A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY OF FACTORS THAT PROMOTE ACADEMIC

MOTIVATION AMONG HIGH-PERFORMING

ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

Gregory M. Shields, Jr.

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the influencing factors that promote academic motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students. Poverty affects students in various ways, such as socially, emotionally, and cognitively. Due to the adverse experiences stemming from poverty, many students lack motivation and confidence in their academic abilities. On the contrary, some students overcome the adversity of poverty by demonstrating resilience. The following central question was used to further investigate the study: What factors promote academic motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students? The theory guiding this study is self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000; 2017). Another theory included in this study's theoretical framework is Bandura's (1986; 1997) self-efficacy theory. Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986; 1997) describes the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments. The theory of self-efficacy refers to the cognitive judgment and beliefs of the behavior and the ability desired by the successful completion of a specific task. Deci and Ryan (2000) suggest that people can become self-determined when their needs for competence, connection, and autonomy are fulfilled. Participants for this study consisted of eight middle school students, along with parents and teachers of the selected participating students. Data was collected from individual interviews and focus groups.

Keywords: poverty, high-performing, economically disadvantaged, motivation, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and resilience

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my best friend and greatest supporter, my loving wife, Jasmine! It is because of your prayers, words of encouragement, and sacrifices that I completed this task. Although it was challenging, having you by my side made it worthwhile. Thank you for believing in me. I love you so much!

I also dedicate this dissertation to my two children, Lauryn and Gregory, III. My prayer is that God will endow you both with wisdom and knowledge to advance in education and promote change in children's lives everywhere. Always remember and live by Proverbs 3:5-6 and Philippians 4:13. I love you both!

Lastly, this dissertation is dedicated to my parents, siblings, and nieces. Thank you for your prayers and support. I love you all!

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I honor God for all the things he has done in my life. Philippians 4:13 declares that I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. Standing on God's word, along with much prayer and faith, I completed this task.

To my family, friends, and colleagues: I sincerely appreciate you for motivating me and being my accountability partners throughout this entire process. Thank you!

I would also like to acknowledge my dissertation committee for their scholarly advice and extraordinary leadership. Special thanks to Dr. David Vacchi, my dissertation chair. Words alone cannot express my gratitude, but please know that I thank you for your guidance and support along the way. – Blessings

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List of Abbreviations

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)

Amateur Athletic Union (AAU)

Big Fish Little Pond Effect (BFLPE)

College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

General Educational Development (GED)

Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA)

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)

Self-determination Theory (SDT)

Self-efficacy Theory (SET)

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Motivation has been a topic of interest for educational psychologists since the early 1930s (Lin-Siegler et al., 2016). Motivation is the driving force that influences the behavior of an individual, both in a personal and professional context (Akhtar et al., 2017). In addition to motivation, the link between a student's academic achievement and socioeconomic status has also been a recurring aspect of inquiry (Hegedus, 2018). Comparative research suggests that poverty in childhood, especially in the early years, impedes educational success (Liu & Hannum, 2017). According to Cavilla (2017), due to adverse experiences, many students of poverty lack motivation and often lack self-confidence in their academic abilities.

Several studies (Xuan et al., 2019; Breger, 2017; Cross et al., 2018) reveal that individuals from a low socioeconomic status often face adversities that impact their motivation and educational experience; nevertheless, as a result of resilience, many overcome the adversities of poverty (Sattler & Gershoff, 2019). Bender and Ingram (2018) define resilience as having the ability to overcome adverse conditions and to function normatively in the face of risk. Therefore, the focus of this research study was to discover factors that positively influence academic motivation among economically disadvantaged, yet high-performing, middle school students.

This chapter provides a framework for research presenting the following components: the background of the research problem, the situation to self, the problem statement, the purpose statement, the significance of the study, research questions, and definitions. Theoretical constructs and research questions were used as a guide to analyze students', parents', and faculty perspectives revealing factors that promote academic motivation among economically disadvantaged middle school students.

Background

Education is fundamental to economic growth, equity, and social justice, and is an essential factor in community development, public health, and urban safety (Wei et al., 2018). In the United States, standards-based education has aimed at improving our schools and raising accountability among teachers, administrators, and students (Breger, 2017). This initiative correlates with Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), emphasizing accountability and action to effect positive change in our lowest-performing schools. The phenomenon of academic underperformance among students of poverty has attracted much attention across disciplines such as medical education, vocabulary, reading, and mathematics (Isik et al., 2018). Research has revealed that students from low socioeconomic status (SES) environments often have lower academic achievement than their more advantaged peers and have a chronic risk of lower academic growth during early adolescence (Li et al., 2017). According to Destin and Kosko (2016), economically disadvantaged students often lack motivation, which in turn impedes their academic success.

Historical Context

The subject of student academic success in relation to their level of poverty has been a frequent debate in education over the past decades (Hegedus, 2018). Scholars have analyzed the socioeconomic status as a crucial indicator of the academic performance of students since the Equality of Educational Opportunity Study (Coleman et al. 1966). Since the mid-1960s, research (The Social Context of Education, 1997) has related the educational disadvantage of impoverished students to a variety of out-of-school variables, many of which concentrate on family characteristics, such as financial hardship due to unemployment or low-paying jobs, home instability, and the education of parents. Given the importance of these results in influencing

future life chances and educational achievement, a long-standing aim of education policy has been to enhance educational outcomes for low-income students (Galster et al., 2016).

In a research study conducted by Plunker and Peters (2018), it reported that the gradual number of economically disadvantaged students in the United States is significant. In addition, several of the students received a public education and attended schools classified as high poverty schools (Cross et al., 2018). Low-poverty schools are public schools in which 25% or less of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch; high-poverty schools are 75% or more (The Condition of Education, 2019). Nationally, the rates of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch have remained the same for the past few years, representing about half of the overall student enrollment in public schools with low and high poverty levels. (National Center for Education Statistics report, 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; & 2019). On a condensed scale, the state of Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) report reveals data pertaining to students classified as economically disadvantaged (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019). Since 2014, more than half of the students in the state of Georgia qualify for free or reduced lunch (GOSA, 2019). On a smaller scale, Georgia's percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch has steadily exceeded over half its total student enrollment in grades K-12 since 2014 (GOSA, 2019). Nevertheless, regardless of the conceptualization of poverty, statistics indicate that U.S. rates of childhood poverty are still high, and income-related achievement has similarly large disparities (Plucker & Peters, 2017).

Aside from deprivation and its impact on education, another debate among researchers has centered around motivation and student achievement. According to Hidi and Harackiewicz (2000), interests and goals are two significant motivational variables that affect the academic success of individuals; however, information is moderately insufficient as it relates to improving

student learning. Motivation and achievement, according to Maehr and Archer (1987), are essential issues in discussions about the role and work of American schools. Maehr (1974) published an article titled Culture and Achievement Motivation, which focuses on contextual influences and how individuals differ in a personality trait called the need for achievement. Based on research (Covington, 1992), it is through one's accomplishments that self-confidence is nurtured. Maher's focus on contextual influences represented a broader shift away from conceptualizing motivation in terms of internal needs and toward a social-cognitive view that placed a greater emphasis on cognitions (i.e., attitudes, beliefs, goals) and contextual factors like culture, affordances, and social structures (Urdan & Bruchmann, 2018).

Social Context

From 2000 to 2010, the proportion of American families with children living in neighborhoods with high poverty rose from 18% to 26% (Wolf et al., 2017). Currently, according to the National Center for Child Poverty (2019), for all children under 18 years of age in the United States, 41% come from low-income households. Mood and Jonsson (2015) define poverty as a lack of economic resources that also involve negative social consequences. Hidalgo-Hidalgo and Iturbe-Ormaetxe (2018) reveal that children who live in families experiencing hardships due to poverty, particularly those who lack motivation and resilience, are more likely to experience hardships when adults.

Poverty and related economic disadvantages affect children's lives in many ways, including their peer relationships and psychological well-being (Dys et al., 2019). Among health measures, childhood obesity was 40% more prevalent among low-income families; asthma was 30% more common; and children in low-income families were four times more likely to be in fair or poor health (Chaudry & Wimer, 2016). For education, research has shown that children

and adolescents from low-income families now comprise a majority of public school students nationally, which also affects the academic achievement gap (Williams et al., 2018). According to Chaudry and Wimer (2016), these conditions associated with children experiencing problems such as being below grade-level, grade repetition, out-of-school suspension, and dropping out of high school. Furthermore, these students are also often stereotyped by their peers as being low in competence and status, making them targets for social exclusion and leading to increased anxiety, fear, and frustration (Dys et al., 2019), all of which are detrimental to student success.

Theoretical Context

Motivation is a metaconcept that subsumes several related concepts, such as engagement, persistence, interest, self-efficacy, and self-concept (Irvine, 2018). Researchers (Usher & Urdan, 2015; Litalien et al., 2016; Lent 2016) have widely used self-determination and self-efficacy theories to develop a better understanding of students' motivation. With an emphasis on self-determination, it is an organic theory, which takes into consideration an individual's ability to evaluate novel experiences, and assimilate, explore, and integrate those experiences into one's identity (Ryan & Powelson, 1991). Deci and Ryan (2008) state that self-determination theory addresses issues such as basic psychological needs, life goals and aspirations, relations of culture to motivation, and the impact of social environments on motivation, affect, behavior, and well-being. According to Deci and Ryan (1985, 1991, & 2000), motivation encompasses three categories, which are intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Intrinsically motivated individuals have the enjoyment of and interest in an activity for their own sake (Wang et al., 2018). Extrinsic motivation specifies situations in which individuals engage in an activity to obtain specific desirable and separate outcomes (Sun et al., 2017). Amotivation refers to the absence of motivation (Cannard et al., 2016). A study conducted by Nishimura and Sakurai

(2017) as it relates to motivation in classrooms revealed that intrinsic motivation for academic activities is associated with better grades and predictive of achievement and adjustment.

In contrast, extrinsic motivation has been predictive of more negative consequences, and in general, is found in students from late elementary to high-school years, becoming more highly correlated with adverse educational outcomes over time (Nishimura and Sakurai, 2017). In addition to the self-determination theory, self-efficacy theory has also been used in research as it relates to motivation (Ross et al., 2016). Self-efficacy theory relates to perceived future performance rather than actual performance; however, prior successful mastery of activity will likely have a positive impact on perceived future performance and hence result in a higher degree of self-efficacy for that activity (Ross et al., 2016).

Situation to Self

As an educator in the Georgia Public School system and a Title I school, I have served students from various backgrounds. Most of the students reside in low-income communities, which categorizes them as economically disadvantaged, according to the state of Georgia (GOSA, 2019). Many of the students who live in poverty face extreme adversities, such as lack of nutrition, unstable home environments, and neighborhood violence (Wolf et al., 2017). These adversities and experiences can be detrimental to their educational outcomes. Due to an overall decline of academic achievement among economically disadvantaged students (GOSA, 2019), I find it beneficial to examine the perspectives of those students who live in poverty but have demonstrated academic success. Data obtained from students could also be useful in identifying the motivating factors to replicate the academic success of others.

As it pertains to the philosophical assumptions, my axiological assumption stems from my career background working in Title I schools. In my profession, I have witnessed numerous

students encounter serval challenges due to poverty and seen a wide array of success and failure. While my assumptions that the nature of values is that they cannot be fully separated from people or qualitative research, I attempted to minimize the influence of my personal values on the truth sought in this study as much as possible. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) state that ontology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the assumptions we make in order to believe that something makes sense or is real, or the very nature or essence of the social phenomenon we are investigating. Throughout this study, as the researcher, I reported different perspectives as themes developed in the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The epistemological, philosophical assumption consists of subjective evidence contained from participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Working closely with the participants provided the opportunity to gather essential information based on their experiences to extend and deepen understanding of the research. The paradigm used to guide this study was pragmatic. This philosophy views knowledge as an instrument or tool for organizing experience, and it is deeply concerned with the union of theory and practice (Schwandt, 2007). For this study, I focused on the outcomes of the research—actions, situations, and consequences of inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Problem Statement

The key issue for this research study is the degree of motivation and the growing disparity in achievement between low-income students and their more privileged peers. While researchers (Chaudry & Wimer, 2016; Cross et al., 2018; Hegedus, 2018) have discovered the factors that affect motivation, research is limited when considering factors that promote motivation among middle school students of poverty (Hegedus, 2018; Isik et al., 2018; Plucker & Peters, 2017; Xuan et al., 2019). The relationship between poverty and educational achievement has yet to be understood completely (Breger, 2017). Students with the potential for

high academic achievement exist at all income levels. The problem is the success rates of students from low-income backgrounds are consistently lower than their higher-income counterparts (Cross et al., 2017). For the state of Georgia, the College and Career Ready Performance Index report indicated that the state served over 1.8 million students, and approximately 65% of the students are economically disadvantaged (Georgia Department of Education, 2019). According to the state of Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2019), students identified as economically disadvantaged are not performing successfully in their academic studies when compared to students within the same age-group or grade-level. The state of Georgia also reveals that the graduation rates fall within a low percentile for economically disadvantaged students when compared to non-economically disadvantaged students (GOSA, 2019). For most students, the impact of poverty has created unique educational challenges. One in eleven of all children in the United States lives at 50% below the federal poverty line (National Research Council, 2019). Thirty percent of children raised in poverty do not finish high school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Poverty is a collective experience among many American children, but one that varies in its timing, duration, and concentration (Chaudry & Wimer, 2016). According to Claro et al. (2016), students with the same economic background vary in their academic outcomes, and researchers have long suggested that students' beliefs, such as locus of control, may temper or exacerbate the effects of economic disadvantage on academic achievement. To break the cycle of poverty, unveiling indicators that support student motivation and resilience are imperative.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study was to understand the factors that promote academic motivation among economically disadvantaged students at Johns Middle School. Measures of

student effort and aspirations defined academic motivation, and measures of perception of school climate and perception of the quality of classroom instruction defined student engagement (Scales et al., 2019). The theories which guided this study are the Self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000) and Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; 1997) theories. Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986; 1997) refers to individuals' judgment about whether they can accomplish a task (Irvine, 2018). Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000) focuses on three basic psychological needs that provide a framework defining intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation (Irvine, 2018). According to Deci and Ryan (1991), the basic psychological needs, which are autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential elements of the development, integrity, and well-being of individuals.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this research study contains a description of the following perspectives: empirical, theoretical, and practical. Research shows that there is an increasing achievement gap existing between high- and low-income students (Owens, 2018). As the education system continues to advance, academic achievement for all students, regardless of their economic status, must be the core value for obtaining success. Therefore, studying students of poverty and the factors that promote their academic motivation is imperative to helping develop a model for all lower SES students to emulate. Data collected and analyzed from this study could be beneficial to school leaders, teachers, and other educational stakeholders who serve students within low socioeconomic demographics. Furthermore, this research could assist practicing educators in identifying motivational strategies to implement within schools and school districts within similar demographics.

Empirical

This study will add to the literature and current research by presenting a detailed analysis of various factors that promote academic motivation for impoverished students. According to research conducted by Olszewski-Kubilius and Corwith (2018), poverty is a significant problem within our society, affecting educational opportunity, upward mobility, and even essential health and security for many children. As it relates to student motivation, Williams et al. (2018) conducted a study on students' perspectives on how schools can promote the academic achievement of students living in poverty. Based on the findings, the student participants reflected three main themes: (a) create a culture of hope, (b) develop relational networks, and (c) establish meaningful parent-school collaborations (Williams et al., 2018). Additionally, educators need to know that high self-esteem correlates with high intrinsic motivation, and vice versa for students (Topçu & Leana-Taşcılar, 2018).

Theoretical

Motivation is a theoretical concept utilized to clarify human behavior and provides a motive for human beings to react and fulfill their needs (Gopalan, 2017). As it pertains to student motivation, motivation involves a wide array of related theories; some include Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1968, 1970), the Expectancy-value theory (Atkinson, 1957; Atkinson & Raynor, 1974, 1978), Self-worth theory (Covington 1992, 1998, 2004, 2009), and flow among others. This study will present a further understanding of students' academic motivation as it relates to self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1999) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1997) theories. Self-determination theory is a theory of motivation that focuses on our innate psychological needs, precisely our motivation without external influences (Deci & Ryan, 1999). Self-determination theorists (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 1999) claim that children start to value the

behaviors that they see reinforced, both their behaviors and those of the significant others in their social environments, for example, teachers and families. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. According to Ross et al. (2016), as motivation in humans is a cognitively generated construct, self-efficacy is, therefore, a particularly powerful force for the determination and regulation of motivation levels. Although these psychological constructs emanate from different fields of study, they are rooted in the discovery of how and why people take on different tasks and can have some element of prediction on the individual's success in completing that task in the future.

Practical

This study will help educators better understand what is needed to promote academic motivation among economically disadvantaged middle school students. According to research, student-teacher relationships that improve over time may help slow or prevent declines in student motivation (Scales et al., 2019). Educators need to detect those students who lack academic motivation early, as well as those with a high level of academic motivation (Đurđević Babić, 2017). Teacher-student relations play a prominent role in the development of competencies in early school-age years and during the transition to middle school (Koca, 2016). According to Đurđević Babić (2017), academic motivation relates to academic performance. A positive teacher-student relationship is related to students' behavioral, cognitive, and social-emotional development (Xuan et al., 2019).

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Research Questions

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The research questions for this study consist of a central research question and two sub-questions. Creswell and Poth (2018) note that qualitative research questions intend to narrow the

scope of many questions that will be answered by the researcher in the analysis. The research questions derive from the problem and purpose statements and drive a specific aspect of the investigation of the study (Terrell, 2016). The central question is the most common, yet a broad overarching question in which the researcher intends to answer in the study addressing the research problem (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This research study will also incorporate sub-questions, which are research questions in a qualitative study in which the researcher subdivides the central question into sections for exploration (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The researcher will use the self-determination and self-efficacy theoretical frameworks to compose the research questions for this study.

Central Question

What factors promote academic motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students?

Applying this central question to the research study, I aim to identify the contributing factors that promote or influence academic motivation, as reflected in approach, persistence, and level of interest among students who reside within a low socioeconomic community. In a research study conducted by Isik et al. (2018), most of the factors related to motivation consisted of individual factors divided into subcategories that all appeared to contain both facilitators and barriers of motivation. In his findings, he identified the following subcategories: (1) well-being, (2) self-efficacy, (3) beliefs and values of education, (4) emotions related to learning, (5) personal characteristics and situation, (6) study skills, and (7) ethnic identity and orientation (Isik et al., 2018). Each of the identified subcategories is relevant to the current research study. Results from the central research question will broaden the study as it will focus on students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged but exemplify academic success.

Sub-question One

What intrinsic factors influence the academic motivation of high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students?

An intrinsically motivated student commits him or herself to a task for its own sake, that is, for the enjoyment of it, the learning it allows, and for a feeling of accomplishment (Koca, 2016). Results from a study conducted by Irvine (2018) found that most children begin school with a high level of intrinsic motivation, which begins to decline immediately, bottoms out around age 16, and after that remains stable at this lower level. For this study, it is essential to understand the intrinsic factors that promote academic motivation among impoverished students.

