroom just to keep yourself humble and be able to relate to with what your teachers are going through.

Previous research has shown that the student behaviors teachers often complain about consist of a lack of self-control, lack of respect, and the inability to deal with emotions (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Waterman, 2013). Teachers mentioned some of the behaviors they deal with from student also included excessive talking and a lack of effort put forth on assignments. Responses from these middle school teachers corroborated with previous research on student behavior, but they also added to literature concerning the connection between student behavior and their troubled lives at home (Waterman, 2013).

Although teachers mentioned the behaviors discussed in previous research (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Waterman, 2013), they revealed those behaviors did not bother them as much since they understood their students have troubled lives at home (Waterman, 2013). These teachers stated that they felt more stressed trying to provide the basic needs for their students before they could educate them. During the online focus group interview, Joe said, “Teaching is evolving. Teaching is not the same as it was 10–15 years ago. Students have many needs today and we try to be the stable part in their life.” Mary agreed and added, “We have to be the mentor and positive role model and, for most kids, we are the only positive they see.” Responses from teachers added to existing literature by highlighting the multiple roles teachers step into before assuming their primary role as educator.

Many of the participants shared that they often felt they must play the role of a mother or father due to a lack of parental involvement in students' lives. Annie, Joe, and Mary felt they do more counseling than educating due to the issues that students face. Veronica wrote in her journal that she feels like a police officer monitoring illegal activities and other unacceptable student behavior. Overall, the teachers explained that dealing with students who have troubled lives at home was more stressful as the issues many of them face are not the same as they were 20 or 30 years ago. Furthermore, teachers felt conflicted as they experienced pressure trying to help their students properly and teach them the standards students find irrelevant compared to their problems. An example of this was evident in one of Mary's journal entries:

Teachers daily have to deal with students who have been abused, neglected, and simply unsupported at home. A large number of our students come to school hungry. My visitor would see little kids dealing with adult problems and teachers trying to meet academic standards that are irrelevant to students whose basic needs are not being met.

Theoretical Literature

The theoretical framework guiding this study was Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST, which is focused on human development and how the environment of an individual can impact one's development. Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1979) categorized an individual's environment into five systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. As previously mentioned, the working environment of middle school teachers is a unique and challenging setting (Huang et al., 2019; Przybylska, 2016; Waterman, 2013). The work environment of middle school educators is one of their immediate environments in which they spend at least 7 hours after school and on weekends working on their job-related workload (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018; Johari et al., 2018). When applying Bronfenbrenner's (1976,

1979) EST to middle school teachers, it is important to note how their environment and organisms within their environment differ from that of other individuals.

The first layer of the EST is the microsystem. This layer consists of social agents in an individual's immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979). For middle school teachers, these social agents would include students, school faculty, social groups, and family. An individual's interactions with the social agents in one's immediate environment can affect one's development. For instance, teachers who have negative interactions with students and other teachers are likely to develop a negative perception of their jobs over time (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Thibodeaux et al., 2015). The findings from this present study diverged from previous research as teachers expressed that they have positive relationships and interactions with students and other teachers. Social agents within their immediate environment were not components in veteran middle school teachers' perceptions of how they viewed their profession.

The mesosystem includes interactions between the microsystems of an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979). There are many microsystems in a teacher's environment and sometimes the relationship between some of these agents such as family and work can be challenging (Liu & Cheung, 2015). According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015), sometimes the interactions of microsystems can be stressful and cause teachers to be less sensitive to students' needs. Responses from teachers supported and added to previous research. Some teachers expressed that they struggle with balancing work and family as they often take work home. Although previous research has shown teachers may be less sensitive to student needs if they experience low job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015), findings from this study indicate that teachers are sensitive to the needs of their students as they described the various roles they fulfill to help take care of their basic needs. Teachers shared that before they can educate

students, they must be a parent, counselor, and nurse among other roles due to students having troubled lives at home. During the online focus group interview, Mary said spoke of what she wished educational stakeholders knew about her job: “I wish they knew the real demand put on teachers. We are truancy officers, child welfare checkers, moral supporters, mentors, advisors, and then educators.”

