BLACK TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN RURAL AREAS OF

SOUTHEASTERN NORTH CAROLINA

by

Angelina Cobb

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 phenomenological study was to explore teacher recruitment and retention practices for Black educators in rural counties in Southeastern North Carolina. The theories that guided this study are John Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance, and Richard Valencia's deficit thinking theory. The research question that supported this study was: What are the lived experiences of recruitment and retention initiatives for Black teachers in rural Southeastern North Carolina? The study design was a descriptive study that utilized the sample of Black educators in rural Southeastern North Carolina. There was a total of 10 teacher participants in this research study. The setting was rural counties in Southeastern North Carolina with a focus on Twine, Golfe, and Haire counties. The data collection methods that were used in this study were individual interviews, exit surveys, and a reflective writing prompt. The analytical approach that was utilized in this study was Moustakas' transcendental approach. The major themes of the study were feelings of home, culture of the school district, and diversity and equity initiatives, which indicate a need for more targeted recruitment and retention measures for Black educators in the form of various levels of support, financial incentives and partnering HBCUs and local community colleges with Grow Your Own programs.

Keywords: minority achievement gap, opportunity gap, teacher recruitment, and teacher retention

Copyright Page

Dedication

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to God and my family. Only these individuals know the full story behind the triumphs and challenges associated with this process. Thank you for your unending support and encouragement on the good and bad days. I am forever grateful.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my Grandmother Daisy Mae, who desired to be an educator. Additionally, I dedicate this dissertation to my Grandmother Ruby who demonstrated the purest form of service. Even though they were not able to see this process to fruition, they will always be remembered.

Acknowledgments

I would first and foremost like to thank God for the ability to start and complete this process. He has shown that He is not only a sustainer, but that He will complete that which He has started (*English Standard Version*, 2016, Philippians 1:6). I would like to thank my father, Christopher, for pushing and encouraging me on days when I felt like giving up. Additionally, I would like to thank my mother, Angela, for loving me and supporting me with advice and meals. I would also like to thank my sister, Manasia, for her support and listening to me vent. Next, I would like to thank my sister, Christina, for being my sounding board and battle buddy. Only you truly understand the ups and downs of this process.

Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Rogers, Dr. Holland, and Dr. Johnson for your guidance throughout this process. I appreciate all study participants and individuals that assisted with the editing process. I am eternally grateful to all who were involved in this undertaking, and I am excited to see what the future holds.

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List of Abbreviations

Central Research Question (CQ)

Grow Your Own (GYO)

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Marathon Teaching Institute (MTI)

North Carolina Teaching Fellows (NCTF)

Research Question 1 (RQ1)

Research Question 2 (RQ2)

Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

Science Technology Engineering, Arts, Mathematics and Agriculture (STEAMA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of Chapter One is to provide a framework for analyzing the problem of Black teacher recruitment and retention in rural areas in Southeastern North Carolina. The role of Black educators in supporting and engaging minority students has been explored as a possible remedy to closing the achievement gap (Plachowski, 2019). Often, this argument fails to examine the rural context. This chapter presents background information, situation to researcher, problem statement, purpose statement, the significance of the study, research questions, definitions, and a summary of the topic of study. Theories that relate to Black teacher recruitment and retention are discussed as well as teacher recruitment and retention in rural areas. Additionally, the exploration of factors that contribute to the lack of Black teachers in rural areas as well as the impact of not having a Black teacher presence in school environments are included in this study. Research questions seek to discover ways to increase Black teacher recruitment and retention in rural areas as well as analyze how it impacts the presence of Black educators.

Background

Even though it has been well-documented that the presence of Black educators can impact students from various backgrounds (Easton-Brooks, 2019), there are still struggles associated with them entering and maintaining in the teaching profession (Scott, 2019). Black teachers possess several benefits to the school environment such as the ability to serve as role models to White, Black, and other minority students. Additionally, students being able to see minority adults serving in the role of a teacher can alter biases and encourage student aspirations (Ingersoll et al., 2019). However, the reasons that dissuade Black educators from the teaching

profession include the option of other lucrative careers, inadequate working conditions and/or a lack of mentorship (Ingersoll et al., 2019). Moreover, rural school districts also face challenges in the areas of teacher recruitment and retention. These challenges can include low salaries, high concentrations of children in poverty, small school population, and remote locations (Beesley et al., 2019). Furthermore, in some rural schools, it is commonplace for a single teacher to be responsible for an entire broad discipline and be required to teach several subjects, irrespective of their certification (Oyen & Schweinle, 2020). The exploration of Black teacher recruitment and retention in rural Southeastern North Carolina will examine the pathways taken to diversify the teacher population in this context.