Sub-question Two

What extrinsic factors influence the academic motivation of high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students?

Extrinsic motivation consists of contingent rewards or incentives; that is, the reward is contingent on successfully performing a task (Irvine, 2018). A student who is extrinsically motivated commits to a task to receive a reward from a source external or to avoid a punishment (Koca, 2016; Levesque et al., 2010). For this research study, this sub-question will identify the extrinsic factors influencing academic motivation among low socioeconomically disadvantaged students who have experienced success throughout their educational experiences.

Definitions

1. *Academic Motivation* – a student's desire (as reflected in approach, persistence, and level of interest) regarding academic subjects when the student's competence is judged against a standard of performance or excellence (Mallick et al., 2017)

2. *Amotivation* – lack of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985b)

3. *Economically Disadvantaged* – individuals who lack the resources to purchase popular goods and participate in their preferred social groups' activities, making it difficult to fit in (Dys et al., 2019)

4. *Extrinsic Motivation* – the willingness to complete a task for the sake of an external incentive such as recognition, reward, or avoidance of punishment (Daniel & Cooc, 2018)

5. *High-performing* - students who perform at the top of their class in a range of academic subjects (Oh et al., 2019)

6. *Impoverished* – the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions (The Journal of Negro Education, 2015)

7. *Intrinsic Motivation* – An individual's innate desire to engage in an activity (Daniel & Cooc, 2018)

8. *Poverty* – the extent to which an individual does without resources (Payne et al., 2005)

9. *Resilience* – the ability to overcome adverse conditions and to function normatively in the face of risk" (Bender & Ingram, 2018)

Summary

This chapter aims to provide the initial context for the discovery of factors promoting academic motivation among economically disadvantaged middle schoolers. The trend of underperformance in education among students of poverty is critical. According to research, economically disadvantaged students often face many challenges, which in turn, hinders successful academic performance (Williams et al., 2019). Individuals in the education profession should recognize the factors promoting academic motivation among all students, but especially those who are economically disadvantaged. Factors identified in this research can be beneficial

to others who serve the vast number of students within the same subgroup. The information

presented in this chapter includes the background of the study, along with the historical, social,

and theoretical contexts. Also, included in this study are the situation to self, problem and

purpose statements, and significance of the study (i.e., empirical, theoretical, and practical). The

chapter concludes with developed research questions and definitions of terms used.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A myriad of factors has combined to shape the educational landscape of impoverished students adversely. Socioeconomic factors, environmental stressors, educational equity, and homelessness collectively stack the deck against students living in poverty. In fact, according to the National Research Council (2019), more than 9.6 million children in the United States live below the poverty line. Lower socioeconomic students face numerous risk factors that decrease their likelihood of being successful in school and life. For most of these at-risk students, the impact of poverty has created unique educational challenges. Children exposed to poverty, particularly extreme poverty, have more significant problems in academic achievement, more behavioral problems in school, and deficient self-regulatory skills than children who do not experience poverty (Jaschik, 2015). This dynamic creates adverse academic outcomes for these students and reduces these children's probability of leading rewarding and productive lives. An increasing number of surveys, studies, and legislation continues to highlight the importance of student motivation and school performance (National Research Council, 2019). To beat the odds resulting from generational poverty, an understanding of the motivational aspects that contribute to student resilience is imperative. This literature review provided a theoretical framework and shed light on the students' psychological and social needs, resilience, engagement, parental involvement, and school structures that support student motivation.

Theoretical Framework

The base of the theoretical framework for this study derived from Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1986; 1997) and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; 2017). Motivation is important because it concerns academic success and student engagement. The theory of self-

efficacy, or efficacy expectations, refers to personal beliefs about one's capabilities to learn or perform actions at designated levels (Bandura, 1986; 1997). Self-efficacy depends in part on student abilities. As it relates to academics, self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his or her ability to achieve satisfactory academic outcomes within an educational learning environment (Metcalf & Wiener, 2018). In general, high-ability students feel more efficacious about learning compared with low-ability; however, self-efficacy is not another name for ability (Schunk, 2016). Deci and Ryan (2000) dedicated research toward developing an understanding of human motivation and self-regulation and concluded that to achieve self-regulation and motivation, basic needs must be met. This aspect serves as a critical crosswalk to understanding the role that motivation relates to a person's basic needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. According to Wisniewski et al. (2018), the need for autonomy is the need to feel one's actions emanate from one's self; the need for relatedness is the need to feel cared for by others, and the need for competence is the need to feel that one is capable of fulfilling a task.

Self-efficacy Theory

Psychologist Albert Bandura postulated the self-efficacy theory outlining the confidence in one's ability to succeed in a specific domain (Zimmerman, 1986). This theory describes the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments. The theory of self-efficacy refers to the cognitive judgment and beliefs of the behavior and the ability desired by the successful completion of a specific task. People with high self-efficacy will be more confident in their work. Bandura found that self-efficacy was the feeling and development of self-belief and focused on a students' judgment of their abilities (Bandura, 1986). Specifically, the self-efficacy theory states that the higher a person's feelings of self-efficacy, the better the person will perform on a task. Self-efficacy also impacts persistence,

such as how individuals approach tasks, the amount of effort invested in completing a task, and achieving established goals (Pugh & Tschannen-Moran, 2016). Additionally, this aligns with Bandura's proposition that belief determines destination, in which he concluded that a course of action is more likely to be completed if there is a belief in the likelihood of success from the outset (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura (1986) concluded that four key components that support the development of self-efficacy, which are mastery experience, social modeling, verbal, and social persuasion, and improving physical, emotional, and physiological states. Mastery experience, which has the most substantial impact on self-efficacy belief, enables attainable success through increasingly challenging performances of desired behaviors (Uchida et al., 2018). Through social modeling, detailed demonstrations help shape vicarious experiences of incremental steps required to complete complex tasks. The intent of improving the physical, emotional, and physiological states is to remove barriers that hinder the attainment of new behavior. Bandura (1997) stated that strong encouragement, along with verbal and social persuasion, also facilitates the development of self-efficacy, based on the belief that providing positive affirmations will elevate confidence enough to induce efforts toward changed behavior. Of equal importance are the perception and interpretation of emotional and physical reactions. Bandura (1986) concluded that improved self-efficacy is prevalent when stress is at a minimum and efforts grounded in elevating one's mood when facing challenging tasks.

There is a correlation across the literature between self-efficacy and high levels of academic outcomes. Decision-making, persistence, and levels of effort are characteristics that influence self-efficacy (Berbery & O'Brien, 2019). Self-efficacy beliefs determine how one thinks, feels, behaves, and even what motivates them. Motivation is also associated with

promoting learning and sustaining self-efficacy. Lent (2016) found that one of the more

valuable motivational beliefs for student achievement is self-efficacy. The interest level of

a student is influenced by his or her belief in their abilities to complete a given task with

proficiency, which also positively relate to effort and persistence (Irvine, 208).

Additionally, researchers (Akerman & Gross, 2018) have found that self-efficacy is a

crucial aspect to focus on since the development of a high sense of self-efficacy leads to an

increase in one's self-respect, and generally, their self-esteem is improved. In a study examining

the relationship between self-efficacy and academic motivation, Ifdil and Rizka (2016)

concluded that individuals with a high level of self-efficacy are inclined to perform activities

much more successfully. Likewise, in experimental and correlational studies, students with high

self-efficacy exhibited resilience when confronted with challenging tasks. As a result, the

students achieved at higher levels and persevered academically (Berbery & O'Brien, 2018).

Other studies contend that increased self-efficacy is the result of established support

systems. A strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being.

People with reliable support systems and high levels of assurance in their capabilities approach

difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided (Ifdil & Rizka,

2016). Berbery and O'Brien (2018) found that when GPA was high, along with support from

direct individuals, college-going self-efficacy increased significantly. Academic persistence is

more likely among students with high expectations and who seek a challenge than those with low

expectations, which are more apt to avoid or to give up on their pursuit of learning.

Evident throughout the literature, self-efficacy impacts levels of achievement and

learning. Individuals who have confidence in their abilities to persevere in various situations

have strong feelings of self-worth, which also resonates in the amount of effort exercised during their pursuits of challenging endeavors. As a result, positive effects manifest when there is a strong sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy belief influences academic performance, academic decision-making, and the pursuit of established goals. Self-efficacy beliefs also contribute to the amount of effort students will expend on an activity, how long they will persevere when confronting obstacles, and how resilient they will be in the face of adverse situations that may occur throughout their educational experience (Pugh & Tschannen-Moran, 2016).

Self-determination Theory

Self-determination theory is a macro-theory consisting of human motivation, emotion, and personality, and has been under development for many years following Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's influential work (Irvine, 2018). Self-determination theory is a formal theory that defines intrinsic and varied extrinsic sources of motivation, and a description of the respective roles of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in cognitive and social development and individual differences (Center for Self-Determination Theory, 2019). The degree to which social and cultural factors facilitate or undermine people's sense of choice and initiative, in addition to their well-being and the quality of their performance, is a central premise of SDT. This theory further explains the connection between student motivation and psychological needs. Conditions supporting the student's experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, argue to foster the most self-directed and high-quality forms of motivation and engagement for activities, including enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity.

Competence, autonomy, and relatedness are three innate psychological needs that are critical to student motivation and success (Irvine, 2018). To be competent, an individual should gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills (Urdan & Bruchmann, 2018). Relatedness refers

to an individual's need to experience a sense of belonging and attachment to other people (Urdan & Bruchmann, 2018). Autonomy is the final component of self-determination theory, which addresses the need of an individual to feel in control of their behaviors and goals (Urdan & Bruchmann, 2018). When individuals fulfill these three needs, they become self-determined and enabled them to be intrinsically motivated to pursue the things that interest them (Urdan & Bruchmann, 2018). An environment that stresses these components provides students with optimal challenges, continual feedback from peers and teachers, interpersonal involvement, a high level of continuous support, and ultimately promotes resilience among students' thus improving levels of motivation and persistence.

The SDT framework has both broad and behavior-specific implications for understanding practices and structures that enhance need satisfaction and the full functioning that follows from it (Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT begins with the assumption that people are active organisms, with evolved tendencies toward growing, mastering ambient challenges, and integrating new experiences into a coherent sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 2017). These natural developmental tendencies do not operate automatically, but instead, require ongoing social provisions and supports (Deci & Ryan, 2017). Specifically, the social context can either support or impede natural tendencies toward active engagement and psychological growth (Deci & Ryan, 2017). As a result, it is the conflict between the active organism and the social context that is the basis for SDT's predictions about behavior, experience, and development (Deci & Ryan, 2017).

For this study, self-determination theory will provide a framework for understanding the factors of motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students. According to Lazarides and Raufelder (2017), research has found that students' motivation in school, as well as the satisfaction of their needs, vary on an individual basis.

Moreover, Raufelder et al. (2015) found that students' perceptions of a single academic environment may differ on an individual basis and concluded that high self-determination supports need satisfaction, which in turn increases motivation and school engagement, which further increase student academic performance in the classroom.

The theoretical framework model for this study, depicted in Figure 1, illustrates how self-determination and self-efficacy theories both stimulate motivation. In reference to the self-determination theory, Deci and Ryan (2000) believe that internal choice or external force controls motivation for specific behavior. According to Bandura (1991), self-efficacy relates to one's belief in the ability to achieve a goal, which can be seen as motivation, because motivation depends on feelings of self-efficacy (Isik et al., 2018).

Figure 1. Theoretical framework model.
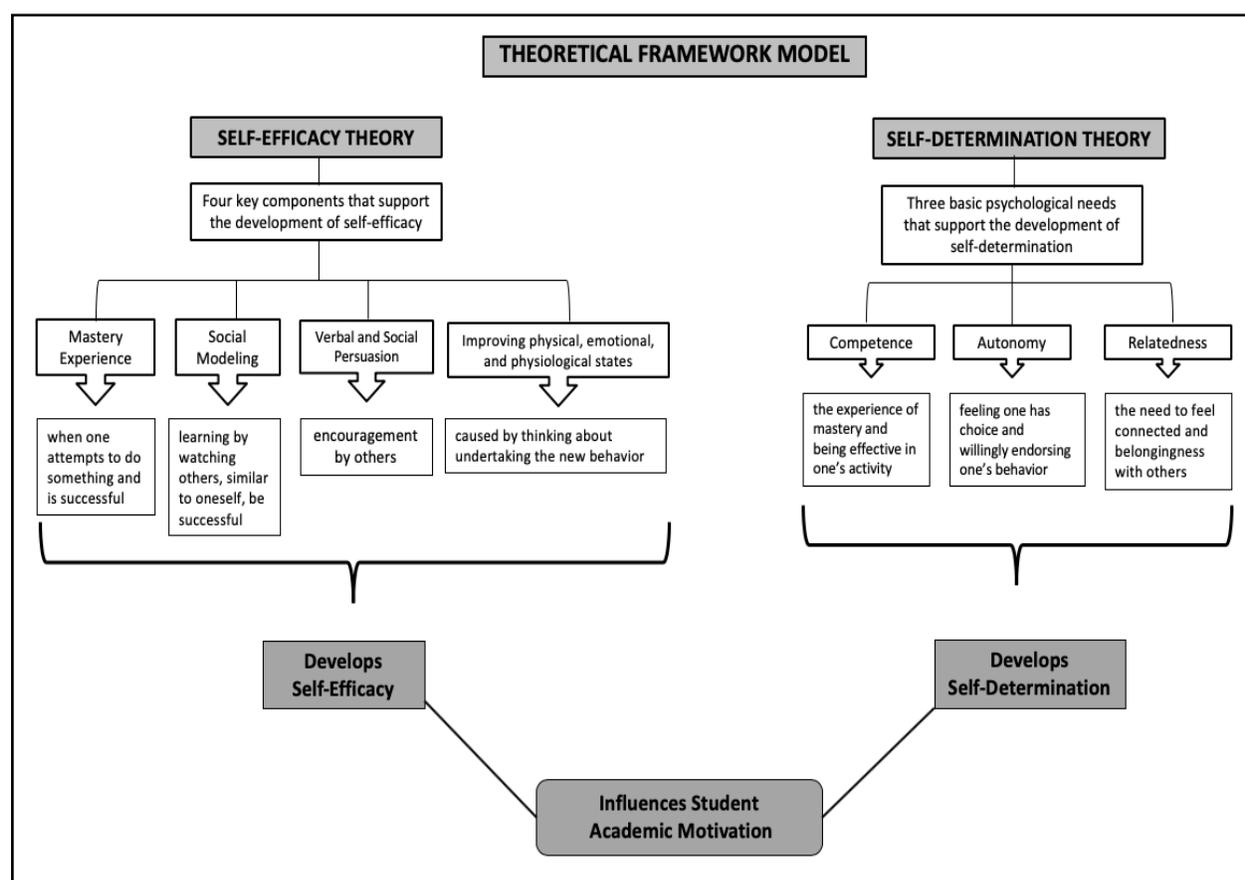
Related Literature

This portion of the literature review provided a conceptual synthesis of existing literature relating to the influencing factors of motivation. Researchers (Isik et al., 2018; Metcalf & Wiener, 2018) have discovered that motivation influences students learning and performance and is a crucial factor when explaining the achievement gap. Information regarding the specifics about motivational aspects that encourage resilience for impoverished students is vital for all educators. To support economically disadvantaged students in achieving their maximum potential, educational stakeholders should understand their perceived barriers, in addition to the influencing factors that promote motivation (Cross et al., 2018).

The literature presented in this section examined academic motivation and its correlation to socioeconomic status, student resilience, parent involvement, and the importance of teacher-student and peer relationships. In addition, this section also presents existing literature regarding the importance of a positive learning environment, maintaining student engagement and motivation, and the effects of school programs and extracurricular activities as pertains to promoting motivation.

Socioeconomic Status

According to the National Center Education Statistics (2017), 45% of children in the United States live in low-income families. One out of every five children live in a low-income family, which means that 16.1% of children are living below the federal poverty line (National Research Council, 2019). These statistics illustrate the marked number of children who are at-risk for negative life outcomes, including lasting effects on physical and mental health (Cortina et al., 2016). Socioeconomic status may affect children through a variety of causal mechanisms that can occur either through social, institutional, or biological processes (Galster et al., 2016).

According to Claroa et al. (2016), the socioeconomic background is one of the strongest and best-established predictors of academic achievement. Harwell et al. (2017) agree with a determination that the family characteristic is the most powerful predictor of school performance is socioeconomic status (SES): the higher the SES of the student's family, often results in greater academic achievement. Research (Bellibas, 2016) proves that unlike students with higher socioeconomic status backgrounds, students suffering from lower SES living conditions are less likely to excel in schools and often discouraged from attending college. Research (Galster et al., 2016) suggests, from a developmental theory perspective, that caregivers, households, schools, and neighborhoods also affect the academic performance of students.

Research (Galster et al., 2016) concludes that structural factors, such as socioeconomic background and psychological factors, such as students' beliefs about their abilities also influence student academic achievement. Galster et al. (2016) further concluded that economic disadvantage could obstruct student academic achievement through multiple mechanisms, including reduced access to educational resources, higher levels of stress, poorer nutrition, and reduced access to healthcare. In a research study conducted by Pearman (2017), it revealed unobserved factors that impeded children's achievement, such as cumulative exposure to such as environmental toxins, parental abuse, parental substance abuse, inadequate nutrition, and poor cognitive stimulation in the household. Prior research has also concluded that neighborhood poverty highly correlates with school poverty, which is highly predictive of children's academic achievement (Mast, 2018). Schools nearest federally assisted households, in addition to students from economically, culturally, and linguistically disadvantaged backgrounds, have much lower performance in reading and math (Pearman, 2017; Ng, 2018). Nevertheless, other factors may influence educational outcomes, including the resilience of students.

Student Resilience

Students of poverty face numerous risk factors that decrease their likelihood of being successful in school and life (Breger, 2017). However, despite all the risks associated with growing up in poverty, some children can overcome the odds to display positive development; these children are considered resilient. (Sattler and Gershoff, 2019). It follows then that students within the same economic background also vary in their academic outcomes, and researchers have long suggested that students' beliefs, such as locus of control, may temper or exacerbate the effects of economic disadvantage on academic achievement (Galster et al., 2016). While students in wealthier homes and neighborhoods may regularly interact with adults who went to college and became professionals, students in more disadvantaged homes and neighborhoods often look to television and the media and find images of success disconnected from education, including entertainers and athletes (Destin & Kosko, 2016). According to Bellibas (2016), if students with low socioeconomic status are involved in life experiences that help them develop important non-cognitive skills, such as self-confidence, self-discipline, and perseverance, these skills may have a more beneficial effect on their future lives than academic performance. Destin and Kosko (2016) concluded that gaining an understanding of the tangible benefits of education and the resources that exist to help students has a significant effect on students' school motivation, especially if they come from economically disadvantaged homes.