The exosystem consists of outside agents concerning educators include administration, the school district, and federal government (Smith et al., 2017). Although teachers may not directly interact with administration, the central office, or the federal government, the decisions made from these agents can impact a teacher’s immediate environment and individual development. This was evident during the online focus group interview as teachers discussed the impact standardized testing impacted their perception of their jobs. Although teachers do not have direct contact with policymakers in education, they are affected by their policies and regulations such as standardized testing at the end of the year. Veronica expressed that there was too much emphasis on students’ scores and that evaluating teachers based on students’ scores was unfair. Olivia and Suzie shared that students already test enough throughout the school year and do not understand or care about standardized tests. Kelly also explained it is unfair to be evaluated on a test that some students do not take seriously. Denise summed up these thoughts:

If we didn’t have to worry about the assessments, we would be able to do more teaching; but I do see the need for assessments. I just wish the importance would be focused on what the students need instead of how to evaluate the teachers.

Another example of teachers’ environment being impacted without direct contact with social agents was seen in their interactions with students. Although teachers stated they had a positive relationship with students, they also mentioned that the issues students deal with at

home affect how they view their profession. Annie provided an example of this: “I love teaching, but it’s like I can’t teach because of all this other stuff going on and these students need support.” Denise expressed in her interview the problems students experience today are different than they were 20 or 30 years ago and that caring for students’ basic needs is often exhausting and challenging. Many teachers shared that they love teaching, but with the issues students bring with them to the classroom, it is nearly an impossible task to educate them.

In the macrosystem, environmental components such as the economy, politics, and socioculture can impact the development of an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979; Nand, 2017). The development of teachers in rural school areas is often affected by components such as politics, the economy, cultural values, and poverty (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018; Zuckerman et al., 2018). Furthermore, rural schools often face the challenge of limited funding and a lack of resources, which impacts rural teachers’ environment (Azano & Stewart, 2015; NEA, 2017). This study corroborated previous research as teachers explained they have limited resources for their classrooms and that due to a lack of funding, they often have to spend their own money on materials and supplies. During the online focus group interview, teachers described the challenges that educators in rural Tennessee encounter. Along with limited funding and limited resources, rural education is not as supported or respected by the community as it used to be years ago as Joe said, “The community does not respect teachers and school administrators like they did 10–15 years ago.” Olivia also revealed students in rural schools are not as motivated in learning as many of them are focused on making money now and having jobs like their parents without thinking about what jobs may or may not be available in the future.

Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1979) categorized the last layer as the chronosystem, which involves traumatic or life-changing events that would have an impact on an individual’s

development. For teachers, some of these major events may include marriage, divorce, a death in the family, children, or transitioning to a new role or school (Price & McCallum, 2015).

These major events can impact the development of a teacher personally and professionally.

Findings in this study did not provide sufficient data to confirm or refute previous research on the chronosystem.

Implications

This study encompassed the use of individual interviews, an online focus group interview, and reflective journals to capture the lived experiences of veteran middle school teachers in rural Tennessee and their perceptions of job satisfaction concerning multiple facets in the teaching profession. According to the findings of this study, middle school teachers had a negative perception of multiple facets in their profession which impacted job satisfaction. The collected data produced information that could be useful for administrators and policymakers at the district and federal levels. To better support rural educators, it is important to understand their lived experiences and their perceptions of job satisfaction. The following sections include discussion of the empirical, theoretical, and practical implications.

Empirical

Findings from this study confirmed and added to empirical research on the topic of teacher job satisfaction and aspects of the teaching profession that impact job satisfaction. Empirical research has identified a variety of components that impact teacher job satisfaction. Some of the major aspects in the teaching profession include workload, work environment, collegial experience, administrative leadership and support, and student behavior. This study supported and added to some of these components, but also diverged from previous research.

Literature on teacher workload has indicated that teachers spend hours inside and outside of school fulfilling job-related responsibilities within a given timeframe and the demands placed on teachers has a significant impact on job satisfaction (Johari et al., 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Yu et al., 2015). The findings of this study supported the literature on teacher workload. Middle school teachers described their workload as overwhelming due to spending hours after school and on weekends grading papers, planning lessons, and planning activities for school events. Many teachers further explained that teaching is more than a 7-hour workday as Joe explained, “Actually, the easy part is from 8:00 to 3:00 to me. After 3:00 is going home, grading papers, preparing for lessons, getting grades in, calling parents, plus anything else that we are required to do.” He also added that he spends up to 8 hours on Saturdays grading homework. Veronica and Denise stated that in order to do their job adequately and stay caught up on their workload, they must take work home.