Historical Context

Black teacher recruitment and retention is a problem that exists in various areas throughout the United States. However, in rural school environments, this issue is heightened by a variety of factors. It is difficult to attract young Black professionals into the teaching field because of other career opportunities available. It is even more complicated to recruit Black educators to rural environments that do not have the advantages of larger cities (Goodrich, 2016). In the past, teaching was a highly promoted profession at historically Black institutions, but this has changed as more advancement for people of color has occurred. In recent times, other professions serve as viable options for Black candidates (Ingersoll et al., 2019). Additionally, historical events such as the Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* had a significant impact on the recruitment and retention of Black educators in the United States (Johnson, 2019). The current composition of the teaching field consists of 80% White and female educators (Ingersoll et al., 2019). The recruitment and retention of Black educators possess several benefits for the students and school environments and assist in closing the minority

opportunity gap (Magaldi et al., 2018).

Social Context

The significance of the role of a teacher cannot be underestimated when attempting to close the minority achievement gap. There is a lack of minority teachers on a national level and the teaching force is largely homogenous (Ingersoll et al., 2019). This is problematic because Black educators can serve as role models to all students, possess cultural synchronicity, change biases and perspectives, and usually have a desire to work in underserviced school settings (Ingersoll et al., 2019). Another factor to consider in the recruitment and retention processes is alternate paths to the teacher profession for teachers of color (Scott, 2019). Also, intentional measures to diversify a staff must be taken into consideration when examining recruitment and retention (O'Meara, 2021).

Diversity in the teaching force is required for a variety of reasons. Black educators as well as other teachers of color, demonstrate the hope that one day their diverse students can fulfill professional positions in society (Nevarez et al., 2019). Additionally, Black teachers can possess culturally responsive practices that are needed to educate and advance upcoming generations of students. Black educators' backgrounds allow for them to assist in cross-cultural learning strategies (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Moreover, Black teachers are beneficial to educational environments because of their ability to lead social justice initiatives, serve as cultural translators, act as role models, develop inclusive school culture, and impact students from similar and different backgrounds (Nevarez et al., 2019). Other groups that may experience the positive impacts from Black educators include colleagues and community members that are recipients of their mentorship or advocacy in the form of surrogacy (Irvine, 2003; Milner & Howard, 2004). These benefits speak to the importance of employing more Black educators.

Theoretical Context

Past research that investigated the issue of Black teacher recruitment and retention identifies practices of concern but does not thoroughly explore the unique experiences of Black educators in rural environments. Gist (2018) argues that past research treats Black teacher recruitment and retention as monolithic experiences and typically isolates teacher development to a single developmental phase such as recruitment, induction, tenure, etc. A past study completed by researchers Ingersoll and Strong (2011) argued that retention rather than recruitment should be explored as a root cause of the Black teacher shortage. Their research revealed that teachers of color entered the teaching profession at a higher rate than their White colleagues, but teachers of color had higher attrition rates (Ingersoll et al., 2019). However, this research predominantly examines the urban context. Conversely, other researchers such as Achinstein et al. (2010) analyzed how teacher preparation is a major contributor to the discussion of Black teacher recruitment and retention. Gay (2015) contends that pedagogical practices such as culturally responsive teaching must be implemented in teacher preparation programs in order to train effective educators.

Theories that interact with the concepts of recruitment and retention are the cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance, and deficit thinking theory. The cultural-ecological theory of minority student performance examines how minorities respond to experiences with organizations such as academic institutions. These responses to treatment can be positive or negative and can influence their future trajectory (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The research expands on this topic by analyzing the concepts of systems and community forces in order to determine how they impact the recruitment and retention efforts of Black teachers in rural Southeastern North Carolina.