Resilience is the ability to overcome adverse conditions and to function normally in the face of risk" (Bender and Ingram, 2018). Unfortunately, resilience is an inference made from variations in outcomes and cannot be measured directly (Brown, 2015). According to Yeung and Li (2019), resilience is a two-dimension construct: exposure to adversity or risk, and the manifestation of successful, or better than expected outcomes. Resilience may stem from a

variety of sources including warm relationships; brief, repeated negative experiences within a supported environment enabling individuals to develop coping skills; and certain styles of self-reflection (Cortina et al., 2016). A key factor in determining resilience is likely to be the cognitive style by which children interpret events around them (Cortina et al., 2016). On the other hand, interpersonal involvement and high levels of continuous support promote resilience among students. Research also suggests that this is a contributing factor to improving motivation and persistence (Bender & Ingram, 2018).

Children's cognitive abilities and academic achievement seem to be negatively impacted by growing up in poverty, and these negative impacts are evident as early as nine months of age (Sattler and Gershoff, 2019). Identifying personal qualities and the effective environmental resources from family, school, community, or society, can inform effective intervention for academic resilience (Yeung and Li, 2019). According to Yeung and Li (2019), as a counterbalance for low SES. Academic resilience is when individuals achieve academic or educational competence despite being in challenging or disadvantaged circumstances. Regarding internal qualities, resilient youth demonstrate social competence, problem-solving skills, critical consciousness, autonomy, a sense of purpose, a positive self-concept, self-regulation, and hope (McCrea et al., 2019). Furthermore, when children and adolescents can engage their strengths and benefit from protective environmental resources, they can pursue positive life trajectories despite traumatic environments (McCrea et al., 2019).

Parent Involvement

Parental involvement consists of a parents' work with schools and with their children to support academic development, which benefits the future success of their child's educational outcomes (Hill et al., 2016). Research (Thomas et al., 2019) evidence supports that parental

involvement in students' schoolwork is beneficial for their learning and, more specifically, facilitates their school achievement. According to Duppong-Hurley et al. (2018), parental involvement in their child's education is one method that contributes to improved academic outcomes. Boonk et al. (2018) add that parents who are active participants in their children's education promote social, emotional, and academic growth. This topic continues to develop in educational research with an emphasis on the positive effect that parental involvement may have on the academic achievement of their children (Boonk et al., 2018). Furthermore, policymakers and researchers seem to agree that parental involvement is a critical ingredient for children's academic success (Boonk et al., 2018).

One of the primary protective factors in the life of a child is a caring parent who is knowledgeable about and engaged in the critical aspects of his or her child's life (Duppong-Hurley et al., 2018). Based on Thomas et al. (2019) research, parental involvement consists of two main categories: (1) school-based involvement, and (2) home-based involvement. Hill et al. (2016) describe school-based involvement as volunteering at school, involvement in school governance, helping with afterschool and extracurricular activities, and communication, for example, parent-teacher conferences and newsletters. Home-based involvement often includes motivational activities such as supporting children and setting standards or expectations, socializing children in-school behaviors, and cognitive activities such as training children to read and solve mathematics problems (Hill et al., 2016). According to research (Thomas et al., 2019), considering the amount of time a child spends at home, the home-based involvement is the most salient out-of-school context for student learning. Beyond school-and home-based involvement, parental involvement also takes place in the context of the parent-child relationship (Hill et al., 2016).

Grounded in the parent-child relationship is academic socialization (Hill et al., 2016).

Researchers (Duan et al., 2018; Hill et al., 2016) explains academic socialization as the parental

expectations and faith about their children's education, such as communicating expectations and

understanding the value and utility of education for the future. Hill et al. (2016) believe that

parents become and remain involved in their children's education because they view involvement

as part of their role as a parent. Parental behavioral input, as well as parents' attitudes toward

education, facilitates children's learning, and ultimately have positive impacts on their academic

achievements (Cui et al., 2019).

Teacher-Student Relationships

In reference to student achievement and academic performance, the quality of student-

teacher relationships is related to student outcomes (McFarland et al., 2016). Research conducted

by Zee and Bree (2016) suggested that the quality of student relationships with their teachers

may play a role in the development of their self-regulation abilities and subsequent reading and

math skills. Building on an extended attachment perspective, researchers (Longobardi et al.,

2016; Koca, 2016; Scales et al., 2019) have postulated that high-quality relationships marked by

high levels of warmth and support (i.e., closeness) and low levels of discordance (i.e., conflict)

provide students with the emotional security to scaffold the development of their self-regulation

skills and beliefs about the self as a learner (Zee and Bree, 2016). Studies (Scales et al., 2019;

Donlan et al., 2017) also reveal that mentoring relationships are related to higher academic

achievement, school engagement, and graduation rates. As it relates to economically

disadvantaged students, Wentzel and Ramani (2016) discovered that most associations between

the teacher-student relationship and student achievement seem stronger for students who are

behaviorally and academically at-risk. According to Wentzel and Ramani (2016), studies have

found that the protective effect of teacher-student relationships on academic achievement may be stronger for lower-income and racial/ethnic minority students; and the link between teacher-student relationships and academic achievement might be stronger for boys because boys demonstrate higher levels of academic and behavior problems at school entry and are at higher risk for referrals and placements for special education services than girls.

Affective qualities of student-teacher relationships are essential for children's development and well-being. Particularly for children who are at risk of school failure, and emotionally supportive relationship with a teacher can have positive outcomes (McFarland, et al., 2016). Positive and productive student-teacher relationships may play an essential role in students' adaptation to the school environment, favoring both academic achievement and adaptive behaviors (Longobardi et al., 2016). Scales et al. (2019) suggest that the benefits of strong student-teacher relationships extend beyond proximal factors related to academic success and are associated with factors related to the broader school context, such as perceptions of school climate, a feeling of belonging or connectedness, and improved student behavior. When students feel safe, emotionally connected to school, and fairly treated, they are less likely to engage in behavior that is disruptive to their own, or others', academic engagement; but they are more likely to exert effort to do well (Scales et al., 2019).

Teachers across the United States commonly report low student academic motivation as the number one problem in their classrooms (Scales et al., 2019). Longobardi et al. (2016) study revealed that students who experience some form of support from their teachers show increased academic commitment and motivation to learn, as well as higher positive social and emotional well-being (Prino et al., 2016). The teaching ability and relational skills of teachers are important to stimulate and promote students' motivation to learn while at school (Longobardi et al., 2016).

Longobardi et al. (2016) research also discovered that children experiencing positive

relationships with their teacher develop an interest in school activities, are more motivated and

willing to learn, and show higher academic achievement.

Peer Relationships

Peer relationships are a major component of the school context that impacts students'

academic development (Ariani, 2017). Consisting primarily of self-selected social contexts, peer

groups provide opportunities for peer-to-peer interactions. These interactions result in the

formation of friendship relationships with similar peers. Throughout the research, there is a

substantial link between children's relations with peers and their academic performance (Stäbler

et al., 2017). In schools where positive peer relationships are fostered, an emotional connection is

established that results in fully engaged students. Students are more likely to be engaged in their

work and less likely to misbehave when members of their peer group adhere to established

protocols and expectations (Mercer & Hoselton, 2017).

Multiple strands of research have converged on the conclusion that peer relationships

play a significant role in student motivation and engagement in school. Ariani (2017) examined

the role of peer relationships in naturally occurring peer groups. Results from this study support

that peers influenced student engagement, motivation, and achievement through proximal

processes that frequently occurred in social interactions within self-selected groups of peers.

Vollet et al. (2017) utilized a social-ecological model to examine the impact of peer relationships

on student engagement. Through variable centered analysis, it was determined by Abacioglua et

al. (2019) that middle school students who affiliated with peers who disliked school showed the

steepest declines in their own enjoyment of school. In the same vein, Belfield et al. (2015)

acknowledged the influence of peers and teachers on student motivation. This researcher found

peer group affiliation was based on commonalities among the group. As a result, these groups tend to create an intensified context that, in the case of engagement and disaffection, may surround students who are already engaged with a higher concentration of engaged peers and expose students who are already somewhat disaffected to a higher concentration of disaffected peers. Results from this study support overall increases in the motivation of students because of peer affiliation (Ariani, 2017). From this, it can be concluded that engaging with peers, or disengaging from peers, impacts the student's emotional and behavioral engagement in the classroom (Kindermann & Skinner, 2012). Likewise, theories of peer group influence have suggested that their effects may be conveyed through multiple channels. They may be transmitted directly, through mechanisms of socialization, modeling, reinforcement, encouragement, or pressure to conform to group norms (Cirik, 2015). Maintaining a positive and safe learning environment promotes students' creativity and the ability to express themselves without fear and anxiety (Ali et al., 2020).

Oldfield et al. (2016) provided a more contextualized view of peer group contributions to academic engagement. These researchers determined that student's relationships with peers were shaped by the experiences among peers. Positive interactions resulted in elevated levels of motivation. Similarly, Raufelder et al. (2015) studied the role of perceived social relationships in enhancing the motivation to learn. A correlation was noted between affective and academic support from peers and cohesive relationships with peers. Qualitative results revealed the importance of positive relationships among peers impacting the development of high motivation to learn.

Relationships or social interaction among students is positively associated with independent learning, cooperative learning, and the ability to use cognitive strategies (Estrada et

al., 2019). In the classroom setting, students are explicitly taught developmentally appropriate cognitive and social skills that encourage the development of positive relationships with a diverse group of peers (Miller et al., 2017). A relationship can also be a social support, which can improve the student's motivation when motivation is perceived as a dynamic and multidimensional process (Schwabe et al., 2019). Cirik (2015) found that perceived social support by students encouraged their curiosity, encouraged meaningful learning, ensured that students perceive learning as an important direction in increasing the levels of individual efforts, improved self-efficacy, and increased their interest in learning. This qualitative investigation also concluded that test anxieties decreased, and levels of achievement increased across similar peer groups.

Reynolds (2016) found that students who are poorly accepted by their classmates tend to have lower grades. The findings in this study demonstrated that adolescents who have more secure relationships with parents, peers, and schools experience a range of better mental health outcomes. It is, therefore, more likely that these individuals will be able to fulfill their potential and play a more positive role in society. In establishing such findings, this study provides more evidence for the importance of forming multiple secure attachments and connectedness relationships during adolescence.

On the other hand, evidence supports positive peer relationships, and success in schools was the result of positive connections underpinned by trust. Belfield et al. (2015) found that cooperation, trust, and openness were the out birth of establishing positive relationships among peers in school. In this study, these characteristics contributed to the social aspects of the school climate. Additionally, Godstein et al. (2017) connected psychological attributes of school climate to peer relationships. These researchers determined that school environments characterized by

positive interpersonal relationships among students resulted in students developing a sense of belonging that resulted in increased motivation and engagement (Godstein, et al., 2017).

Research supports positive impacts when schools lead the charge in building positive connections to marginalized students. As peer to peer or adult to peer relationships are established, avenues are fostered that support meaningful involvement (Reynolds, 2016). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019) describe school connectedness as, "the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals" (p. 3). It is also associated with student health and academic outcomes (Borgmeier et al., 2016). Additionally, students' feelings of connectedness to peers mediates the association between school success and level of aggression (Georgia Department of Education, 2017). The impact of peer relationships on self-concept was also investigated by Schwabea et al. (2019). Using the Big Fish Little Pond Effect (BFLPE), these researchers concluded that students with positive peer relations experienced smaller BFLPEs than students with negative or average peer relations (Roy et al., 2015). The study illustrated how relationships moderate a frame of reference that affects the formation of academic self-concepts.

Positive Learning Environment

According to the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2019), 30% of instructional time is lost as a result of disruptive student behavior or administrative tasks. Correspondingly, 60% of teachers are in schools whose school principal reports that classroom disturbances hinder learning (GOSA, 2019). Learning environments matter. The tone in the classroom contributes to classroom success. Students learn best when positive attitudes and perceptions are developed and intertwined throughout learning tasks. This allows students to learn to think positively about themselves, their peers, and the material they are learning. According to research (Premo et al.,

2018), a positive learning environment means that a student feels comfortable, has a sense of rapport with their teacher and peers, and believes they can be successful.

A growing number of studies have documented the positive ways in which learning environments contribute to the development of children. The rising interest in providing children with appropriate learning environments has initiated a greater emphasis on how the learning environment is shaped (Ostrom, 2015). A good foundation in education may lead to success in learning and, eventually, in life. Understanding the influence of the environment on a child's growth and development is an important part of building that foundation.

Positive learning environments are characterized as being challenging, academically robust, caring, safe, and supportive (Hopland & Nyhus, 2015; 2016). A synthesis of research studies supports positive outcomes in learning environments characteristic of cohesiveness, satisfaction, task difficulty, and formality. Negative results were noted in disorganized settings that lacked apathy. Students' perceptions of their learning environment impact their self-concept as a learner. Through a quantitative investigation, Hagis (2017) determined that positive learning environments supported the level of motivation that students exhibited. Developing a positive classroom culture also fostered collaboration among peers that resulted in higher levels of achievement as students worked toward behavior and academic goals. This position is supported by Asıksoy (2018). Through an experimental study, this researcher examined the motivation levels of students engaged in a gamified flipped classroom environment. Students from the experimental group had a significantly increased motivation for the classroom and learning achievements in comparison to the students in the control group Asıksoy (2018). Essentially, a positive classroom culture establishes a more meaningful and rewarding teaching and learning

environment and is the first step in guiding students to developing character and preparing for success in the adult, real-world community.

Georgia's Teacher Keys Evaluations System (2019) has identified the physical arrangement of the classroom, discipline and routines, organization of learning activities, engagement of students, maximizing instructional time, communication of high expectations, and care and respect as seven factors that contribute to a positive learning environment. As an effective teacher implements these indicators of a positive learning environment, research supports the promotion of psychological safety, a positive self-image, feelings of belongings, purposeful behavior, and a sense of personal competence (Tas, 2016). Along the same lines, Martin and Olson (2015), explored objective-oriented classroom learning. Their qualitative analysis concluded that a caring and positive learning environment helped students feel safe when connections existed, and common goals were established. Research further documents that a safe and caring environment encourages learners' creativity and the ability to express themselves without fear and anxiety. In classroom environments where learning goals are explicit, learners do not hesitate to seek help if they face difficulties so they might keep engaged in learning activities. This is possible when teachers establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment (Zulfiqar & Khan, 2020).

Literature shows a correlation between positive learning environments and supportive relationships. Brydon-Miller (2018), found that learning environments inclusive of positive feedback and instruction on social behaviors resulted in improvements in school culture. Teachers who established clear behavior and academic expectations and consistently implemented effective rituals and routines created a culture of achievement. The structure and predictability contributed to the positive atmosphere in the classroom. Additionally, the social

quality of relationships contributed to the learners' academic and socio-emotional development. This aspect validated the role of student-teacher relationships as it relates to improvements in the learning environment. Hence a supportive environment positively impacts the learners' behavior towards participation in academic and social activities (Lazarides et al., 2018).

Engagement and Motivation

Self-concept, or the perception of one's own abilities, is a key factor in motivated and engaged learners (Breger, 2017). Research in a variety of areas has documented that characteristics of classroom environments have an impact on student motivation and engagement. As students are engaged in the learning process, their attention and focus increases, and as a result, students are motivated to practice higher-level critical thinking skills, and meaningful learning experiences are promoted (Duraku, 2017). In a quantitative study examining the relationship between engagement and achievement among cognitively disengaged high-achieving middle-school students, Boberg and Bourgeois (2016) found that a positive relationship between engagement and academic achievement was essential to academic success in terms of both higher grades and higher scores on standardized tests.

The term motivation is frequently used to describe why a person does something. The three major components of motivation are activation, persistence, and intensity. Activation involves the decision to initiate a behavior. Persistence is the continued effort toward a goal even though obstacles may exist. Intensity can be seen in the concentration and vigor that goes into pursuing a goal (Breger, 2017). Further research on SDT and goals has confirmed the connection between success and autonomy and supported the idea that success is also more likely when our goals are intrinsic and intended to satisfy our basic needs. Success in goal-striving is more likely when we are supported by empathetic and supportive people, rather than controlling or directive

people (Koestner & Hope, 2014). Goal research inspired by self-determination theory has provided evidence that goal strivings are most successful and adaptive when they are based in autonomous motivation; when goal-strivings are aligned with intrinsic, need-satisfying aspirations; and when goal-strivings are supported by empathic rather than directive others. According to Williams (2015), motivation guides, initiates, and maintains goal-oriented actions. The biological, emotional, social, and cognitive forces that activate student's behavior are also addressed from this perspective.

Elements of self-determination, extrinsic, and intrinsic motivation are often portrayed as separate and distinct. The behavior exhibited in the presence of each is complex, and people are rarely driven to act by a single source of motivation. Instead, multiple sources of motivation are relied upon in the pursuit of a goal. Traditionally, intrinsic motivation has been the standard of motivation striven for by the academic community (Abu Bakkar, 2016). This position is reported by Jaschik (2015), who suggests that extrinsic and intrinsic motivational processes are not necessarily antagonistic, and the extent to which behaviors are self-determined dictates the relationship. However, Patalla (2019) reported that extrinsic motivation could also be a positive factor in student success. This study focused on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and the possible factors that led to the internalization of both forms of motivation. According to Patalla (2019), because intrinsic motivation has been found to contribute positively to the learning process and the quality of learning, this form of motivation has been widely studied. However, Patalla reported that much less research had been directed to extrinsic motivation in determining educational outcomes. Patalla (2019) defines intrinsic motivation as a behavior engaged involuntarily for pleasure and satisfaction derived from participation. In contrast, extrinsic motivation was defined as activities engaged in to receive a reward or to avoid being punished.

These findings concur with Deci's early work in the 1970s that demonstrated how extrinsic rewards undermined intrinsic motivation and were, therefore, discouraged (Marsden, 2015). Goals afford basic need satisfactions differentially and are thus differentially associated with well-being. Extrinsic goals such as financial success, appearance, and popularity were specifically contrasted with intrinsic goals such as community, close relationships, and personal growth (Center for Self-Determination Theory, 2019). Findings concluded that intrinsic goals were more likely associated with lower wellness and greater ill-being (Marsden, 2015).

Through a meta-analysis and controlled longitudinal study that examined the relations of specific types of motivation to overall academic achievement, Akkus and Durmaz (2016) found support for intrinsic motivation as a key factor when predicting school achievement. Additionally, Thomas (2016) conducted a series of empirical studies involving high school and college students, which reported that intrinsic motivation was the only motivation type to be consistently positively associated with academic achievement over one year, controlling for baseline achievement. Lack of motivation was significantly associated with lower academic achievement. Overall, the findings of Akkus and Durmaz (2016) and Thomas (2016) highlight the unique importance of intrinsic motivation for the academic success of students.

In most cases, behaviors tend to lie somewhere in the middle of the continuum. There is often a varying amount of external motivation, which can also fuel a degree of internal motivation. People may engage in actions because they feel they have some level of personal control, and the behaviors ultimately align with something that is important for self-concept (Patalla, 2019). In other words, most actions are not purely self-determined or non-self-determined. Instead, actions often rely on a certain degree of self-determination that may also be influenced by extrinsic motivations.