This study also added to the empirical research on teacher pay. The literature has shown teachers are salaried employees and that salary is a positive component in retaining teachers due to its impact on job satisfaction (Saiti & Papadopoulos, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2013; Tang et al., 2018). The findings of this study support these claims, but also diverge from research that has shown teachers who are dissatisfied are less motivated and teachers who feel they are paid what they deserve are more likely to work harder (Karim et al., 2017). All of the teachers in this study demonstrated a hard work ethic as they described the long hours they put into their work to plan rigorous lessons and analyze data for student growth and academic achievement. Some teachers such as Joe, Olivia, and Veronica were also involved in leadership roles within their schools and organizations. Although these educators were motivated in their work, they were also dissatisfied with their jobs and felt they were not paid

according to the time and work put into to teaching. During the online focus group interview, Joe stated that an increase in pay would not change how he felt about his job, but it would help compensate for the work he does and the hours he spends trying to be an effective educator. Mary added, “Yes! At least we would be compensated for some of the struggles we deal with.”

The literature on the work environment of middle school teachers suggested it is a challenging setting in which teachers work with early adolescents (Huang et al., 2019; Przbylska, 2016; Waterman, 2013). The work environment of middle school teachers is also constantly changing as teachers are expected to make adjustments to daily activities and keep up with current trends in curriculum and instruction (Collie & Martin, 2017). The findings of the current study support and add to the empirical research as many teachers who had a background in elementary education described how the middle school setting is different. For example, Veronica shared that middle school students often become more independent and less likely to ask for help even when it is needed. Olivia and Veronica revealed it takes more work to get students at the middle school level to buy into education and to recognize its value. Furthermore, teaching students in this age group is challenging as many students go through changes in their emotions and relationships with family and peers.

Many teachers perceived their work environment as negative due to their overwhelming workload and a lack of administrative leadership and support. During the online focus group interview, teachers explained that the issues of teaching in rural schools also affected their environment as there is often a lack of funding and a lack of resources. Carol, Denise, and Joe admitted to spending their own money on materials and supplies for their classroom. Overall, teachers stated that they love teaching and working with students, but the job-related demands, political involvement, and other circumstances surrounding their environment were unfavorable.

Veronica summed up this point when describing students and young adults interested in becoming teachers: “I think that we get that negative vibe to tell them not to go to school to be a teacher because so many things are negative for us.”

The literature on collegial experience in the teaching profession indicates that teachers receive positive gains when they work with satisfied teachers (Thibodeaux et al., 2015) and that colleagues are important as they offer support and share resources (Pogodzinski, 2014). Empirical research has also suggested negative interactions with colleagues can affect job satisfaction and that teachers who are negative can negatively affect how teachers view their jobs (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Rankin, 2017). Findings from this study diverged from the existing literature on collegial experience in the teaching profession and added to the empirical research on the importance of collegial support. Joe, Kelly, and Veronica expressed that if it were not for their colleagues, they probably would not remain in the teaching profession. According to the participants of this study, most of the support they receive comes from their colleagues. Most of them had a positive perception of the teachers they work with and found it helpful to have colleagues who understood the pressure they were under and the challenges they encountered on their jobs because they shared these experiences themselves. In her journal, Mary wrote, “Relating to colleagues is not really a problem. I think most educators feel we are in the same boat. We all know the disconnect between expectations and reality, but do not know what to do about it.” There were some unfavorable perceptions of colleagues as Denise and Olivia shared that they do not understand how some of their colleagues could go home at 3:00 p.m. without papers to take home, but they did express they had a positive working relationship with colleagues on their teams and teachers they worked more closely with than others. Joe did not understand how some colleagues could not be professional in their interactions, but said it was

likely due to stress from their work environment and had a positive perception of the colleagues he worked with closely.