Deficit thinking permeates various facets of the academic experience by unfairly assigning negative and unsubstantiated attributes to particular groups (Valencia, 1997). This can be witnessed through the experiences of Black students in the K-12 setting, teacher preparation program setting or in the teaching workforce. These accounts can shape whether students want to change or continue specific career paths (Valencia, 1997). The research further elaborates on this theory by exploring whether Black teachers are perceived as inadequate in this rural context and how this mindset can shape employment decisions. These theories assist in understanding the totality of Black educators and how certain life experiences may result in different outcomes.

Current research on the topic of the recruitment and retention of Black educators can be seen through the works of Mosely (2018) and Sun (2018). Micia Mosely's (2018) research examines the Black Teacher Project and how this organization contributes to supporting and sustaining Black teachers in the United States. Within her article "The Black Teacher Project: How Racial Affinity Professional Development Sustains Black Teachers," she examines teachers in San Francisco and New York as well as the benefits of racial affinity-based professional development (Mosely, 2018). Min Sun's (2018) work entitled "Black Teachers' Retention and Transfer Patterns in North Carolina: How Do Patterns Vary by Teacher Effectiveness, Subject, and School Conditions?" specifically examines retention and transfer patterns of Black teachers in North Carolina. Factors such as Black teachers' experience, education, and challenging school and community contexts are analyzed in this study (Sun, 2018). Currently, there is a focus on methods of retaining Black educators and the creation of teacher preparation programs that fit the distinctive needs of Black teacher candidates.

The proposed research extends existing knowledge on this topic by focusing on the specific area of Southeastern North Carolina. This provides further insight into the experiences

of Black educators with respect to rural school districts. Urban recruitment and retention issues have been explored extensively in regard to Black educators (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018), but more information is needed to understand the recruitment and retention practices in the rural context. This assists with addressing the needs of diverse students in these rural areas, which is sometimes overlooked (Monk, 2007).

Problem Statement

The problem is there is a need to increase Black educators in the rural context of Southeastern North Carolina. This is reflected on the national level because there is a disparity between the teaching force being 80%White and female (Plachowski, 2019) and the student population being over 50% students of color (Samuels et al., 2021). In regard to this topic, it has been established that the recruitment and retention of minority educators has been explored in an effort to close the achievement gap among Black and Latino students. Additionally, Black teachers serve in various capacities in the school setting, which positively impacts student achievement for diverse groups (Easton-Brooks, 2019). However, Black teachers are leaving the profession at a 24% higher rate than their White counterparts. It is known that obstacles such as inadequate pre-service training, need for alternate licensure routes, other lucrative career opportunities, as well as other key factors exacerbate this problem for Black educators (Ingersoll et al., 2019). Nevertheless, what is not known is how these specific challenges impact Black educators in the rural context and the experiences tied to Black educators trying to enter or maintain in a rural school district. This gap in literature presents a need for more research on this topic.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the factors that

impact Black teacher recruitment and retention in rural counties in North Carolina. Black teacher recruitment and retention is generally defined as initiatives or programs by school districts to intentionally employ Black teachers and keep them over a three-year period. Recruitment encompasses mechanisms that support entry into a program and preparation through mediums such as curriculum, pedagogy, and structures that support learning (Gist et al., 2019). Retention includes means such as professional development and mentorship that assist teachers in remaining in the profession (Gist et al., 2019). The theories that guided this study are the cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance, and deficit thinking theory. These theories assisted in framing the thought processes and experiences of Black educators throughout the recruitment and retention process.

Significance of the Study

When examining the concept of closing the achievement gap, the integral role of the educator cannot be ignored in regard to their ability to mold student learning and influence motivation (Bowman et al., 2018). Black educators are needed in all educational environments including rural areas of the United States. Studies have shown how minority and White students benefit from their presence in the classroom setting (Egalite et al., 2015). However, in order for this gap to be eliminated Black teachers have to come and stay in locations where they can effectively impact all students.

Black educators bring an array of perceptions and resources into the school environment. These strategies include growth mindsets and culturally responsive teaching (Rattan et al., 2015). Black teachers provide mentorship, support and cultural insight and synchronicity (Bowman et al., 2018). Without the exploration of this study the demographic of rural Black teachers and students will not be wholly examined. Ultimately, this will lead to a lack of action steps to

address this issue and a decrease in retention, recruitment, and closing the achievement gap.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of recruitment and retention initiatives for Black teachers in rural Southeastern North Carolina?