Across the literature, there is a consensus purporting negative educational outcomes over time with the use of extrinsic motivation. Accordingly, Nishimura and Sakurai (2017) identified extrinsic motivation as being predictive of more negative consequences for late elementary to high-school-aged students. In a qualitative investigation examining high school students and extrinsic motivation, Basch (2016) concluded that there was a correlation with negative educational outcomes over time.

School Programs and Extracurricular Activities

Regarding student motivation, school programs and extra curriculum activities are essential factors that determine the direction and resolution of student behaviors in education institutions (Kılıç, 2019). Students who participate in extracurricular activities often forge close friendships with others on the team or in the group, which is essential for emotional, mental, and even physical health. (Shaffer, 2019). Research (Fitch et al., 2016; Kılıç, 2019) shows that extracurricular activities increase students' commitment to the school, influences the quality of the students' social life, and improves levels of satisfaction as it relates to the overall educational experience. Shaffer (2019) states that school extracurricular activities are often a predictor of student motivations, academic performance, attendance, and graduation rate. Additionally, extracurricular activities also stand out from other aspects of students' lives at school because they provide opportunities to develop initiative and allow youth to learn emotional competencies and develop new social skills (Shaffer, 2019). Researchers (Chittum et al., 2017; Foster & Marcus Jenkins, 2017; Fitch et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2016; Kılıç, 2019; Shaffer, 2019;) have concluded that sports and physical education classes, academic clubs, after-school programs, technology-focused programs, and fine arts programs all have positive impacts on student motivation and achievement.

Sports Programs

Physical education and other sports programs are offered in the public schools beginning at the primary level and goes into the secondary level. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) strongly supports the positive motivational influence of sports program involvement. Participation in sports provides the opportunity for student to show initiative and responsibility as well as demonstrate their goal setting and time management skills (Fitch et al., 2016). The philosophy of sport education is to (a) provide opportunities for students to engage in sport more authentically; (b) enhance the chances for students to learn sport more thoroughly; and (c) create more critical and relevant experiences for students (Chu & Zhang, 2018). In addition, Chu and Zhang (2018) found that sports education is relatively consistent in promoting motivational outcomes across genders, grade levels, sports, and motivational profiles. In a research study conducted by Fitch et al. (2016), it concluded that participation in sports have a beneficial influence on the development of positive identity in the domains of perseverance, emotional self-regulation, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Fitch et al. (2016) also found that students who participated in youth sports had higher grades, educational aspirations, spent more time on homework, and applied to postsecondary institutions. In a research study conducted by Kılıç (2019), he found that participation in school teams, doing regular exercises, and participating in school social activity programs positively influences the school motivation levels of the students. Research (Chu & Zhang, 2018) also proves that an efficient physical education curriculum model, in addition to sports programs, often links to positive psychological outcomes among students, such as increased competence, affiliation, motivation, and enjoyment.

Fine Arts

A growing body of research supports how crucial arts integration is to create well-rounded, well-prepared learners, and leaders. The fine arts provide learners with non-academic benefits such as promoting self-esteem, motivation, aesthetic awareness, cultural exposure, creativity, improved emotional expression, as well as social harmony and appreciation of diversity. Additionally, fine arts programs have been credited with providing challenges for students at all levels and connecting learners to the world of real work where theater, music, and products appeal to a growing consumer public (Pettigrew et al., 2015). The individualistic aspect of fine arts programs has been identified as a primary benefit. Students learn to become sustained, self-directed learners, capable of creativity and expression (Horgan, 2017).

The relationship between the arts and education in educational settings has long been questioned and debated (Durlak et al., 2017). Some fail to recognize the value of fine arts programs in the development of the whole child. Instead of viewing arts infusion programs as a critical role in the education of all students, many see it as an added aspect that does not add value to student learning experiences. Fine arts programs are often underestimated by many who believe that school was created to teach analytical concepts such as mathematics and literature. However, research has shown that fine arts courses are important, even necessary for students in elementary, middle, and high schools. Proponents of fine arts programs herald the need to have a humanistic component to student evaluation. From this standpoint, supporters feel that using a multiplicity of perspectives to understand education will improve student achievement and help meet the demands of the creative economy (Pereira & Marques-Pinto, 2017a). This position is supported by Durlak et al. (2017) who found that to tap into the well-rounded student, assessment measures should be framed to address multiple kinds of perspectives. As various

methods are infused in the fine arts, a multiplicity of instruments shed light on the impact of fine arts programs on student learning.

Across the literature, studies emphasize the importance of access to arts education. As a result of engaging in arts education, evidence supports better grades, increased creativity, higher rates of college enrollment and graduation, as well as higher aspirations and civic engagement (Kinney, 2019). Fine arts assist in educating the whole child in many capacities. Pereira and Marques-Pinto (2017b) recognized many benefits of fine arts in educating the whole child. The arts reach students not ordinarily reached, in ways not normally used. This minimizes tardiness and truancies and reduces the dropout rate. Observational studies also support connectedness as a result of fines arts participation. (Pereira & Marques-Pinto, 2017b) reported that greater camaraderie was displayed among students in fine arts programs. The students connected to each other better. There were also fewer fights, less racism, and a reduced need for conflict resolution. This was attributed to engaging in a relaxed atmosphere that allowed for discovery. The change in environment seemed to re-ignite the love of learning in students tired of mundane aspects of traditional school.

STEM

Across the educational sector, innovative programs are preparing students to enter the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. STEM education is an interdisciplinary approach to learning where rigorous academic concepts are coupled with real-world lessons as students apply science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in contexts that make connections between the school, the community, work, and the global enterprise, enabling the development of STEM literacy and with it the ability to compete in the new economy (McGee & Bentley, 2017). While concentrating on authentic content and problems,

using hands-on, technological tools, equipment, and procedures in innovative ways, STEM education aims at encouraging students to take an interest in science, technology, engineering, and math. It has been evidenced that focusing on STEM at the elementary level benefits students as they are exposed to enhanced opportunities that these contexts off at an early age.

Technologies are described as solutions designed by humans to fulfill a need. The process that creates what is needed to solve human problems is engineering, which designs curriculum uses in math and science subjects to teach about technology and engineering (McGee & Bentley, 2017). These subjects can open new pathways to success for the 21st-Century workforce and mean new opportunities for students and teachers alike. Technology greatly impacts how STEM subjects are taught and internalized across digital districts. Successful STEM programs incorporate collaborative, active learning activities. The right devices can foster dynamic, personalized learning environments around STEM subjects and drive stronger learning outcomes (McGee & Brantley, 2017).

Robnett and Thomas (2017), investigated the effect of hands-on learning activities in a quantitative quasi-experimental study. These researchers concluded that when applying hands-on activities, such as mathematics games and interactive simulations, students made gains in academic performance. As a result of the approaches used in STEM activities, students exhibited enhanced efforts to complete the math problem accurately and a faster pace than their peers, because of the ability to relate the study of math to practical experience and integrate manipulative (Vincent-Ruz & Schunn, 2018). Statistical information revealed that after the posttest, where hands-on interventions were used, positive gains and understanding were evidenced. From this, Vincent-Ruz and Schunn (2018), concluded that hands-on teaching methods appropriately impacted the interest level of students throughout the learning process.

Similar findings were noted in a research study conducted by Kim et al. (2018). Through an experimental study, these researchers explored the interest level of students as hands-on activities were used to teach science. They found that the use of hands-on learning promoted a maintained interest in science content. Interview results supported feelings of relevant engagement and increased literacy in science.

By and large, the STEM learning approach is underpinned by hands-on learning. Moore et al. (2016), identified peer interaction through cooperative learning, object-mediated learning, and embodied experience as three factors that meaningfully contribute to STEM instruction. To facilitate an in-depth understanding across each of the disciplines embedded in STEM, the hands-on approach supports an understanding of complex concepts. Through this hands-on approach, research has evidenced an improvement in student performance (Moore et al., 2016). These researchers resolved that students graduating and preparing to succeed in college and the workplace require a solid foundation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. A strong background in this skill set has been accepted as advantageous not just for aspiring scientists and engineers but essential for all students.

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)

To find ways to make learning experiences rewarding for impoverished students, schools have begun to examine educational aspects that create an environment that empowers both teachers and students. With the aim of establishing a sense of belonging, a sense of confidence, and a sense of influence, the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) concept is gaining popularity (Matthews, 2015). AVID is backed by a strong and extensive research base. As a result of the implementation of the AVID program, 94% of 2018 AVID seniors completed four-year college entrance requirements (Casap, 2016). Of the 94%, 86% identified as a race or

ethnicity historically underrepresented in higher education (Casap, 2016). Additionally, 75% of the population qualified for free or reduced-price lunch and attended and persisted in college (Casap, 2016). Throughout the literature, benefits and challenges are noted when the AVID program is used.

AVID is a nonprofit organization that seeks to change lives by helping schools shift to a more equitable, student-centered approach. To help educators to close the opportunity gap, instruction, systems, leadership, and culture have been identified by the founders of AVID to transform teaching and learning. AVID's mission is dedicated to improving instructional quality and equity. Using this program, schools are provided with a framework that bolsters rigorous academic programs improving instructional quality and equity as existing programs, and educational approaches are enhanced.

With the goal of transforming conceptual understandings into usable strategies that are intentional, purposeful, repeatable, and lead to student success, AVID provides extensive research to support teaching and learning (Ferguson, 2017). AVID is a detracking program that separates all students by ability and performance, placing them in a rigorous course of study, meets college entrance requirements, and provides support in both cognitive and affective domains. Its mission statement emphasizes reducing the achievement gap by preparing students for college readiness, focusing on strategies related to writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading, and by providing teacher advocacy and sponsorship. Its selection criteria traditionally focus on students in the "academic middle" who are members of a population historically underserved at 4-year colleges (AVID, 2015).

Benefits and challenges across the nation, school districts are in search of effective ways to help students acquire the rigorous skillset needed to be successful in postsecondary education

and workforce environments. Plausible results have been noted to support the use of the AVID program. To determine the effect of the AVID program, Pugh and Tschannen-Moran (2016) conducted a quasi-experimental study with 434 AVID students. These researchers concluded that AVID had a positive impact on student self-concept in English and language arts. The length of time in AVID also had a small but statistically significant impact on self-efficacy for self-regulation. Huerta and Watts (2015) reported comparable findings in a longitudinal study with high school students. Eighty-five percent of the participants shared that their exposure to AVID positively contributed to their motivation to be successful in college. This is consistent with AVID's emphasis on developing skills to effectively manage time, plan for class assignments, organize ideas and information for major projects, use calendars and binders, and take notes using the Cornell system (AVID, 2015).

Research by Flores, Park, and Baker (2017) also credits the AVID program for enhancing the motivation of college students. The case study methodology was used to track the enrollment of a cohort of students from an inner-city New Jersey school. Findings revealed that students who participated in AVID for 3 to 4 years in high school were more likely to enroll in college than their peers who started but did not complete the AVID program. In a similar study with African American and Latino AVID participants, Smith (2015) found that once enrolled in college, AVID students continued to attend college one-to-two years post matriculation and remained on track to graduate within 4 to 6 years.

While research supports student gains and empowerment as the AVID program is used, operational factors exist that could hinder use. Stringfield et al. (2016) conducted a case study to examine implementation issues experienced by schools that chose to adopt the AVID model. Survey results conclude that the level of professional development could not be maintained.

Additionally, participants also noted that AVID's high-resource demands were a problem for a school already in financial peril. Concurrently, start-up challenges and setbacks were also reported by Wooldrige (2017). As a result of funding and support, tutors were not utilized. With this missing critical component, the support needed for AVID students was scant.

Summary

This chapter provided the theoretical framework and literature related to the proposed study. Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (2000) and Bandura's self-efficacy (1986; 1997) theory provided the theoretical framework for the study. Both theory concepts note the impact that motivation has on meeting individual needs (Bandura, 1997) and becoming self-determined (Deci & Ryan, 2017). Several studies (Cortina et al., 2016; Bender and Ingram, 2018; and Yeung and Li, 2019) connect resilience and poverty because students, even in adverse situations, persevere despite the challenging factors they face. Additionally, some studies (e.g., Sattler and Gershoff, 2019) have studied the impact that students are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated.

This chapter also revealed the current gap in the literature. Previous studies (Sattler and Gershoff, 2019; Cortina et al., 2016; Destin & Kosko, 2016) have discovered various factors that influence motivation; however, research is limited when identifying factors that promote academic motivation among students of poverty. For this research, the self-determination and self-efficacy theoretical framework broadened the current findings by identifying factors that promote academic motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged students.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this case study was to discover factors that positively influence academic motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students. The impact of poverty has created unique educational challenges (Chaudry & Wimer, 2016), and according to Breger (2017), students of poverty face numerous risk factors that decrease their likelihood of being successful in school and life. To break the cycle of poverty, unveiling indicators that support student motivation and resilience are imperative. This chapter describes the research methods proposed for conducting this study. This chapter also presents the design, research questions, along with the setting and participants of the study. Data were collected from individual interviews and focus groups. The chapter concludes with an in-depth discussion of the data analysis, the trustworthiness of the research, and ethical considerations.

Design

A qualitative method was most appropriate for this study because qualitative methods seek to discover and describe what people do in their everyday lives and what their actions mean to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Choosing to conduct a qualitative research study originated from the desire to delve deeper into the subject matter and to understand the phenomenon observed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this research, I used a case study design, which Yin (2018) defines as an approach involving the study of a case, or cases, within a real-life contemporary context or setting. The cases in this study consisted of students of poverty who exhibited successful academic achievement and shared their perspectives regarding the factors that promote their motivation. The type of case study used is a collective case study. In a collective case study, the inquirer selects multiple cases to illustrate the primary issue or concern

selected (Creswell and Poth, 2018). In this study, I investigated economically disadvantaged middle school students and the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that promote academic motivation. I also examined the perspectives of the parents and teachers of the selected students participants to share their perceptions regarding factors that influence their child or student's motivation.

Research Questions

Central Question: What factors promote academic motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students?

Sub-question One: What intrinsic factors influence the academic motivation of high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students?

Sub-question Two: What extrinsic factors influence the academic motivation of high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students?

Setting

Johns Middle School is one of ten middle schools in the Brown County school district. According to the Georgia Department of Education College and Career Ready Performance Index report (2019), this Title I school serve students in grades four through eight. Johns Middle School is in an inner-city with an estimated city population of 112,000 citizens, of which 24.4% of the population are families of poverty (United States Census Bureau, 2018). Within the school, four teachers per grade level, serve 503 students. The school demographics consist of the following: 0.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, 90.5% African American, 1.6% Hispanic, 4.0% Multi-racial, and 3.8% White (Georgia Department of Education, 2019). This site was suitable for the study due to the number of students residing in the poverty-stricken community, yet have demonstrated academic growth in reading and mathematics content areas of the Georgia Milestones Assessments (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019) and maintains a

grade average of an 80 or above in core subjects (i.e., language arts, math, science, and social studies).

Participants

The primary participants for this research study consisted of students residing in an inner-city in the state of Georgia. Student participants were students attending Johns Middle School. Nine students, five girls and four boys, were identified and selected to participate in the study. All student participants were invited to participate in a focus group interview. Parents and teachers of the student participants were also invited to participate in this study. One parent for each student participant was selected to participate in an individual interview session. A teacher was also selected to participate in the study as a representative of a student participant.

For this study, I used purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is most appropriate for this study as it intentionally produces a group of individuals that can best inform the research problem under examination (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The purposeful sampling strategy applied was maximum variation, which was most suitable for understanding how the phenomenon was perceived and understood among different people, in different settings, and at different times (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), maximum variation is often used to represent diverse cases and to describe multiple perspectives about the cases entirely. This approach consists of determining in advance some criteria that differentiate the sites or participants and then selecting sites or participants that are quite different on the criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each student participant was selected based on the following criteria: eligible to receive Free and Reduced Lunch; ethnicity variation, particularly Black, White, and Hispanic; maintains a grade average of an 80 or above in core subjects, which include

language arts, math, science, and social studies; and scores of "proficient" or "distinguished" in mathematics and reading on the Georgia Milestones Assessment data.

Procedures

Regarding the procedural process, my initial step was to seek the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this case study before collecting data (see Appendix A). Next, a letter requesting site approval for the research study was presented to the Brown County School District superintendent (see Appendix B). In addition to the school district's superintendent, I also obtained site approval from Johns Middle School's principal (see Appendix C). After receiving IRB approval, I then moved forward with selecting participants for the study.

Student participants for the research study were selected using the sampling criteria, which included the following items: Free and Reduced Lunch eligibility report, student report cards, and Georgia Milestones Assessments data. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, the school counselor assisted with collected the criteria documents. First, the school counselor obtained a copy of the school's Free and Reduced Lunch eligibility report to identify students classified as economically disadvantaged. Children in households with incomes at or below the federal poverty level are eligible for free school meals (Food Research & Action Center, 2018). Next, the school counselor obtained a copy of the student's report card to identify students with a grade average of an 80 or above in the core subjects, which are language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The school counselor then retrieved the school's student achievement data to identify students who scored p*roficient* or *distinguished* on the Georgia Milestones Assessment System. Afterwards, the counselor cross-referenced each criterion verification document to identify students listed on all three reports and create a master list of all identified students. From the master a total of 12 students were selected to ensure that

the sample size of 6 to 10 student participants was reached. To produce a diverse data collection, students from both genders and of different ethnicities were selected as participants. Next, on my behalf, the school counselor provided a recruitment letter for each identified student, explaining the study's purpose and details (see Appendix D). Due to the student participants' age ranges, a child assent form and parent consent form were also distributed to each child and parent (see Appendix E). Once the student participants were identified and approved to participate, I began inviting parents and teachers. The school counselor distributed recruitment letters and consent forms to each parent and teacher of the participating student (see Appendix F and Appendix G). Parents and teachers of the selected student participants were asked to participate in an individual interview.

Next, I began the interviewing process. The individual interviews (see Appendix J and Appendix K) and focus group interviews (see Appendix L) convened at the research site. Individual interviews were conducted with parents and teachers only. All student participants participated in a focus group. The focus group's purpose was to create a sense of safety and security for the students, as they conversed and interacted with other group members and the research facilitator. The participants, the researcher, and the school counselor were in a private room during the focus group session. The individual interviews and focus groups were recorded using written notes and a digital audio recorder and were also professionally transcribed. All information received from the interview and focus groups were synthesized and coded for themes.

The Researcher's Role

My primary interest in this research was to discover factors that promote academic motivation among impoverished middle school students. My role as the researcher consisted of

distributing and collecting assent and consent forms, conducting individual interviews, and facilitating focus groups. I also analyzed data collected from the participants of the study. I did not have any relationship or ties with any of the participants. I also safeguarded all confidential information, such as the name of the research site and the names of the participants.