The literature on administrative leadership and support has shown that administrators play a vital role in schools as they mentor teachers and provide support (Graham, 2015). Research has indicated teachers desire greater support from administrators when it comes to accessing materials, implementing instructional methods, and dealing with student-discipline issues (Song & Mustafa, 2015). The findings from the present study supported empirical research as many teachers expressed they wanted more support from their administrators. Kelly and Veronica stated that a lack of communication was an issue concerning administration. The findings of this study also added to the literature as teachers emphasized there was a disconnect between educators and other educational stakeholders. For example, Carol explained that when administrators transition from the classroom to an administrative role, they forget the pressures and challenges teachers experience. Olivia stated that the longer administrators are away from the classroom and the higher the position they obtain, the more disconnected they become. In forgetting the pressures and challenges teachers experience, administrators are likely to have unrealistic expectations of teachers as described in participants' responses. Mary shared that the timeframe teachers have to fulfill certain job-related demands from administration is unrealistic as they already have a full workload.

The literature on student behavior has indicated teachers find a lack of self-control, a lack of respect, and the inability to deal with emotions as disruptive (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Waterman, 2013). The findings from this study support the literature, but also added to it as teachers shared more about the students they work with and the behavior they demonstrate in class. Although teachers stated that they found excessive talking

and a lack of self-control disruptive, they found the issues many of these students deal with were more disruptive as they often have to meet the basic needs of students before they can educate them. Teachers revealed they find themselves taking on the role of mothers, fathers, counselors, police and truancy officers, welfare checkers, and other roles before fulfilling their role as educator. In her journal, Mary shared that many of the students they work with have troubled lives at home and the standards educational stakeholders in higher positions emphasize are not relevant to these students. Denise explained that it is difficult to teach students who are hungry or do not know where they will be sleeping that night.

Theoretical

The theoretical framework guiding this study was Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST, which is focused on human development and how the environment of an individual impacts his or her development. A total of 10 rural veteran educators in Tennessee participated in this study. The lived experiences of these teachers contribute to the study of Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST, but they also diverged from previous research surrounding the theory. This study was focused on multiple facets in the teaching profession and how teachers perceived that these facets impacted job satisfaction. This study also shows the connection between veteran middle school teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction in rural Tennessee and Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST. Middle school teachers in this study expressed frustration about various aspects of education that fall into different systems of EST.

Concerning the microsystem, teachers had a favorable perception of the social agents within their immediate environment. Overall, they perceived the support they received from colleagues positively impacted job satisfaction. They also shared that they enjoy working with students. Within the mesosystem, teachers' collective agents such as family and work collide,

creating a challenge for teachers to balance (Bronfenbrenner, 1976 1979; Liu & Cheung, 2015). This concept was further confirmed in this study. Veronica explained the challenge of balancing work and family as she is often exhausted at the end of the day taking care of her family and trying to catch up on her workload from school. Denise stated that her husband often questions how many bags of work she will bring home because she spends several hours after school and on weekends working on her job-related workload.

Teachers' frustrations were evident in the exosystem as this system involves agents outside teachers' immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979). These outside agents consist of administrators, central office employees, and policymakers at the federal level (Smith et al., 2017). These agents typically do not have direct contact with educators. Although administrators work in the same school as teachers, they do not have daily interactions with teachers directly. Many teachers expressed that the lack of communication and support from administration negatively affects the work environment. They also stated administrators have the unrealistic expectation of getting certain tasks done in a short amount of time which adds to their stress and workload. These teachers revealed that administration and those in higher education positions typically forget what it is like to be in the classroom setting dealing with some of the challenges that teachers encounter and enduring the pressure they are under frequently.