As the researcher, I have firsthand knowledge of the school district. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), identifying appropriate settings and working with gatekeepers to obtain necessary permissions are critical steps in a case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As an educator in the district, I have working relationships with many of the administrators and other stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, and community partners within the district. The research site that I used is in a community consisting of impoverished families; therefore, gaining participants who met the sampling criteria was not challenging to obtain. During the research, I interviewed teachers and parents of the student participants. I did not have prior knowledge or associations with the teachers or parents at the site. The site administrator and I have a working relationship; however, the site administrator did not participate in the study. Although I work within the school district, I chose a site where I had no affiliations, associations, or personal connections with the participants, which also helped with bracketing the study. I used different methods while collecting data, such as written notes and an audio recorder, to guarantee accuracy during the reporting process. I also utilized another researcher, not affiliated with the research, to review and verify data transcriptions.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study was obtained from interviews and focus groups. After receiving IRB approval, permission letters from the superintendent and school principal, and the assent and consent forms from the participants, I began collecting data. First, I conducted

individual interviews with parents and teachers. After conducting the individual interviews, I began conducting student focus groups. Due to the students being under the age of 18 years old and to foster a sense of safety and security, I did not conduct individual interviews with the student participants. The information received from the individual interviews and focus groups were transcribed and triangulated. All documents were collected and placed in a secure location. An audit trail for the study was also be established.

Interviews

In this case study research, conducting interviews with individuals allowed the researcher to find out those things that cannot be directly observed (Michael Quinn Patton, 2002). The individual interviews were conducted with parents and teachers of the selected student participants. Each interview was conducted in a private room at the research site to maintain the participating individuals' confidentiality and respect. The following questions were designed to conduct individual interviews:

Teacher Interview Questions

1. What's your educational and teaching background?

2. What influenced you to become a teacher?

3. What grade levels have you previously taught?

4. Which grade and subject are your most favorite?

5. What inspires you most about teaching?

6. Describe your teaching philosophy.

7. Describe your classroom culture and environment.

8. Describe your experiences working in an inner-city middle school.

9. Based on your observations, what are some challenges students from the community

    face?

10. How would you describe the student's resilience?

11. In reference to the student's academic success, what has been the most influential

    contributing factor(s)?

Parent Interview Questions

1. What is it like being the parent of the participating student?

2. Describe your values regarding education.

3. In reference to your child's education, how important is parent involvement?

4. Describe your child's level of interest concerning academics. Overall, what do you think

    motivates him or her to perform academically?

5. How do you motivate your child to succeed in school?

6. How involved are you in the community (e.g., church, community center, neighborhood

    association, etc.)?

7. How has your community (e.g., church, community center, neighborhood association,

    etc.) influenced your child's academic achievement?

8. Describe your home environment on a typical day. How does it influence your child's

    motivation and academic achievement?

9. Describe your child's level of interest concerning extra-curricular activities and outside

    school activities.

10. How has the extra-curricular activities and outside school activities influenced your

    child's motivation?

Each interview question was designed to reveal the factors that promote academic motivation based on the perceptions of the parent and teacher participants. The interview questions were designed based on previous research findings conducted by various researchers (Deniz Can & Ginsburg-Block, 2016; McFarland et al., 2016; Park et al., 2017; and Lv et al., 2019). Research studies (Deniz Can & Ginsburg-Block, 2016; McFarland et al., 2016; Park et al., 2017; and Lv et al., 2019) show that parental involvement as well as teacher-student relationship both have significant impacts on the students' academic achievement, but especially among those who come from low-socioeconomic communities and households.

Focus Groups

The focus groups were conducted in groups. Group one consisted of male student participants and group two consisted of female participants. They school counselor sat in for both group sessions. Conducting focus groups provided an opportunity for me to interact with multiple student participants at the same time while allowing them the security of being in a group, rather than singled-out in an interview. The following questions presented relevant information pertaining to the persistence and motivation among economically disadvantaged, yet academically successful middle school students.

Focus Group Questions:

1. Who's the smartest kid in school?

2. What personal achievement are you most proud of?

3. What makes you want to come to school?

4. Describe a time when you felt very challenged. How did you overcome this challenge? Can you tell me why you wanted to overcome this challenge?

5. What extracurricular activity are you interested in? Can you tell me why you are interested in these activities?

6. What is your favorite subject, and why do you like it?

7. What is your least favorite subject, and why do you dislike it?

8. How would you describe an ideal teacher?

9. Tell me about a time when your teacher motivated you.

10. How often do you work with your peers to complete class assignments?

11. Describe your feelings when working with other students in your class?

12. Do you prefer working with one partner or in groups? Explain.

13. What else do I need to know about how you are so successful as students?

The focus group questions aligned with the self-determination and self-efficacy theories, with emphasis on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. As it pertains to intrinsic motivation, the questions were centered around an individual's innate desire to engage in an activity (Daniel & Cooc, 2018). Regarding extrinsic motivation, the focus group questions dealt with the willingness to complete a task for the sake of an external incentive such as recognition, reward, or avoidance of punishment (Daniel & Cooc, 2018).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this qualitative research study occurred through collecting data in the form of interviews and focus groups. According to Yin (2018), case studies allow you to focus in-depth on a "case" and to retain a holistic and real-world perspective—such as in studying individual life cycles, small group behavior, neighborhood change, and school performance. For this research study, I used a holistic analysis approach. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that in this approach to data analysis, the researcher examines the entire case (Yin, 2009) and presents a

description, themes, and interpretations or assertions related to the whole case. The goal of the holistic approach is to understand the case—what it is, how it works, and how it interacts with its real-world contextual environment (Yin. 2018).

During the data collection process, I analyzed the data retrieved from the interviews and focus groups by using a data analysis spiral approach. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), utilizing a data analysis spiral approach, the researchers engage in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach. Using the data retrieved from the interviews and focus groups, I completed the following as outlined by the data analysis spiral approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018):

1. *Managed and organized the data:* I created and organized digital data files from the interviews and focus groups, in addition to creating a file naming system.

2. *Read and memo emergent ideas:* I furthered the analysis getting a sense of the whole database by reading the texts, making margin notes, and forming initial codes. I also initiated a digital audit trail to ensure the individual interviews' accuracy and focus group transcripts.

3. *Described and classified codes into themes:* During this process, I built descriptions, developed and applied codes, and developed themes describing the case and its context.

4. *Developed and assessed interpretations:* Using the information retrieved from the interviews and focus groups, I used categorical aggregation to establish themes or patterns. This process began with the development of the codes, the formation of themes from the codes, and then the organization of themes into larger abstraction units to make sense of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

5. *Represented and visualized the data:* I created a visual image, such as a comparison table and matrix, to represent the information.

Trustworthiness

In this section, I will provide information about the credibility, dependability and confirmability, and transferability of the research study. Trustworthiness is defined as the quality of an investigation and its findings, making it noteworthy to audiences (Schwandt, 2007). For this study, trustworthiness stemmed from triangulating the data and maintaining a chain of evidence. Also, having multiple data sources helped capture a broader range of perspectives, behaviors, and attitudes.

Credibility

For this study, I triangulated the data using multiple sources, including individual interviews and focus groups. Using multiple data sources fostered credibility to ensure that the study results would be believable from a participant's perspective in the study (Terrell, 2016). Also, to establish trustworthiness and ensure the data's credibility, I conducted a member checking process. This approach involved taking data, analyses, and interpretation back to the participants to assess the findings' accuracy and credibility (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Dependability and Confirmability

I increased the trustworthiness of the study through dependability and confirmability. According to Schwandt (2007), dependability focuses on inquiry and the inquirer's responsibility for ensuring that the process is logical, traceable, and documented. For this study, I established dependability using an audit trail, which allowed me to retrace the process of research findings. I also used data triangulation to validate the accuracy of the study with the confirmatory evidence. Confirmability is close to objectivity, according to Schwandt (2015), and it ties assumptions,

conclusions, and interpretations back to the evidence. To achieve confirmability, I used a confirmability audit, which involves having a researcher not involved in the research study to examine both the process and the product of the study (Terrell, 2016).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the generalization of the research so it can establish some degree of similarity between cases (Michael Quinn Patton, 2015). Transferability is done by providing a thick description of the results by fully describing the situation in detail (Terrell, 2016). Information retrieved from this research could be used for future research as it pertains to academic motivation and students of poverty. The findings from the study will be beneficial to other school administrators and educational stakeholders.

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Ethical Considerations

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To ensure proper ethical considerations, I first obtained IRB approval before collecting data for the study. I also received permission from the school district superintendent and site administrator to conduct the study within a school in the district. I also collected assent and consent forms from each research participant. Ethical considerations for this research study consist of privacy, data storage, and confidentiality of the students. Therefore, I made sure that all documents obtained are kept confidential. I also used pseudonyms to identify the site and all participants. The participants were informed that there were minimal risks associated with this study, and if desired, they could withdraw from the study at any time. The participants were also informed that their personal information, such as name, home address, and contact information would be kept confidential. Furthermore, I conducted this research study in an environment where I do not hold any supervisory control nor associations with those who participated in the

research study sample. All data transferred electronically, such as notes and audio recordings, were stored and password protected.

Summary

This chapter discussed the methods used for this study. The purpose of this research was to reveal contributing factors that promote academic motivation among economically disadvantaged students. Included in this chapter are the research design, research questions, setting, and researcher's role. The chapter also includes a discussion of participants' selection, as purposive sampling was used to select the participants for this study. A description of the instrumentation and data collection was also be discussed. Data was collected through individual interviews and focus groups. This chapter also concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness, the credibility of findings, dependability and confirmability, transferability, and ethical considerations of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this case study was to explore factors that promote academic motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students. Presented in this chapter are descriptions of the research participants and a summary of the research results, which includes discussion of the theme development and responses to the research questions. Data were gathered from two focus groups conducted with student participants and individual interviews with parents and teachers who have directly observed the academic processes of these student participants. A total of five themes emerged, all of which addressed the central research question and sub-questions.

Participants

There were 28 participants for this study (see Table 1), which consisted of eight teachers, eleven parents, and nine students. Each teacher and parent participant participated in an interview, while the student participants participated in focus groups. The focus groups were divided into two groups: five female students in the first focus group and four male students in the second focus group. The names of each participant were replaced with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

Table 1

Participants Chart

Student	Gender	Ethnicity	Grade	Teacher Representative	Parent Representative
Terrell	Male	Black	8th grade	Ms. Collins	Mom: Ms. Vicki
Isabella	Female	Hispanic	8th grade	Mr. Hill	Mom: Ms. Samantha
Tiffany	Female	Multi-Racial	7th grade	Mr. Franklin	Mom: Mrs. McFadden Stepfather: Mr. McFadden
Darren	Male	Multi-Racial	7th grade	Mr. Franklin	Mom: Ms. Michelle Grandmother: Ms. Doris
Donte	Male	Black	7th grade	Dr. Cooper	Grandmother: Ms. Betty
Ashley	Female	Black	8th grade	Ms. Harman	Mom: Ms. Cynthia
Stephanie	Female	Hispanic	8th grade	Ms. McDonald	Mom: Ms. Carole
Taylor	Female	Multi-Racial	7th grade	Ms. Harris	Mom: Ms. Rebecca
Caleb	Male	White	8th grade	Ms. Barnes	Dad: Mr. Calvin

Terrell

Terrell is an eighth-grade student at Johns Middle school. He is 13 years old and is the oldest of three children. Terrell enjoys playing sports and is a skilled member of the school's basketball and football teams. In his spare time, he enjoys playing video games with his younger brother. Terrell's favorite subject is science. His eighth-grade science teacher, Ms. Collins, also participated in the study.

Terrell's mother, Ms. Vicki, participated in the study as well. Ms. Vicki is a single mother and works at a local gas station where she was recently promoted to an assistant manager position. She moved to Georgia when Terrell was five years old to be closer to her mother, who at the time was terminally ill. Although young, Ms. Vicki states that Terrell has been an inspiration in her life, and unknowingly, he often motivates her to be the best mother for her children.

Ms. Collins has been teaching for 12 years. She has worked within the same school district since the start of her career. Ms. Collins previously worked in the accounting field but decided to change careers to become an educator, which she affirms to be her calling. Ms. Collins expressed that her experience working in an inner-city school has been heartbreaking due to the impacts of poverty, but also rewarding as a result of student achievement and success.

Isabella

Isabella is a 13-year-old eighth-grader. Her family moved to Georgia during her final year of sixth grade. Isabella's favorite subjects are language arts and math, and she also enjoys reading chapter books and going shopping. She is a member of the following extracurricular activities: the senior math club, student government, band, and the art and design club. Isabella's mother and teacher also participated in this study.

Ms. Samantha is Isabella's mother. She is a single mother and has four children. Currently, Ms. Samantha is unemployed and receives assistance from her family members to help support her children. Ms. Samantha states that moving to Georgia was challenging, but it was the best move for her children. She says that her that daughter is a wonderful child and is always willing to assist her younger siblings with their schoolwork. Ms. Samantha believes that Isabella will have great success in her future endeavors.

Ms. Hill has been teaching middle grades math for five years. She enjoys teaching math and making it a subject fun to learn. She comes from a family line of educators to include her grandmothers, parents, and two siblings, all of whom have taught in the same school district. Ms. Hill's inspiration for teaching not only stems from her family's tradition, but she has the heart to help children, especially those who experience academic challenges.

Tiffany

Tiffany is a 12-year-old seventh-grader. Tiffany has encountered many challenges throughout childhood, including experiencing the loss of her father. She enjoys coming to school and being with her friends, who she describes as her second family. Outside of her academics, Tiffany is often staying after school to participate in the math team, cheerleading squad, and STEM team. Her aspirations are to one day become an accountant or civil engineer. In addition to school activities, Tiffany enjoys playing and helping her younger sister with homework and cheer routines.

Tiffany's mother and step-father, Mr. and Mrs. McFadden, also participated in the study. The couple has been married for four years, and together they have another daughter, Tiffany's younger sister. Mrs. McFadden has lived in the community for several years, but she and her husband are in the process of relocating to a better area. Mrs. McFadden states that she wants to provide a better life for her children and believes that moving to a better neighborhood with less crime would benefit the family. Mr. McFadden is a construction worker, and Mrs. McFadden works as a private duty patient care assistant.

Mr. Franklin, Tiffany's math teacher, has completed 17 years in education, working in Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia. Before relocating to Georgia, Mr. Franklin had never taught in an inner-city school. His previous teaching experiences were all in rural counties, which he states are much different from the inner-city school experience. Based on his teaching philosophy, Mr. Franklin believes that learning is most effective when students understand that they, too, have a role in their education and feel connected to those who have close access.

Darren

Darren is a seventh-grader at Johns Middle School. He is a member of the school's football and baseball teams. His favorite subject is science, and as a result, he has won first place in the science fair competition for two consecutive years. Darren enjoys spending time with his football and baseball teammates. He often plays sports with his neighborhood friends or watches wrestling with his brother in his spare time. Darren is being raised by his mother and grandmother, who both participated in the study. Mr. Franklin, the seventh-grade teacher who was previously introduced, is also Darren's math teacher.

Ms. Michelle is the mother of Darren. She and her family are originally from Orlando, Florida. While in Florida, Michelle experienced various hardships and needed support with raising her two children; therefore, she moved to Georgia and began living with her mother Doris, who is a retired widow and lives on a fixed income. She is a firm believer that children must work hard to have a better chance at life. Ms. Doris comes from a large yet closed-knitted family. She and her daughter Michelle both try to instill principles regarding family, educational, and spiritual values in Darren and his brother Kyle.

Donte

Donte is a 13-year-old seventh-grade student. His favorite subjects are math and science. Donte is an avid reader and likes reading historical articles and books. He enjoys playing sports, listening to various genres of music, and drawing. Donte currently lives with and is being raised by his grandmother. His grandmother Betty, as well as his teacher Dr. Cooper, both participated in the study.

Ms. Betty is a 72-year-old vibrant grandmother of eight grandchildren, three of whom she has raised independently. To ensure that her grandson Donte was provided a stable home

environment, she decided to obtain full custody of him, and he has been with her since the age of seven. In addition to raising Donte, Ms. Betty is also the primary caretaker of her youngest son, who is also mentally disabled. Ms. Betty has lived in the community for over forty years. She is an active member of her church and often volunteers at the school for special events.

Dr. Cooper is a retired military veteran, having served 21 years in the United States Army. Dr. Cooper is a seventh-grade math teacher and serves as the school's math club coach. She has always had a desired to teach children. Before retiring, she had the opportunity of experiencing teaching while stationed in Japan, Hawaii, and Washington state. Dr. Cooper enjoys working with her students and serving the community.

Ashley

Ashley is a seventh-grade student who proudly acknowledges that she has an A average in each of her core classes. Ashley is 13 years old and is the youngest of three children. Her favorite subjects are social studies and language arts, and she enjoys watching tv sitcoms dealing with criminal justice. She also enjoys reading and writing poetry, playing basketball, and visiting her older sister, who is away in college. Ashley lives at home with her mother and older brother. Her mother, Cynthia, also participated in the study along with her social studies teacher, Mrs. Harman.

Ms. Cynthia is a patient transporter at one of the local hospitals. She has been working in the healthcare field for 16 years and is currently taking classes to become a licensed nurse practitioner. Ms. Cynthia is a single parent. Her oldest son is a high school senior and has already earned several college football scholarships. Ms. Cynthia has plans of relocating to another state after her oldest son graduates high school. She believes that relocating will also be beneficial for Ashley as she prepares for high school.

Ms. Harman has over 25 years of teaching experience. She has taught students at every grade level within the elementary and middle school setting. She has also taught various subjects but claims reading and language arts as her most favorite subjects to teach. Ms. Harman enjoys working at Johns Middle School but plans to retire at the end of the school year.

Stephanie

Stephanie is a 14-year-old eighth-grade student who is friendly and enjoys making new friends. Stephanie is a talented violinist and is a member of the school's orchestra. Before joining the orchestra, Stephanie was selected to be a member of the school's chorus and introductory jazz ensemble. Her favorite core subject is language arts, and she enjoys writing songs. She is an only child and her mother is a devoted single parent. Stephanie's mother, as well as her teacher, also participated in the study.

Ms. Carole is Stephanie's mother and is very supportive of Stephanie and her endeavors. Ms. Carole shared that since kindergarten, her daughter has always maintained good grades and conduct. Ms. Carole works in retail, and during her days off, she often works as a substitute teacher within the school district. She is heavily involved in Stephanie's school and is a frequent parent volunteer. Ms. Carole has also served as a former PTA president for the school.

Ms. McDonald is an eighth-grade language arts teacher. She has been teaching for seven years and has completed three of those years in middle school. Ms. McDonald began her career at a private childcare facility and later became a certified Pre-K teacher. She earned a Master of Arts in Teaching to become a fully certified math and science teacher. Ms. McDonald enjoys teaching and loves to find ways to promote learning for all students.

Taylor

Taylor, who is affectionately known as Tay, is an eighth-grader. Her peers describe her as a relaxed yet humorous individual. Taylor participates in various extracurricular activities, such as being a part of the cheerleading squad, volleyball team, student council, and step team. Academically, she serves as a member of the STEM and scholastic reader clubs. Taylor has a twin sister, and they both live with their mother and father. Taylor's mother participated in the study, along with her teacher Ms. McDonald.

Taylor's mother, Mrs. Rebecca, is a stay-at-home parent. Due to having severe health conditions, she is unable to work. Her husband works as a laborer for the local labor union. Together the couple has four children, including their twin daughters. Mrs. Rebecca describes Taylor as outgoing and curious. She states that Taylor can be found studying or going to church with her grandparents during her free time.