The macrosystem also showed evidence of frustration from teachers. This system consists of cultural components such as economics and politics which impact the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979; Nand, 2017). Teachers expressed frustration over political involvement in education. Many teachers stated that politics has become too involved in education and decisions are being made without considering how those decisions may affect

teachers and students. They also shared that policymakers have no idea about what it is like to be in the classroom setting on a professional level and deal with the job-related demands teachers experience. Many teachers stated this point was evident as many expectations from the federal government are unrealistic and unfair to teachers. For instance, when discussing standardized assessments during the online focus group interview, Kelly and Veronica explained how unfair it was to be evaluated and scored based on students' standardized test scores. Carol, Joe, and Olivia also shared the challenges they encounter as educators in rural Tennessee. Rural school districts often deal with economic challenges such as poverty and a lack of resources which can impact classroom instruction (Azano & Stewart, 2015; NEA, 2017). Many of the participants discussed a lack of funding and resources they need for their classrooms. Carol, Denise, and Joe stated that they spend their own money on materials and supplies, which causes frustration as they feel they are not supported properly.

The chronosystem was not highlighted in this study as teachers did not thoroughly discuss life-changing events in their lives and how those events impacted their work environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979). The closest any of the teachers came to addressing the chronosystem of their environment was when many of them discussed their transitions to their current middle schools and when one teacher briefly mentioned how her health has worsened within the last 2 years due to work-related stress. Overall, the systems that impacted the development of teachers the most were the mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Agents not in direct contact with teachers frequently and work-related aspects beyond teachers' control impacted how teachers perceived job satisfaction in rural Tennessee.

Practical

The existing literature has practical implications for those who work with middle school teachers in rural Tennessee. Administrators play a vital role in education as they impact teachers' work assignments, access to resources, and professional evaluations (Pogodzinski, 2014). The leadership and support they provide can impact teacher job satisfaction (Dou et al., 2016; Thibodeaux et al., 2015). The findings in this study provided information administrators may find useful and could help them provide proper support for their teachers. One recommendation for administrators, as indicated by participants, is to relate to their teachers better. Middle school teachers perceived a disconnect between themselves and their administration and that disconnect negatively impacted their work environment. Many teachers stated that as administrators leave the classroom and take an administrative role, they begin to forget the pressure and challenges teachers experience, which causes them to not be able to relate to their teachers properly. According to Olivia, the longer administrators are away from the classroom, the more the disconnect becomes evident. The participants emphasized the importance of administrators relating to their teachers so they can better support them. If administrators take the time to relate to their teachers professionally, they will likely be more aware of the current issues teachers face in their classrooms. Teachers also expressed the disconnect they see from administration contributes to the unrealistic expectations placed upon them because they have been away from the classroom for a period of time and have forgotten the workload and time constraints teachers experience.

Educational stakeholders at the district and federal levels may find the accounts of lived experiences of veteran middle school teachers useful. Central office employees and policymakers may be able to provide better support and have a deeper understanding of the

impact their decisions have on the classroom. In addition to a disconnect from administration, teachers perceived those in higher positions in education have a greater disconnect as they have either been away from the classroom longer or have never been in the classroom. Many of these teachers shared that decisions being made in education are not helping teachers and students. In addition, many participants revealed that the professional development sessions and conferences they attend are not always useful because the instructional strategies taught are not relevant in the classroom today since those leading the sessions have no clue what teachers and students face inside and outside the classroom. Denise explained that many presenters have ideas about what will work in the classroom, yet have little or no classroom experience. Carol wrote in her journal that she is often expected to share with colleagues in her department what she learned from sessions she attends and struggles to do so as the information she receives is irrelevant to her subject and the time she has for classroom instruction.

It is important for educational stakeholders at the school, district, and federal levels to relate to educators and understand the pressures and challenges they experience. Kelly and Mary shared that it would be beneficial for these stakeholders to spend a day in the classroom at least once a month to humble themselves and to gain a greater understanding about what teachers deal with regularly. Taking the time to relate to teachers and spending time in the classroom would allow administrators to gain insight into what takes place in the classroom such as the interruptions that occur and disruptive behavior that sometimes arises. Furthermore, administrators and policymakers would also see the various roles teachers sometimes have to fulfill before they can educate students as some students come from troubled homes and bring their issues with them and how standards are sometimes irrelevant to these students. By relating to teachers, educational stakeholders at all levels may be able to examine their expectations of

teachers and help monitor how much they add to teachers' workload when it comes to job-related tasks and standardized tests.