Ms. Harris is a seventh-grade language arts teacher. Many of her students respectfully refer to her as "Mama Harris." She was inspired to teach as a result of her own experiences during her childhood. Outside of regular classroom hours, Ms. Harris is committed to providing tutor sessions and assisting students with homework. Her aspirations are to one day become a certified school counselor working in a middle or high school setting.

Caleb

Caleb is 13 years old and is in the eighth grade. His favorite subjects are social studies and science. He likes to play race car video games. Caleb also likes to collect dinosaurs and action figures. He aspires to one day own a landscaping company conducting business for commercial corporations. Caleb is a three-year spelling bee champion. He won first place in each competition and stated that although spelling is not his favorite subject, he enjoyed competing.

Caleb's father, Mr. Calvin, participated in the study. Ms. Barnes, Caleb's social studies teacher, also participated in the study.

Mr. Calvin is a single father. Five years ago, his wife passed after fighting a long battle with cancer. Currently, he works a full-time job at a local restaurant as a cook. Mr. Calvin enjoys cooking and spending time with his son Caleb. He did not complete high school, which is why he encourages Caleb to work hard and study. Mr. Calvin is also enrolled in a program to earn a GED and hopes to enroll in a program to become a certified HVAC Technician.

Ms. Barnes is an eighth-grade social studies teacher who also serves as the grade-level chairperson. Ms. Barnes has worked in the field of education for nearly 15 years. Before becoming a social studies teacher, she worked as a special education teacher in Kentucky and Tennessee. She enjoys working in an inner-city setting and finds it rewarding when she can witness students achieve.

Results

The results from this qualitative case study derived from pursuing three research questions that focused on understanding the promoting factors of academic motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students. Data were collected from participants during individual interviews and focus groups. The analysis process for this study involved organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of transcripts, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Theme Development

A thematic analysis was used to examine the collected data. The initial step consisted of completing a thorough review of the retrieved information. After each interview and both focus

groups, I immediately began processing the collected information and recorded detailed notes. This process involved making general notes of the participants' interactions with others during the focus groups, documenting participants' individual reactions during the interviews, and other notable observations relevant for data analysis, such as voice, tone, and body language.

Next, I began the initial coding process and generating themes. This process was completed using the Otter.ai transcription software and manually reading the resulting text. The manual review was conducted to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts. I then began highlighting key phrases and sentences retrieved from the transcripts to generate codes. Once the codes were generated, I then identified patterns and relationships between the codes. A data reduction process was also conducted to identify and focus on information meaningful to the study. Codes were then collated and sorted into sub-themes. Fourteen sub-themes and five unifying themes were identified through data analysis. The five fundamental themes include: (a) classroom environment, (b) parental involvement, (c) community involvement, (d) school-connectedness, and (e) student goals and determination. The corresponding sub-themes and codes are also displayed (see Table 2).

Table 2

Themes, Sub-theme, and Codes

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes
Classroom Environment	Variety of learning models	Technology use Teamwork Student collaboration Experimental work
	Teacher challenging students	Attainable goals Setting goals Accountability
	Encouragement received from the teacher	Verbal praise Consistent feedback

		Motivating students
		Encourager
		Positivity
Parental Involvement	Parent as volunteer within the school	Comradery
		Parent capacity
		Dependable and consistency
		Support from parents
	Parent and teacher relationship	Building relationships
		Supportive parents
		Communicating with parent
		Trusting the teacher
	Value of education	Home values
		Educational experiences
		Parent expectations
Community Partners and Organizations	Recreational Programs	Playing sports
		Fine arts participation
		Community programs
		Motivating
		Academic performance
	Tutoring Programs	Mentoring
		Assistance with assignments
		Community tutoring program
	Faith-based Organizations	Attend church regularly
		Church program incentives
		Outreach
		Tutoring for children
School-connectedness	Being accepted by others	Insecurities
		Self-conscious
		Built family-like relationships
	Participate in school activities	Student achievement
		Extracurricular activities
		Keep students out of trouble
		Responsibility
	Support from school staff	Building trust
		Positive learning environment
	Way out of poverty	Family cycle

Student Goals and Determination		Self-motivation
		Resilience
	Aspirations to attend college	Goals and aspirations
		Career choices
		Family role model
		Personal development

Classroom Environment

The theme classroom environment emerged during the teacher interviews and student focus groups. It described the atmosphere, expectations, and perceptions of the learning environment. The theme was formulated from the following codes: a variety of learning models, challenging students, and encouragement from teachers.

Variety of Learning Models. One of the learning models discussed during the interview was the use of technology in the classroom. Based on the responses received by the teacher participants, many of the students attending Johns Middle School do not have access to Wi-Fi or technology devices in the home. Therefore, when students are provided the opportunity to use technology in the classroom during instruction, they are more focused and motivated to complete assignments. Ms. McDonald, an eighth-grade teacher, explained the advantages of integrating technology during instruction. She stated

"Technology is a powerful resource for learning. I use technology in my lessons because it keeps the students engaged and encourages active participation. One thing that I have noticed is that most of my students are more confident when using technology. It brings out their creative skills, and it is obvious that they feel competent when completing tasks."

Another learning model discussed by the teacher participants was group collaboration. Ms. Barnes, another eighth-grade teacher, explained how students in her classroom benefit from collaborative group assignments. She stated that, during a previous professional development provided by the school district, group collaboration was highlighted as an effective instructional model to implement within the classroom, especially with students of poverty According to Mr. Franklin, students from low-income communities often do not experience proper collaboration with others outside of school, which impacts their self-esteem and even their interaction with their peers. Mr. Hill, who is also a member of the eighth-grade team, discussed the effectiveness of collaborative group during instruction. He stated,

> "Student collaboration is needed, and honestly, if it is implemented effectively, teachers would witness an increase in student performance. Collaboration requires the students to work together and learn from each other, but the teacher has to know the students so that grouping is effective."

In addition to technology and collaborative grouping learning models, experimental learning was another instructional model mentioned by teacher participants. During the interview, Dr. Cooper described his student's experiences during science class. He stated

> "My students are more engaged when they participate in interactive and experimental learning. They prefer that instead of listening to me lecture. I even notice that my male students are more engaged and look forward to class when they know we will be doing experiments or labs. Also, their grades are much higher when completing experimental-based assignments."

Dr. Cooper furthered explained how he often witnessed successful outcomes when implementing experimental and project-based learning models over the years of teaching students of poverty. He believes that it also builds confidence and encourages student interaction.

Teachers Challenging Students. Teachers challenging students to learn and perform successfully were discussed during the interviews. Teachers explained the importance of setting attainable goals for students. For example, Ms. Harman, a seventh-grade social studies teacher, requires her students to organize and maintain data notebooks throughout the school year. During her interview, she stated

"In my classroom, the students are accustomed to using data notebooks. My purpose for utilizing the data notebooks is to provide students with a visual of their performance, which also promotes accountability. Students at this age need to take ownership."

Ms. Collins also discussed the importance of challenging students while in the classroom. She explained how most of her students are functioning at different levels academically; however, regardless of their academic performance, her expectations are the same for all students when completing the work. Ms. Collins also stated, "several of our students' academic achievement and overall school performance is a result of them challenged by a teacher." In addition to Ms. Harman and Ms. Collins, Ms. Hill also discussed the importance of challenging students. She believes that a system for supporting students should also be executed for every challenge presented to the student.

"Many of my students come from similar backgrounds, and many of them encounter similar home situations. My goal is not only for them to understand the importance of reading and knowing how to accurately solve math problems, but I also want them to

know that I will be there to support them through the process of learning, as long as they

are willing to learn."

Based on the participant teacher responses, presenting students with challenging tasks has

not only resulted in higher academic achievement outcomes, but it develops resilience, and also

encourages accountability and perseverance.

Encouragement from Teachers. During the teacher interviews and student focus

groups, it was discovered that providing consistent feedback and encouragement to students was

another promoting factor of motivation. Based on the various discussions with the teacher

participants, students receiving feedback and encouragement from their classroom teacher is

critical. In addition, providing effective feedback and encouragement to students has had a

positive effect on the school climate and learning environment. During the interview with Dr.

Cooper, he stated, "students can sense when someone genuinely cares for them, you can see it

through their work ethics." Mr. Franklin and Ms. Harris also mentioned the importance of

encouraging students. In his interview, Mr. Franklin stated,

> "I have been in education for almost twenty years, and I realize that my words and
>
> actions can either increase or decrease my student's motivation. Many people fail to
>
> realize that encouraging words or actions can be the difference between students' success
>
> or failure."

During the student focus groups, Terrell stated how his teacher, Ms. Collins, encourages him to

do his best when completing assignments or taking tests. He explained,

> "Ms. Collins is like the best encourager. Sometimes she reminds me of my mom because
>
> they both say, 'do your best' or 'I know you can do it.' Ms. Collins's favorite line is 'you

did good, but I know you can do better,' and then she makes us redo the work. I had her

last year in seventh grade, and she is still the same."

During Ms. Collins's interview, she made the following statement regarding student

encouragement: "I believe the success for any student is the support and encouragement they

receive, whether it be from family, parents, teachers, coaches, or any adult in their life."

Receiving encouragement from the teacher appeared to have a positive effect on the students.

Many of the student participants showed excitement while describing their teachers as

encouragers and explaining their approaches.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement refers to parents who are active participants within the school and is

actively involved in their child's education. Three codes formed this theme: parents as a

volunteer within the school, parent and teacher relationships, and parents' value of education.

Parents as Volunteers. Based on teacher participants' responses, when parents are

present and work closely with the school, it sends a positive message and builds comradery

among the parents, teachers, students, and other stakeholders. For example, Mr. Franklin stated,

"we have different parents who volunteer at our games, PBIS events, or other functions, and

most are parents of average or above-average performing students." Ms. Hill stated during her

interview, "when parents volunteer at the school, it encourages other parents to get on board."

Ms. Collins also stated that parents who volunteer at the school are consistent and dependable,

which help decrease negative behaviors among students. Ms. Collins also stated,

"Serval of my student's parents volunteer in my classroom and during school functions.

Unfortunately, due to circumstances caused by the coronavirus, we cannot have

volunteers, but it has been great in the previous school years. Parents sometimes don't

understand the joy and excitement students get when they see their mother, father, grandparents, or older sibling coming in the building to check on them or just to lend a helping hand. It goes a long way and pays greatly at the end of their school years."

During the parent interview, five parent participants discussed their role as volunteers within the school and its effects on the child's academic and behavior performance. Ms. Betty stated, "If Donte knows that I am coming to his school, he gets all happy about it. When my children were young, I would volunteer in their schools. As a matter of fact, I was the president of the PTA for several years. "Terrell's mother also explained that before she became involved in the school, his behavior and academic performance were below average, but since she has been volunteering, she has seen improvement in both areas. Mr. and Mrs. McFadden also talked about the importance of parental involvement and how they enjoy volunteering at the school, specifically during sporting events and on field trips. Ms. Cynthia is another parent participant who frequently volunteers at the school. Based on her statements, she has a positive influence on many of the students. She stated, "some of the children call me Mama Cynthia when they see me at the school." Ms. Cynthia went on to say,

> "Most of the kids and their parents know me very well. I am what they call the neighborhood candy lady. Because of the violence and thefts at the neighborhood convenience store, I decided to sell snacks and other goodies to the neighborhood children to keep them from having to them out of trouble and harm's way. It's funny because every time they bring home report cards, I add a special treat to their bag when they come to buy snacks from me. We have some good children in our neighborhood, smart too, but many of them lack support from their parents."

According to the teacher participants, only a few parents serve as volunteers. Most of the parent volunteers are parents of students who receive academic or extracurricular activity recognitions. The school has received a school-based parent facilitator to assist with recruiting parent volunteers and enhancing parental involvement.

Parent-teacher Relationship. Another code developed during the data analysis was parent-teacher relationship, which was noted during the parent and teacher interviews. During the parent interview, some participants felt that having a relationship with the teacher was beneficial for the parent, teacher, and child. Ms. Michelle, Darren's mother, stated,

"After moving to Georgia, Darren had a hard time adjusting to the school just as any other child would probably have at that age. It wasn't until he was placed in Mr. Franklin's class that he started to loosen up and began socializing with other students. Mr. Franklin allowed Darren to play on his team, and because of their relationship, I began building a rapport with Mr. Franklin. This also helped me build a relationship with his other teachers as well."

Ms. Samantha also described her relationship with Isabella's teachers. She stated, "Isabella's teachers are very good at checking on her if she is absent from school or contacting me just to let me know how well she is doing in class, and that goes a long way with me." During the interview session, Caleb's father stated, "Caleb's teachers have been very supportive, and they include me in everything, which is the main reason for his success in school." The teacher participants also noted the importance of establishing a relationship with parents. For example, Dr. Cooper expressed his feelings regarding parents and teachers establishing a working relationship for the student's sake. He stated,

"When you work toward building a relationship with parents at the beginning, you will see the effects in the end. We have to consider the whole child, remove our personal feelings and disagreements, and focus solely on the child. For many of my most successful students, I knew their parent's first and last names; I knew their telephone numbers, and I even knew of the addresses. I'm telling you, when the teacher and the parents are on the same page, the student has no other choice but to jump on the bandwagon."

The teachers expressed similar thoughts regarding the importance of establishing a parent and teacher relationship and its impact on student academic performance. Most of the teachers who made such statements were teachers with more than five years of teaching experience.

Value of Education. The code value of education covered several statements from parent participants. During the interviews, each parent participant was asked to describe his or her values regarding education. Each parent stated that education is valued in their homes; however, based on their responses, some had higher standards than the other parents. The data analysis indicated that single parents described their value for education with more emphasis than others. For example, Ms. Vicki, a single parent, stated,

"It is very hard working a full-time job with little pay and being a single parent at the same time. That is why I am very hard on my children when it comes to their education because I know what it takes to break this cycle of living paycheck-to-paycheck. My children know that homework and study time is a daily requirement. I make them study even if they don't have a scheduled test or quiz."

Other parents, such as Ms. Michelle and Ms. Doris, also articulated their expectations and how they value education. During their interview, Ms. Doris, Darren's grandmother, described her

hardships in life as a young girl growing up in Georgia. She stated, "many young people don't value education, but we make sure that we instill the right things in Darren, and so far, his success speaks for him." Although some of the participants had various descriptions of how they value education, each parent indicated that they are heavily involved in their child's education with hopes of seeing them succeed.

Community Partners and Organizations

The theme community partners and organizations refer to resources and support received from various community organizations. The theme derived from the following: sports recreational programs such as the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), community art programs, tutoring programs, and faith-based organizations.

Recreational Programs. Many parent participants indicated the importance of community partners and organizations and how they believe it links to their child's motivation and academic performance. For example, Darren's mother, Ms. Michelle, stated

"Darren really loves playing football. I signed him up to play football with AAU, and I have noticed that this motivates him when it comes to making good grades in school. His coaches are always asking about his grades, and sometimes they even visit the school to check on him."

Ms. Vicki, Terrell's mother, also mentioned how being a part of the recreational team has motivated her son in his educational performance. Ms. Vicki stated that having an outside reinforcement helps with keeping Terrell on track.

"He is not a bad child, but he is growing up into a teenager, and the things that use to interest him, does not interest him anymore. Playing sports is like therapy for Terrell, and

he doesn't like for me to use it as a punishment, so he works really and puts in a lot of time studying to make good grades and stay on the team."

Both parents explained how their sons were allowed to play on the team because of their academic performance and the effort of work demonstrated, such as studying, to effective performance in school.

Community arts programs were another factor linked to student's motivation. The community arts program is provided by a local mini theater that offers the following areas of performance: drama, dance, visual arts, piano, and violin. The program is designed for local students between the ages of 6 to 19 years old. Stephanie's mother, Ms. Carole, allows her to participate in the program once a week learning ballet. During the interview, Ms. Carole made the following statement:

"Stephanie has so much potential, so I wanted to put her in a program that would help nurture her gift. When I was her age, I always wanted to dance and have a role in plays and skits, but my mother was not fortunate enough to enroll me into a program like the one she is in now. Since she has been in the program, I have noticed that her self-esteem and overall social interaction with other children her age have improved."

Taylor also participates in the community arts program. According to her mother, Ms. Rebecca, she is a talented dancer and does well with singing. Her mother also explained how being in the community arts program has helped develop her daughter's character and perseverance.

Tutoring Programs. Another code identified from the interview sessions was the availability of community tutoring programs. Four of the parent participants have enrolled their children in a local tutoring program. The program is provided by a local college offering tutoring

services in reading, math, and science. Mr. and Mrs. Fadden stated that the tutoring program's

cost is reasonable, and their daughter Tiffany attends twice a week. Mr. McFadden states

> "Tiffany is a hard worker, but when it comes to her education, we just want to make sure
>
> that she receives the best all-around. She makes good grades, but I also know that she is
>
> moving up in grade levels, and the workload will be different from what she is used to
>
> having. That is the main reason we enrolled her into a tutoring program."

Mrs. McFadden stated that the tutoring program also serves as a form of mentoring for her

daughter, especially with having the opportunity to interact with the college student tutors during

the tutoring sessions.

Faith-based Organizations. Faith-based organizations and programs, such as churches

and programs offered by the churches were discussed during the parent interviews. Most of the

parent participants mentioned the importance of attending church and various programs offered

by the church for school-aged children. Ms. Betty, who is an active member of her church,

discussed her expectations regarding her family attending church as well as the various ways the

church has supported her children over the years. She stated,

> "We attend church on a weekly basis, and Donte knows that church comes before playing
>
> outside, hanging out with his friends, or anything else. That is how I raised my own
>
> children; I have instilled the same thing in Donte. Our church has different youth
>
> programs, especially during the summertime, which keeps them busy and out of trouble.
>
> During the weekday services, the church has retired teachers helping the church children
>
> with homework or study for an upcoming test. We call it the church's study hall."

Ms. Cynthia, another parent participant, discussed how her church acknowledges and provides

incentives for students who make the honor roll and have perfect attendance. She stated, "my

pastor is an advocate of education, and he makes sure that the church embraces his vision by rewarding the students in our church with pizza dinners, skating parties, and gift cards for their accomplishments."

School Connectedness

School connectedness was another theme derived during the interviews and focus groups. School-connectedness refers to students' belief that adults in the school care about their learning and being socially connected with their peers. The following codes were generated: the feeling of being accepted by others, participating in school activities, and receiving support from school staff.

Being Accepted by Others. During the data analysis process, I discovered 24 instances where student and teacher participants made statements about the feeling of being accepted by others. In the focus group, Isabella described her experiences as a new student and new to the community. She stated,

"At my old school, me and my siblings would get picked on by other students because we did not dress like them. When my family moved to Georgia, I was nervous because I didn't know anyone, and I just knew the same thing would happen like it did at my old school, but it didn't. The teachers and kids in my class were so nice to me."

In agreement with Isabella, Taylor stated, "our principal always tells us that we are her children while we are at school." Darren and Caleb also made statements concerning feeling accepted by others within the school. Caleb stated,

"I don't have any brothers or sisters, but I have made friends with most of the people in my class. Most of my classmates are more than friends; they are like the brothers or

sisters I never had. We try to treat each other like family because we see each other every

day at school or playing in the neighborhood together."