Delimitations and Limitations

To collect data that aligned with the purpose of understanding the lived experiences of veteran middle school educators in rural Tennessee, it was important to set delimitations. This study contained a set of boundaries that helped maintain the focus of understanding the lived experiences of specific participants. The criteria for participation in this study required teachers to have more than 5 years of teaching experience as this study was focused on the lived experiences of veteran educators. Participants also had to teach students at the middle school level in rural Tennessee at the time of the study. Middle schools were specified to describe the lived experiences of teachers who teach middle school students as there is not enough literature concerning middle schools. The third criteria for participants required them to self-report as experiencing low job satisfaction. Participants were identified by completing Spector's JSS. This study was aimed to understand the lived experiences of middle school teachers who self-reported as having unfavorable or doubtful perceptions of their jobs. The purpose of having participants who possessed unfavorable or doubtful perceptions of their jobs was not only to share their lived experiences, but also to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions concerning various aspects of the teaching profession.

Although there were delimitations set in place, there were limitations present in the study that are important to address. For instance, a total of 12 participants were invited to participate in the study; however, due to inclement weather and sickness among the counties where teachers worked, several snow and sick days were issued in a short period of time. This added to teachers' stress and workload and caused two participants to withdraw from the study.

Ultimately, 10 teachers participated in the study, but there was a gender bias present as there were two male teachers and eight female teachers. Another limitation to this study included the study focusing on educators in rural Tennessee. Urban schools, charter schools, and private schools were not focused on in the study. Furthermore, rural educators in the Southeastern part of the United States were the only sample used this study of teacher job satisfaction.

Another limitation was the reliability of Spector's JSS for this study in gathering participants. For instance, before and after individual interviews, some participants expressed confusion concerning some of the questions asked on the survey. Carol commented that she was confused about what was meant by the word *organization* when she responded to statements such as, "Communications seem good within this organization," "The goals within this organization are clear to me," and "I often feel I do not know what is going on with this organization." For Carol and other participants, the term *organization* could refer to the school, central office, or the Tennessee Department of Education. Due to the lack of clarity concerning the definition of *organization*, participants' responses may have been different had the survey specified what was meant by organization. Based on the responses from participants, it was evident there was a slight variation in their responses to the survey and their responses to the interview questions. This was likely due to fear or concern about administrators or central office employees seeing survey results as teachers who completed the survey were required to provide their name and email. Some teachers who responded to the survey with slight favor concerning their supervisors, spoke negatively on administrative leadership and support during interviews, online focus group interview, and reflective journals. In education, *supervisor* could refer to administrators, the superintendent, or the commissioner. Therefore, these various interpretations of survey statements could have altered the participants' scores.

Another limitation was the use of an online focus group interview. Due to teachers working in different schools and counties, conducting the focus group online was the best option as this prevented teachers and the researcher from traveling a far distance. As the researcher, having at least one interaction with participants face-to-face was important in order to get to know the participants better. Additionally, interviews in person provided the opportunity to collect information about participants and their lived experiences that would not have been gathered without personal interaction. Although teachers answered interview questions in-depth and participated in real time, an in-person focus group in one setting might have provided greater insight into the questions asked.

Recommendations for Future Research

Teacher job satisfaction is a growing concern in education (Drummond & Halsey, 2014; Lindqvist & Nordanger, 2016). Teachers play an essential role in education and the future. It is important to help increase teacher retention and to provide educators the support they need. With teacher attrition on the rise and the high demand for highly qualified teachers, studies on the subject of teacher job satisfaction need to continue. While this study presented the lived experiences of veteran middle school teachers who experienced low job satisfaction, there are still gaps in the literature concerning teacher job satisfaction that need to be filled. More studies on this topic are recommended for future research.

As previously mentioned, this study contained a total of 10 participants. Only two of the participants were male teachers. A mixed-methods study with more male teachers could be helpful in avoiding a limitation and to compare male teachers' perceptions and female teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction. This study was also focused on veteran educators. Due to teacher attrition increasing, it may be beneficial to conduct a transcendental phenomenological

study to understand the lived experiences of novice educators. Furthermore, such research could provide greater insight on novice teachers' perspectives on job satisfaction and help administrators and policymakers to prevent teachers from leaving the profession early in their careers. A case study focusing on educators experiencing low job satisfaction in one rural middle school setting is recommended to understand teachers' lived experiences within a particular work environment.