Darren explained how students on his football team motivate each other to make good grades. He

stated, "we don't just talk about sports or the football plays, but we also study and do homework

together." Along with student responses, some teachers have witnessed how students receive and

interact with one another. Ms. McDonald stated,

"Many of our students come from broken homes, so it is special to see them connect with

each other as they do, which all stems from the school's culture. Our principal is one who

believes in unity and teamwork, and she teaches this to the entire school, not just the

staff. I believe that this has a major effect on student interaction with others."

Based on the overall responses, the student participants expressed how they enjoyed attending

school and building relationships with others. According to the teacher and student participants,

the relationships established among students are a result of feeling accepted by others within the

school.

School Activities. School activities consisted of various extracurricular activities, such as

sports, band, STEM, and art. During the interviews with teachers and parents, a common

reference made focused on how students' performance in school was linked to extracurricular

activities. Ms. Betty described how participating in extracurricular activities has been beneficial

for her grandson Donte. She stated, "Donte loves playing music, and he really likes playing ball,

but he knows that schoolwork comes first in order to participate in those programs." During the

student focus groups, Terrell discussed how playing sports keeps him focused. As he discussed

being on the school's basketball team, he stated,

"We have to keep our grades up so that we can stay on the team. But even if I wasn't on the team, I would still push myself to make good grades. My brother and two of my cousins played sports in middle school and high school, and they all went to college on a sports scholarship. That is my goal when I go to high school, but I hope that I will get scholarships for academics and sports."

Ms. Barnes, a teacher participant, made the following statement during her interview:

"Sometimes sports, chorus, art clubs, and other extracurricular activities are student's only hope. I say this because many of them may not have the advantages to participate in activities outside of school due to lack of finances or lack of interest shown by the parents. Encouraging students to become involved in programs outside of the classroom can benefit their academic performance as well as their overall well-being."

During another teacher's interview session, Mr. Franklin described extracurricular activities as the safety net for most students. Mr. Franklin stated, "when the students are offered extracurricular activities, it keeps them off the streets and also keeps them in their books." Based on the responses from the students during the focus groups, each student participated in one or more extracurricular activities.

Support from School Staff. During the focus groups, students expressed the support they received from school personnel to include the school administrators, counselors, teachers, and coaches. The majority of the female student participants identified the school counselor, school administrators, and their teacher(s) as the most supportive. In contrast, most male student participants identified the teacher and coach as their most supportive among school personnel. Some of the teacher participants, such as Ms. Hill, Ms. Harris, and Dr. Copper, discussed how the school adapted a curriculum that focuses on the students' social and emotional needs.

According to Dr. Cooper, the program provides teachers with strategies for building trust, encouraging problem-solving, and establishing a positive learning environment. He stated, "this program is needed for our student population because many of them are socially and emotionally deprived, which in turn hinders their chances of being academic achievers."

Student Goals and Determination

The theme student goals and determination refers to high-performing economically disadvantaged students who demonstrated resilience and were motivated to perform academically. The theme is made up of the following codes: way out of poverty and college aspirations.

Way Out of Poverty. To escape poverty or break the cycle of poverty was a goal described by participants during the interview and focus group sessions. Student participants, along with parent and teacher participants, made several statements about the importance of academics and how performing well were crucial factors for having a better life. During the teacher interviews, self-motivation and self-determination were mentioned most frequently among the participants. For example, Mr. Franklin made the following statement regarding influential factors for achievement among students of poverty, "their motivation, I believe, comes from something internal that says they won't stay in the life that they have lived. Having this mid-set and the determination to be successful is key." Ms. Barnes and Ms. Hill also discussed the importance of how students must be willing to achieve and have a desire for a better life. While interviewing with Ms. Collins, she became emotional speaking about her students' life and their resilience. She stated,

> "These students are taught the value of education, the importance of hard work, and they
> are encouraged to place emphasis on both of these, not only within academics but in other

areas of life as well. Every day we strive to teach them to do something that they love, never settle for anything less than what they absolutely desire, and most importantly, to know their worth. Children who understand and believe they are worthy of success are more likely to accomplish their goals."

During the focus groups, both male and female student participants expressed similar aspirations of leaving their neighborhoods and having a better life. For example, Isabella expressed her desire to one day become a registered nurse. She stated, "My auntie is a registered nurse, and she makes a lot of money and lives in a nice house. I want to be like her once I finish school." Caleb, another student participant, stated during the focus group,

"My dad works very hard, and he always tells me that if I don't want to work as hard as he does, then I have to get an education. He works these long hours every week, and sometimes he has to work overtime. That's why I study so much and work really hard in class to get good grades. I don't want to struggle or have to work low paying jobs when I grow up."

Parent participants, such as Ms. Michelle, Ms. Betty, and Ms. Vicki, also discussed how they motivate their children to excel in school so that they will experience a better quality of life. Darren's mother, Ms. Michelle, expressively stated during her interview,

"When I was younger, I played around in high school and eventually dropped out. I have been trying to get my GED but have not completed the program. Darren is so smart, and I make sure he knows it. Every day before he leaves the house, I encourage him to do his best in school because I don't want my son to make the same mistakes I did when I was in school. So far, he has made the honor roll since he's been in school."

Other parents, such as Mr. and Mrs. McFadden, described how their children strive to make good grades in school due to their career goals and aspirations of wanting a more satisfying living status.

Aspirations for Attending College. In the focus groups, most student participants discussed their aspirations of attending college or technical school. The students expressed their desires for attending college; some elaborated on attending colleges away from home, and others had hopes of going to technical school such as Terrell, who desires a career in welding; Caleb, who wants to become a mechanical technician; and Taylor who desires to become an occupational therapist. Some student participants, such as Ashley, Tiffany, and Donte, have older siblings or other family members currently in college whom they described as role models. For example, Ashley stated, "my sister is in college, and I like to hear stories about her experiences in class, living in the dorms, and the horrible food." Donte also has a family member in college, his older cousin, whom he looks up to and hopes to attend the same college to major in computer engineering. Based on the data, the student participants had high hopes and strong desires about attending college as they explained it be a form of self-enrichment and a way out of poverty.

Research Question Responses

The research questions used to guide this study consisted of one central question and two sub-questions. The responses to the research questions provided an understanding of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that promote academic motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students.

Central Question: What factors positively influence academic motivation among successful economically disadvantaged students?

The central question aimed to identify the contributing factors that promote or influence academic motivation, as reflected in approach, persistence, and level of interest among students in a low socioeconomic community. For this study, promoting factors referred to positive sources that influence students' motivational drive to perform well academically. The promoting factors of academic motivation among successful economically disadvantaged students identified in this study consisted of (a) classroom environment, (b) parental involvement, (c) community involvement, (d) school-connectedness, and (e) student goals and determination.

Classroom Environment. The classroom environment was described as a positive factor as it pertains to student motivation. Based on the participant responses, when students feel supported by the teacher or connected with their classmates, it promotes student engagement and motivates students to learn. Teacher participants discussed the importance of establishing a classroom environment where students could feel secure both physically and emotionally. For example, Dr. Cooper stated, "children need a safe haven outside of their homes, and classroom environment should be that haven." He further said,

> "I have encountered students who were performing extremely low academically at the start of the year, but they made a tremendous improvement by the end of the year. It's not because I am so great as a teacher, but I believe in providing an environment for my students just like it was my home. Many of my students have achieved significantly as a result of the learning environment."

Based on their experiences, several other teacher participants explained how the classroom's physical structure, such as desk arrangements, the color of the walls, and classroom décor also impact student motivation.

Parental Involvement. Before discussing the data collection, the literature review for this research study revealed the impact of parental involvement on student achievement. According to Hill et al. (2016), parental involvement consists of parents' work with schools and with their children to support academic development, which benefits the future success of their child's educational outcomes. The research (Hill et al., 2016) was confirmed based on the parent and teacher interviews' collected responses. Parent participants explained that due to being present in the school building and involved in their child's education, they saw an improvement in their behavior and academic performance. Teacher participants further stated that parents-supported students frequently perform much better than their peers.

Community Partners and Organizations. Data analysis indicated that community partners and organizations were positive influences on students' motivation. Data also revealed that most parent participants strongly rely on community organizations such as local churches and recreational programs for support. According to various parent participants, the organizations within their community provided resources for students that positively impacted their social skills, self-confidence, and encouraged academic achievement.

School-connectedness. School connectedness-which included supportive school personnel, an inclusive school environment, and participation in extracurricular activities-emerged from the data obtained during the interviews and focus groups. Based on the participants' responses, students who feel connected to their school are less likely to demonstrate improper behavior and are more likely to have higher academic performance, including higher grades and better attendance rates.

Student Goals and Determination. Students participants explained how their motivation stems from their personal goals. Several students discussed their desires to graduate high school

and attend college or technical schools to obtain a career that would provide a better life financially. Most of the students explained how being resilient and having determination are critical factors for motivation.

Sub-question 1: What intrinsic factors do students perceive to influence academic motivation and how?

An intrinsically motivated student commits him or herself to a task for its own sake, that is, for the enjoyment of it, the learning it allows, and for a feeling of accomplishment (Koca, 2016). Data analysis revealed several factors of academic motivation, which were developed into sub-themes and themes. The sub-themes provided a more in-depth examination of which intrinsic factors impact academic motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged students. Based on the analysis, the following sub-themes were identified as intrinsic factors as it relates to high-performing students of poverty: (a) being accepted by others, (b) receiving support from school staff, (c) value of education, (d) variety of learning models, (e) being challenged by the teacher, (f) receiving encouragement from the teacher, and (g) aspirations to attend college.

The teacher and parent participants explained how many of the student participants' academic performance resulted from them being critical thinkers, resilient, or confident in their abilities to succeed. During the focus groups, several student participants explained how they felt more confident in their academic abilities due to being accepted by others and receiving support from school staff. For example, Ashley explained that math was a challenging subject for her but having the support and encouragement of her teacher, she was motivated to try harder, and now she enjoys math. Another student discussed how being accepted by his friends encouraged him to attend school and try out various extracurricular activities that he would initially avoid.

Student participants also discussed their educational values and aspirations for furthering their learning as future college students. Several students also discussed how life circumstances-resulting from poverty-motivated them to learn and work extremely hard to earn good grades. Other identified factors-such as learning models, being challenged, or receiving encouragement from the teacher-supported students' intellectual abilities, were identified as intrinsic motivating factors that increased the student's competency and influenced academic motivation.

Sub-question 2: What extrinsic factors do students perceive to influence academic motivation?

Extrinsic motivation consists of contingent rewards or incentives; that is, the reward is contingent on successfully performing a task (Irvine, 2018). A student who is extrinsically motivated commits to a task to receive a reward from an external source or avoid punishment (Koca, 2016; Levesque et al., 2010). Data analysis revealed eight sub-themes that corresponded with extrinsic factors of motivation, which include: (a) participation in school activities, (b) participation in recreational programs, (c) tutoring programs, (d) faith-based organizations, (e) parents as volunteers within the school, (f) parent-and-teacher relationship, (g) family values of education, and (h) the pathway out of poverty.

Student participants discussed how they participated in school activities and recreational programs out of personal pleasures and interest; however, based on the participants' feedback, many were motivated to perform academically to remain on the team or continue in the extracurricular activities of interest. For example, during the teacher interview, Mr. Franklin explained the basketball team's requirements. He stated,

"My students on the team cannot earn anything less than a "C" on their report cards. So,

me and the other coaches try to encourage them to maintain their grades so that they can

stay on the team. This motivates them to do their best all around."

Students who are enrolled in tutoring programs and attend church also displayed academic

achievement. Most of the students were not interested in enrolling in a tutoring program such as

the community tutoring center or the after-school tutoring program. Several students also

discussed their lack of desire to attend weekly church services. For most, the tutoring services

and attending church were requirements initiated by their parents. However, as a result, these

students received academic support, which encouraged them to study, complete assignments, and

earning good grades.

Parents, as volunteers, and parent-and-teacher relationships were other identified extrinsic

factors of academic motivation. Based on data analysis, students with parents consistently

visiting the school or involved in their education resulted in significant academic performance.

According to teacher and parent participants, they noted that students worked harder and

displayed improved behavior due to their parents being active in the school. Similar reasons were

also identified as a result of parent-and-teacher relationships. According to several teacher

participants, when students know that their teacher and parent are unified, they are more likely to

perform to avoid punishment or earn a reward.

The final sub-themes, identified as extrinsic motivating factors, were the value of

education and the pathway out of poverty. Parent participants discussed how their values for

education and its correlation to the way out of poverty. Ms. Samantha, Isabella's mother, stated

during her interview,

"Education is a tool that you can use for anything, and no one can take it from you. This is a statement that I say to Isabella every day, and she repeats it back to me, or we say it together. I know she believes it because I have even heard her say it during her study time. So, the importance of education is embedded in her."

As it relates to the way out of poverty, most student participants explained how they study to make good grades so that one day they can have a better life.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

The purpose of this case study was to understand the promoting factors of academic motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students. Three research questions were used to guide this study. The central question was: What factors positively influence academic motivation among successful economically-disadvantaged students? The two sub-questions were: (a) What intrinsic factors do students perceive to influence academic motivation and how? (b) What extrinsic factors do students perceive to influence academic motivation? Data was collected through one-on-one interviews and focus groups. Five major themes and 14 sub-themes were derived from the data analysis. The five major themes were: (a) classroom environment, (b) parental involvement, (c) community involvement, (d) school-connectedness, and (e) student goals and determination.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this case study was to reveal and examine the promoting factors of academic motivation among high-performing, low-income middle school students. Data were collected from individual interviews conducted with teacher and parent participants and focus groups with student participants. This chapter summarizes the findings, along with a summary of the central research question and sub-questions answers. This chapter also discusses the findings related to the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two, a section containing the study's implications, an outline of the delimitations and limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

This section provides a summary of the findings based on the research questions. The responses received from the research questions provided an understanding of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that promote academic motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

Central Question: What factors positively influence academic motivation among successful, economically disadvantaged students?

Sub-question One: What intrinsic factors do students perceive to influence academic motivation and how?

Sub-question Two: What extrinsic factors do students perceive to influence academic motivation and how?

As it pertains to the central question, five factors positively influenced academic motivation among successful, economically disadvantaged students. These factors consisted of the following: (1) classroom environment, (2) parental involvement, (3) community involvement, (4) school-connectedness, and (5) student goals and determination.

Intrinsic Factors

The intrinsic motivating factors identified in this study were (a) being accepted by others, (b) receiving support from school staff, (c) value of education, (d) variety of learning models, (e) being challenged by the teacher, (f) receiving encouragement from the teacher, and (g) aspirations to attend college. Data analysis revealed that intrinsically motivated students often felt accepted by other students; they received support and encouragement from their parents and other adults, such as their teachers and coaches. Other intrinsic motivating factors consisted of education values imparted by their parents.

A variety of learning models also initiated intrinsic motivation for students. The learning models consist of student collaboration and project-based learning activities. Another intrinsic factor that promoted academic motivation among the student participants was the teacher challenging the students to maximize instructional outcomes. Students who were challenged by the teacher were motivated and displayed resilience. The last intrinsic factor revealed was that students' aspirations to attend college to further their education. The intrinsic factors identified in this study promoted academic motivation among each student participant. Based on data analysis, I discovered that students were confident in their ability to perform academically and persist throughout the process. Many of the students described their desire to attend school, their feelings regarding making good grades, and their desire to learn new skills to enhance their learning.

Extrinsic Factors

Data analysis revealed eight sub-themes that corresponded with extrinsic factors of motivation, which include: (a) participation in school activities, (b) participation in recreational programs, (c) tutoring programs, (d) faith-based organizations, (e) parents as volunteers within the school, (f) parent-and-teacher relationship, (g) family values of education, and (h) the pathway out of poverty. Many student participants explained how participating in school activities such as playing sports and other extracurricular activities motivated them to perform academically to remain active on the team. For example, students on the basketball team or the math club had to maintain a certain grade point average to remain a part of the team. Some of the student participants explained how they work hard academically because they wanted to have a better life and to one day, escape from the life of poverty. Other student participants described their motivation to perform academically due to incentives received from various community organizations and the parents' and teachers' expectations regarding their educational outcomes.

Discussion

The purpose of this section is to discuss the study's findings and their relationship to the theoretical framework and literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The theoretical literature focuses on Bandura's (1986; 1997) self-efficacy theory and Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory.

Empirical

This study adds to the existing literature concerning factors that impact academic motivation among students of poverty. Previous research studies (Bender & Ingram, 2018; Sattler & Gershoff, 2019) identified numerous factors that influence motivation, including

parental involvement, teacher-student relationships, peer relationships, learning environment, school programs, extracurricular activities, and student resilience. Based on my findings, I discovered several factors that influence and promote academic motivation among impoverished students, all of which emerged into five major themes.

Theme 1: Classroom Environment. The theme classroom environment was identified as a promoting factor of academic motivation. This theme aligns with the research conducted by Premo et al. (2018), which describes the classroom environment as a setting where students feel secure, have a sense of rapport with their teacher and peers, and are motivated to learn. The theme merely focused on the students' academic, emotional, and social support in the classroom setting. Data analysis revealed that students who received such supports performed higher academically than other low-income students. During the interviews and focus group sessions, participants described the elements of a positive learning environment and the types of support students received. The supports described by the participants included various learning techniques implemented by the teacher, building relationships, collaborating with peers, and developing positive relationships between the teacher and students. Parents participants also discussed how students had shown significant improvement in their academics, behavior, and self-efficacy due to being a part of a classroom where they felt safe and accepted by others.

Theme 2: Parent Involvement. In connection with previous literature, parental involvement is a proven method that positively contributes to improved academic outcomes. Boonk et al. (2018) add that parents who are active participants in their children's education promote social, emotional, and academic growth. In this study, the theme parental involvement involved parents being actively involved in their child's education. Parent and teacher participants discussed the importance of being involved in their child's education as volunteers

within the school, maintaining the value of education in the home, and the positive impact of teacher-parent relationships. Some of the teacher participants discussed how well students performed academically and noted an increase in student engagement due to parental involvement. Student participants also discussed the effects of parent involvement and their parents' desire to make their parents proud of their academic achievements.

Theme 3: Community Involvement. The theme community involvement aligns with prior research of by Mast (2018) and Yeung and Li (2019) concerning the advantages of having community partners and resources located in low-socioeconomic communities. This theme included various community organizations such as recreational centers and programs, religious organizations, and the community's educational programs. Based on parent participants, many local organizations provide resources to families to promote educational achievement. For example, students on the recreational sports team had coaches who would visit the schools to check their students' progress. As a result, those students were motivated to perform academically. Data analysis also revealed how other community organizations promoted academic motivation by providing incentives or recognition for their academic achievement.

Theme 4: School-connectedness. The theme of school-connectedness emerged from the student focus groups. The theme aligns with previous research (Stäbler et al., 2017; Mercer & Hoselton, 2017; Shaffer, 2019; Fitch et al., 2016; Kılıç, 2019) pertaining to students and their relationships with others, participation in extracurricular activities, and their overall educational experiences. Student participants described their classroom experiences with teachers and peers, which motivated them to attend school regularly. Several student participants discussed their feelings accepted by others, such as the teacher and other adults in the school. Data from the teacher interviews and student focus groups revealed that students who developed relationships

with their teachers were eager to attend school and were more engaged than their peers. It was also discovered that students who participated in school activities such as sports or academic clubs performed higher academically than their peers.

Theme 5: Student Goals and Determination. This theme corresponds with previous studies (Breger, 2017; Sattler & Gershoff, 2019) exploring poverty and student resiliency. In particular Sattler and Gershoff (2019) found that students beat the odds of poverty and exhibit academic achievement as a result of resilience. Similarly, my data revealed that several student participants had similar outcomes. For example, some of the students discussed their aspirations of graduating high school and attending college or technical school, so they worked hard to earn good grades. Other students discussed their motivation to perform academically, which was due to their desire to have a better life. Data analysis revealed that several student participants displayed determination and were resilient as they discussed their aspirations and plans for attaining their academic goals.

Theoretical

The self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; 1997) and self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000; 2017) theories developed the theoretical framework used to guide this study. The framework illustrates how self-determination and self-efficacy theories explain stimuli for student motivation. Self-efficacy theory refers to personal beliefs about one's capabilities to learn or perform actions at designated levels (Bandura, 1986; 1997). Self-determination theory is a motivation and personality theory that addresses three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and psychological relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Self-Efficacy Theory. According to Bandura (1991), self-efficacy relates to one's belief in achieving a goal, which can be seen as motivation because motivation depends on self-

efficacy feelings (Isik et al., 2018). Based on Bandura's (1986) discovery, four key components support the development of self-efficacy, which include the following: (1) mastery experience: when one attempts to do something and is successful; (2) social modeling: learning by watching others, similar to oneself, be successful; (3) verbal and social persuasion: encouragement by others; and (4) improving physical, emotional, and physiological states: caused by thinking about undertaking the new behavior.

This study revealed that student participants developed a sense of self-efficacy as a result of their academic achievement. The theory of self-efficacy refers to the cognitive judgment and beliefs of the behavior and the ability desired by the successful completion of a specific task. People with high self-efficacy will be more confident in their work. Bandura found that self-efficacy was the feeling and development of self-belief and focused on a students' judgment of their abilities (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy beliefs also contribute to the amount of effort students will expend on an activity, how long they will persevere when confronting obstacles, and how resilient they will be in the face of adverse situations that may occur throughout their educational experience (Pugh & Tschannen-Moran, 2016). Based on data derived from the interviews and focus groups of this study, I learned that self-efficacy theory and the identified themes and sub-themes related to intrinsic factors that promote academic motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged students. For example, I discovered that students who frequently received encouragement from a teacher or parent had high levels of self-efficacy and were motivated to perform academically.

Self-determination Theory. According to Deci and Ryan (2000; 2017), three innate psychological needs support the development of self-determination and critical to student motivation and success, which include competence, autonomy, and relatedness. As it relates to

this study, competence is the experience of mastery and being effective in one's activity; autonomy addresses the need of an individual to feel in control of their behaviors and goals; relatedness is the need to feel connected and belongingness with others. When students fulfill the three psychological needs, they become self-determined and motivated to pursue the things that interest them (Urdan & Bruchmann, 2018). In a study concluded by Raufelder et al. (2015), she concluded that high self-determination supports need satisfaction, which increases motivation and school engagement, which further increases student academic performance in the classroom. This study revealed that the identified extrinsic factors that promoted academic motivation aligned with the self-determination theory. For example, students who participated in the after-school enrichment program were more determined to put in extra time for studying and completing homework to continue to attain high grades.

Implications

This section aims to address the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study based on the interviews and focus groups' data. The findings in this study have implications for the district leaders, school administrators, and classroom teachers.

Theoretical

This study's theoretical framework emerged from the self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986; 1997) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; 2017). In this study, self-efficacy refers to students' belief in their academic capability. This study revealed that when students of poverty have high self-efficacy or feel competent in their abilities, this increases their academic motivation and develops greater satisfaction with attending school. Similarly, self-determination, which defines intrinsic and varied extrinsic sources of motivation, promotes resilience among students, thus improving persistence and academic motivation.

Based on the literature review and data analysis, I recommend that educational stakeholders, such as district leaders, local school administrators, and classroom teachers, implement programs that focus on building self-efficacy for impoverished students. Economically disadvantaged students must be encouraged to believe in their abilities to perform successfully. Therefore, to promote academic motivation among students of poverty, educational leaders should provide a school culture in which students feel accepted and safe in the learning environment. Furthermore, strengthening teaching practices and implementing effective instructional strategies, such as project-based tasks, are also critical for students promoting academic motivation.

Empirical

Based on previous research studies (Galster, Santiago, & Stack, 2016; Hagis, 2017), students who live in low-income communities often lack academic motivation. According to Destin and Kosko (2016), students of poverty often come from homes that do not emphasize the importance of academic achievement. In addition, research studies (Anthony & Ogg, 2019; Cui, Zhang, & Leung, 2019; Deniz Can & Ginsburg-Block, 2016) have also indicated that students of poverty do not attend school regularly, have higher dropout rates, and lack parental support or involvement in the schools.

Based on my findings, I discovered that economically disadvantaged students who have supportive individuals in their homes are more likely to perform well academically. The student participants in my study all came from homes consisting of supportive parents, grandparents, or other relatives. Several student participants discussed how their older siblings, such as high school graduates or college students, were positive role models. Other students discussed that as a result of having a supportive parent or guardian, such as an aunt, uncle, or grandparent, they

were more enthused about attending school. I also discovered that students performed higher academically due to their parents being actively involved in their education. Several parents indicated how they frequently volunteered at the school, encouraged their child to participate in extracurricular programs, or required their child to participate in after school programs such as tutoring.

Practical

Students who participated in this study were selected based on their socioeconomic status and academic achievement. Teachers and parents of the selected students also contributed to the study. The participants' responses revealed several promoting factors that influenced the students' academic motivation. The most significant factors were parental involvement, school connectedness, and classroom environment based on data analysis. As it relates to parental involvement, school leaders must implement initiatives that encourage parent participation within the school. Outside of school, the parent can be the most influential individual in the child's life; therefore, school districts must implement initiatives that emphasize building relationships and strengthening the parental connection.

School connectedness, which involves the students' perception of the learning environment, is another significant promoting factor revealed in the study that school leaders must consider. Establishing a school culture in which students feel accepted and safe is essential to academic achievement. The teacher must also consider the students' perception as it relates to developing a positive learning environment. Students of poverty come from similar home environments and similar neighborhood experiences, resulting in depression, low self-esteem, and lower academic achievement than peers with higher socioeconomic statuses. The classroom environment is critical for student achievement. Based on the data analysis for this study, I

discovered that it positively affects their overall performance when economically disadvantaged students are provided a positive learning environment.

Data analysis revealed that parental involvement, feeling connected to the school, and being a part of a positive classroom environment were significant factors promoting academic motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged students. Educational stakeholders must ensure that maximum support and interventions are implemented to achieve positive outcomes for students of poverty. Practical recommendations that I provide for building-level school administrators focus on building a positive school climate and culture. Based on the literature review and data analysis, school climate shapes all stakeholders' quality of interactions, which also develops a strong culture for the school. School climate has been recognized as an opportunity to enhance student achievement, reduce problem behaviors, and dropout rates (Wang & Degol, 2015). To build a positive school climate, school leaders must develop a strategic plan that involves unifying all stakeholders, including parents and community partners. The following are strategies school leaders should consider for establishing a positive school climate and culture:

- implementing programs that focus on building effective communication within the school
- addressing individual needs
- raising students' self-esteem
- encouraging respect for diversity
- establishing appropriate communication between school and home

Delimitations and Limitations

For this qualitative case study, there were delimitations and limitations. Delimitations are purposeful decisions the researcher makes to limit or define the boundaries of the study. Limitations, on the other hand, are potential weaknesses of the study that cannot be controlled.

Delimitations

The delimitations for this study consisted of the sampling approach used for identifying potential participants. The study aimed to identify middle school students of poverty who exhibited academic achievement and discover positive factors that influenced their academic motivation. I used purposeful sampling to select participants. Seventeen eligible students were interested in participating in the study; however, I selected nine students, including five girls and four boys. Purposefully selecting the student participants allowed me to choose students of different racial backgrounds, including Black, White, Hispanic, and Multi-Racial.

Limitations

A limitation of this study consisted of the willingness of parents to participate. Most of the parent participants had jobs with various work hours, which made scheduling interviews somewhat challenging. The availability of fathers as participants was another limitation as most of the parents who participated in the study were single mothers or parent representatives such as a grandparent. Having the opportunity to discover the perceptions of both parents would have strengthened the data analysis. Another limitation was conducting interviews during a pandemic, which caused a delay in the interviewing process due to rearranging schedules and locations.

Recommendations for Future Research

Previous studies have shed light on the factors that negatively impact or influence student motivation and academic achievement (Bellibas, 2016; Breger, 2017; Alexander & Jang, 2018).

Based on the related literature section in Chapter Two, most of the negative factors resulting from poverty impact students' motivation, attendance and graduation rates, and overall academic performance. While, good studies, it is unclear that simply doing the opposite of what causes failure is the right recipe for success. This study focused solely on factors that promote academic motivation among middle school students who live in a low-income community but are identified as academic achievers. In other words, this study offers a description of success in the face of presumed obstacles and the resulting implication for replicating that success among middle school students.

Considering the findings, limitations, and delimitations placed on the study, my first recommendation for future research consists of expanding the research to include perceptions from participants at the elementary and high school levels. Recruiting elementary and high school participants would develop a richer study as it will contain perceptions from each level. The second recommendation is to obtain the perceptions of building-level administrators. While the school administrator may not be in the classroom environment with the students, such as the teacher, the information they would provide would be vital. Administrators are held accountable for the school's overall functioning, including student achievement, school climate, attendance rates, graduation rates, and more. Including the school administrator would provide a more in-depth understanding of serving students of poverty and the factors that promote academic motivation at the school level. The final recommendation for future research is to explore the experiences and perceptions of high school seniors and first-year college students identified as economically disadvantaged. Focusing on high school seniors and first-year college students would allow the researcher to expand the research focusing on student resilience.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the promoting factors that promoted academic motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students. The theories framed this study included self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000; 201) and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986; 1997). Three research questions, a central question, and two sub-questions were used to guide the study. Data were collected from individual interviews and two focus groups. Chapter Five presented a summary of the findings, including a brief report of the central research question and sub-questions findings. The most significant factors influencing middle school student motivation to excel were parental involvement, school connectedness, and classroom environment. This chapter also discusses the findings related to the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two, an implications section, an outline of the study's delimitations and limitations, and recommendations for future research.

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APPENDIX or APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

July 31, 2020

Gregory Shields
David Vacchi

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY19-20-434 Factors That Promote Academic Motivation Among High-Performing Economically Disadvantaged Middle School Students

Dear Gregory Shields, David Vacchi:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the date of the IRB meeting at which the protocol was approved: July 31, 2020. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make modifications in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update submission to the IRB. These submissions can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

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.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: SCHOOL DISTRICT REQUEST FOR PERMISSION

Date:

Dear Superintendent:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is *Factors that Promote Academic Motivation Among High-Performing, Economically Disadvantaged Middle School Students* and the purpose of my research is to describe student perceptions of factors influencing academic motivation.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research within the school district and to contact staff and educators within the school district to invite them to participant in my research study.

Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

The results from the research study will be beneficial the local school and district stakes holders, parents, and community partners as it will reveal the factors that promote academic motivation for economically disadvantaged students.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval.

Sincerely,
Gregory Shields
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C: SCHOOL PRINCIPAL REQUEST FOR PERMISSION

Date:

Dear Principal(s):

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is *Factors that Promote Academic Motivation Among High-Performing, Economically Disadvantaged Middle School Students* and the purpose of my research is to describe student perceptions of factors influencing academic motivation.

I am writing to request your assistance in identifying qualified participants. Participant requirements are: (1) eligible to receive Free and Reduced Lunch; (2) has a grade average of an 80 or above in core subjects, and (3) earned an achievement level of proficient or distinguished in mathematics and reading on the Georgia Milestones Assessment.

Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

The results from the research study will be beneficial the local school and district stakes holders, parents, and community partners as it will reveal the factors that promote academic motivation for economically disadvantaged students.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval.

Sincerely,
Gregory Shields
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D: STUDENT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Parent/Guardian:

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to identify factors that positively influence academic motivation among high-achieving, economically disadvantaged students, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be current students at the participating school; have scored proficient or distinguished in mathematics and reading on the Georgia Milestones Assessment; and maintains a grade average of an 80 or above in core subjects. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a focus group consisting of six student participants. It should take approximately 90 minutes to complete the procedure listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please sign and return the attached parental consent document to your child's teacher/school.

Sincerely,

Gregory Shields
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University
gshields1@liberty.edu

APPENDIX E: COMBINED PARENTAL CONSENT AND STUDENT ASSENT

Title of the Project: Factors that Promote Academic Motivation Among High-Performing Economically Disadvantaged Middle School Students
Principal Investigator: Gregory Shields, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

Your child is invited to participate in a research study. Participants must be current student at ████████████. Each student participant will be selected based on the following criteria: eligible to receive Free and Reduced Lunch; maintains a grade average of an 80 or above in core subjects; and has scored proficient or distinguished in mathematics and reading on the Georgia Milestones Assessments. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to allow your child to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why are we doing it?

The purpose of this study is to identify factors that positively influence academic motivation among high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students. The information collected from this study could help increase motivation and academic achievement among students of similar demographics.

What will participants be asked to do in this study?

If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, I would ask him or her to do the following:

1. Participate in a focus group interview session with five other student participants. The focus group will be recorded using an audio device and handwritten notes.

How could participants or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

What risks might participants experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports 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. Data collected as part of this study may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from the participants is shared, any information that could identify them, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.
- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and codes.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect your or her/his current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to allow your child to participate, she or he is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

What should be done if a participant wishes to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw your child from the study or your child chooses 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 her/him, or should your child choose to withdraw, data collected from your child, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your child's contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw him/her or your child chooses to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Gregory Shields. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ and/or gshields1@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. David Vacchi, at dvacchi@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about rights as a research participant?

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. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to allow your child to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researchers will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to allow my child to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record my child as part of his/her participation in this study.

_____
Printed Child's/Student's Name

_____
Parent's Signature   Date

_____
Minor's Signature   Date

APPENDIX F: TEACHER RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Recipient:

As a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to identify factors that positively influence academic motivation among high-achieving, economically disadvantaged students, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be a current teacher at the research site. In addition, the teacher must currently teach or have taught the student participating in the study. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview. It should take approximately 90 minutes to complete the procedure listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you are interested and would like to participate, please sign the consent document and return it to your school administrator.

Sincerely,

Gregory Shields
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University
gshields1@liberty.edu

APPENDIX G: PARENT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Recipient:

As a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to identify factors that positively influence academic motivation among high-achieving, economically disadvantaged students, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be the parent/guardian of the student participating in the study. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview. It should take approximately 90 minutes to complete the procedure listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you are interested and would like to participate, please sign the consent document and return it to your child's teacher.

Sincerely,

Gregory Shields
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University
gshields1@liberty.edu

APPENDIX H: TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: Factors that Promote Academic Motivation Among High-Performing
Economically Disadvantaged Middle School Students
Principal Investigator: Gregory Shields, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a current or
former teacher of the student participant. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in
this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to identify factors that positively influence academic motivation
among high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students. The information
collected from this study could help increase motivation and academic achievement among
students of similar demographics.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Participate in a one-on-one individual interview. The interview will be recorded using an
   audio device and handwritten notes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports 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. Data collected as part of this study may be shared
for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from the participants
is shared, any information that could identify them, if applicable, will be removed before the data
is shared.
- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and codes.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the
  conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future
  presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password
  locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to
  these recordings.

- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether 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.

What should you do if you decide 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 will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Gregory Shields. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ███████████ and/or gshields1@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. David Vacchi, at dvacchi@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____   _____
Printed Subject Name   Signature & Date

APPENDIX I: PARENT CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: Factors that Promote Academic Motivation Among High-Performing
Economically Disadvantaged Middle School Students
Principal Investigator: Gregory Shields, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be the parent
or guardian of the student participant. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in
this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to identify factors that positively influence academic motivation
among high-performing, economically disadvantaged middle school students. The information
collected from this study could help increase motivation and academic achievement among
students of similar demographics.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Participate in a one-on-one individual interview. The interview will be recorded using an
   audio device and handwritten notes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports 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. Data collected as part of this study may be shared
for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from the participants
is shared, any information that could identify them, if applicable, will be removed before the data
is shared.
- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and codes.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the
  conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future
  presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password
  locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to
  these recordings.

- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether 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.

What should you do if you decide 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 will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Gregory Shields. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ████████████ and/or gshields1@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. David Vacchi, at dvacchi@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____   _____
Printed Subject Name   Signature & Date

APPENDIX J: TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTION

1. What's your educational and teaching background?

2. What influenced you to become a teacher?

3. What grade levels have you previously taught?

4. Which grade and subject are your most favorite?

5. What inspires you most about teaching?

6. Describe your teaching philosophy.

7. Describe your classroom culture and environment.

8. Describe your experiences working in an inner-city middle school.

9. Based on your observations, what are some challenges students from the community face?

10. How would you describe the student's resilience?

11. In reference to the student's academic success, what has been the most influential contributing factor(s)?

APPENDIX K: PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTION

1. What is it like being the parent of the participating student?

2. Describe your values regarding education.

3. In reference to your child's education, how important is parent involvement?

4. Describe your child's level of interest concerning academics. Overall, what do you think motivates him or her to perform academically?

5. How do you motivate your child to succeed in school?

6. How involved are you in the community (e.g., church, community center, neighborhood association, etc.)?

7. How has your community (e.g., church, community center, neighborhood association, etc.) influenced your child's academic achievement?

8. Describe your home environment on a typical day. How does it influence your child's motivation and academic achievement?

9. Describe your child's level of interest concerning extra-curricular activities and outside school activities.

10. How has the extra-curricular activities and outside school activities influenced your child's motivation?

APPENDIX L: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who's the smartest kid in school?

2. What personal achievement are you most proud of?

3. What makes you want to come to school?

4. Describe a time when you felt very challenged. How did you overcome this challenge? Can you tell me why you wanted to overcome this challenge?

5. What extracurricular activity are you interested in? Can you tell me why you are interested in these activities?

6. What is your favorite subject, and why do you like it?

7. What is your least favorite subject, and why do you dislike it?

8. How would you describe an ideal teacher?

9. Tell me about a time when your teacher motivated you.

10. How often do you work with your peers to complete class assignments?

11. Describe your feelings when working with other students in your class?

12. Do you prefer working with one partner or in groups? Explain.

13. What else do I need to know about how you are so successful as students?