Finally, there was not a great deal of information discovered within the data of this study that provided insight into the chronosystem layer of Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST. A phenomenological study with a transcendental approach is recommended to focus on the chronosystem layer of the theory and how major life events in teachers' lives impact job satisfaction. This could be beneficial for administrators and policymakers in examining the workload and job-related demands placed on teachers and how major life events could impact teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction. Findings of this recommended study could also add to Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) EST.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of veteran middle school teachers in rural Tennessee. Data were collected through individual interviews, an online focus group interview, and reflective journals. The lived experiences of veteran middle school teachers in rural Tennessee revealed four major themes: (a) unrealistic expectations, (b) middle school environment, (c) students, and (d) overwhelming workload. It was discovered that middle school teachers found the expectations from administrators and other educational stakeholders unrealistic due to time given to complete job-related demands and challenges they encountered in the classroom. They also perceived their

environment of their middle schools as negative for a variety of reasons. The main causes for teachers' perceptions of their work environment were a lack of administrative leadership and support, limited funding and a lack of resources, and dealing with student issues unrelated to school. Teachers perceived behavior demonstrated by students in the classroom setting was mainly due to the problems they face outside the school setting, which caused them to be understanding when disruptive situations occurred. However, they expressed the troubled lives students experienced at home was often too much for them to handle and that teaching standards was nearly impossible when many students' basic needs were not being met. It was also discovered that middle school teachers perceived their workload as overwhelming due to the long hours spent performing job-related responsibilities and fulfilling various roles to meet students' basic needs. Although participants' experiences varied at times, it was determined that teachers mostly had negative perceptions of job-related aspects of their profession as previously discussed.

Currently, there is a high demand for highly qualified educators in rural Tennessee. It is important for all educational stakeholders in Tennessee to understand the lived experiences of veteran middle school teachers so educators can receive the support they need. By having greater insight into the lived experiences of rural educators, school districts may be able to retain highly qualified teachers. Through the findings of this study, educational stakeholders at the school, district, and federal levels may gain a deeper understanding of how rural educators perceive various aspects of their job such as workload, administrative leadership and support, collegial experience, and student behavior and how these components impact job satisfaction. Furthermore, educational stakeholders may be able to examine their own role in teacher job satisfaction to learn how to relate better to educators and provide them with the support they

need. Despite the pressures and challenges experienced by educators in rural Tennessee, the participants in this study emphasized that they love teaching and helping students become successful; they just strongly disliked the circumstances surrounding their classrooms and wanted to be able to focus more on what they love: teaching.

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APPENDIX A: PERMISSION REQUEST LETTER

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Shayla D. Carew and I am currently pursuing my Ed.D. in Educational Leadership through Liberty University. I am reaching out to you to seek permission to conduct my research study in your school district.

My study will focus on the job satisfaction and job-related experiences of veteran middle school teachers in Tennessee with five or more years of experience. Because this is not a case study, and I am not looking for one school or school district in particular, I need access to multiple school districts in Tennessee, preferably three districts. Data collection for my study would consist of distributing a survey to middle school teachers to identify whether or not they meet the criteria to participate in the study, interviewing participants, and collecting a written sample from participants. The identity of the participants will be kept confidential by the use of pseudonyms and password-protected devices used in the data collection process.

I am requesting permission to conduct my research study once I receive approval from the IRB. I would highly appreciate your assistance in this next phase in my doctoral journey. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns by phone ([REDACTED]) or by email ([REDACTED]).

Sincerely,

Shayla D. Carew

APPENDIX B: PAUL E. SPECTOR'S JOB SATISFACTION SURVEY

JOB SATISFACTION SURVEY Paul E. Spector Department of Psychology University of South Florida Copyright Paul E. Spector 1994, All rights reserved.							
PLEASE CIRCLE THE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH QUESTION THAT COMES CLOSEST TO REFLECTING YOUR OPINION ABOUT IT.		Disagree Very Much	Disagree Moderately	Disagree Slightly	Agree Slightly	Agree Moderately	Agree Very Much
1	I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	There is really too little chance for promotion on my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	My supervisor is quite competent in doing his/her job.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I am not satisfied with the benefits I receive.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	Many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	I like the people I work with.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	I sometimes feel my job is meaningless.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	Communications seem good within this organization.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	Raises are too few and far between.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	Those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	My supervisor is unfair to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	The benefits we receive are as good as most other organizations offer.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	I do not feel that the work I do is appreciated.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	My efforts to do a good job are seldom blocked by red tape.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16	I find I have to work harder at my job because of the incompetence of people I work with.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17	I like doing the things I do at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6

18	The goals of this organization are not clear to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
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19	I feel unappreciated by the organization when I think about what they pay me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20	People get ahead as fast here as they do in other places.	1	2	3	4	5	6
21	My supervisor shows too little interest in the feelings of subordinates.	1	2	3	4	5	6
22	The benefit package we have is equitable.	1	2	3	4	5	6
23	There are few rewards for those who work here.	1	2	3	4	5	6
24	I have too much to do at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6
25	I enjoy my coworkers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
26	I often feel that I do not know what is going on with the organization.	1	2	3	4	5	6
27	I feel a sense of pride in doing my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6
28	I feel satisfied with my chances for salary increases.	1	2	3	4	5	6
29	There are benefits we do not have which we should have.	1	2	3	4	5	6
30	I like my supervisor.	1	2	3	4	5	6
31	I have too much paperwork.	1	2	3	4	5	6
32	I don't feel my efforts are rewarded the way they should be.	1	2	3	4	5	6
33	I am satisfied with my chances for promotion.	1	2	3	4	5	6
34	There is too much bickering and fighting at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6
35	My job is enjoyable.	1	2	3	4	5	6
36	Work assignments are not fully explained.	1	2	3	4	5	6

APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 6, 2019

Shayla D. Carew

IRB Approval 3935.110619: Low Job Satisfaction as a Lived Experience for Veteran Middle School Teachers in Rural Tennessee: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Shayla D. Carew,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

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APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
11/6/2019 to 11/5/2020
Protocol # 3935.110619

CONSENT FORM

Low Job Satisfaction as a Lived Experience for Veteran Middle School Teachers in Rural
Tennessee: A Phenomenological Study

Shayla D. Carew
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to participate in a research study on the lived experiences of veteran middle school teachers in rural Tennessee with low job satisfaction. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a current veteran middle school educator, teach in a rural school district in Tennessee, and meet the cut score on the questionnaire indicating low job satisfaction. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Shayla D. Carew, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The present study is a phenomenological study designed to understand veteran middle school teachers' lived experiences with low job satisfaction.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- Allow the researcher to use the data collected from the screening survey.
- Participate in an audio-recorded interview (60 minutes).
- Review a transcription of your interview (30 minutes).
- Participate in an online focus group (60 minutes).
- Participate in an electronic reflective journal forum (Approximately 10-15 minutes for each of the four journal prompts during a three-week window).
- Review researcher notes on your journal entries (10 minutes for each journal prompt).

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit by participating in this study.

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
11/6/2019 to 11/5/2020
Protocol # 3935.110619

Compensation: Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. You will receive a \$50 Amazon gift card upon completion of this study. Should you choose to withdraw from the study, you will not be compensated.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data. Data collected from the present study will be stored for three years after completion of the study. The following measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality of participants:

- Participants and research sites will be assigned a pseudonym.
- Individual interviews will be conducted in a location where conversations cannot be easily heard.
- Participants will be assigned an email pseudonym created specifically for the present study for the online focus group interview.
- Participants will receive a secure link to complete the reflective journal prompts.
- Data collected from interviews and the reflective journal will be stored on a password protected computer, which will be locked with a key when not being used.
- My personal researcher journal concerning the present study will also be locked with a key.
- All data from interviews, the reflective journal, and researcher journal will be deleted electronically or shredded after three years of completing the present study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from the focus group, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Data from the online focus group will not be destroyed; however, your individual contribution to the group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
11/6/2019 to 11/5/2020
Protocol # 3935.110619

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Shayla D. Carew. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Tim Nelson, by email at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date