Sub-question One

What impact does race have on recruitment into the teaching profession in rural Southeastern North Carolina?

Sub-question Two

What impact does race have on retention in the teaching profession in rural Southeastern North Carolina?

Definitions

This section includes the definitions of terms that will inform an understanding of the research topic. These terms are minority achievement gap, opportunity gap, teacher recruitment, and teacher retention.

1. *Minority Achievement Gap* – The extensive documentation of Black and Latino children, as well as children from lower-income families, trailing behind White and Asian children and children from wealthier families using traditional measures of success (Daniel, 2018).

2. *Opportunity Gap* – The disparity that begins to develop between minority and economically-disadvantaged children in comparison to White, Asian, and economically-advantaged children as the result of not having the same access to enrichment experiences such as field trips, developing vocabulary, rigorous curriculum, high

expectations teaching, etc. (Saphier, 2017).

3. *Teacher Recruitment* – Recruitment encompasses mechanisms that support entry into a program and preparation through mediums such as curriculum, pedagogy, and structures that support learning (Gist et al., 2019).

4. *Teacher Retention* – Retention includes means such as professional development and mentorship that assist teachers in remaining in the profession (Gist et al., 2019).

Summary

In previous decades, the teaching profession was highly endorsed at historically Black institutions. However, this has changed as more opportunities for progress have occurred for people of color. Currently, other professions serve as lucrative options for Black candidates (Ingersoll et al., 2019). However, the importance of the role of a teacher cannot be underestimated when attempting to close the minority achievement gap. As a result, there is concern about the disproportionate number of Black teachers on the national level and the teaching force being largely homogenous (Ingersoll et al., 2019). When analyzing this phenomena, Black teacher recruitment and retention, was examined. Theories that interact with the concepts of recruitment and retention are the cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance, and deficit thinking theory because they explore the totality of Black educators and how certain life experiences may result in different outcomes.

In regard to this research study, the problem is that there is a need to increase Black educators in the rural context of Southeastern North Carolina. This is reflected on the national level because the student population is over 50% of students of color while the teaching force is 80% White and female (Samuels et al., 2021). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the factors that impact Black teacher recruitment and retention in rural

school districts in North Carolina. While obstacles such as inadequate pre-service training, need for alternate licensure routes, and other viable career opportunities have been explored, it is usually in an urban or suburban context (Ingersoll et al., 2019).

The significance of Black educators can be seen when analyzing the concept of closing the opportunity gap. The critical role of the educator cannot be ignored in regard to their ability to mold student learning and influence motivation (Bowman et al., 2018). Black teachers are valuable because of their ability to provide cultural insight and synchronicity as well as the skill to serve as a mentor to students from diverse backgrounds (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Additionally, studies have shown how minority and White students benefit from their presence in the classroom setting (Egalite et al., 2015). Black educators are needed in all educational environments including rural areas of the United States. This study analyzes how recruitment and retention practices impact the numbers of teachers in rural school districts in Southeastern North Carolina.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of literature was conducted in order to examine the experiences of Black educators in rural southeastern North Carolina and the factors that impact the recruitment and retention of this group. When scrutinizing the needs of Black students or closing the minority student achievement gap, the role of Black teachers is seen as a contributing factor that will lessen this gap and create other positive outcomes for students of color (Losen & Skiba, 2011). However, Black teachers are leaving the profession at a rate 24% higher than their White counterparts. This phenomenon requires attention in order to address the needs of Black students and educators (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018).

Within this chapter there is an analysis of several theoretical frameworks that guide this qualitative study and there is a specific focus on Black educators. The cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance and deficit thinking theory was explored in relation to the topic of Black teacher recruitment and retention. Related literature on the topics of rural education as well as the role of teacher preparation programs and past recruitment measures are also included in this research. Gaps in the literature as it pertains to a concentration on Black teacher recruitment and retention in rural contexts are explored through the lens of school districts in rural Southeastern North Carolina.

Theoretical Framework

This qualitative study investigated the unique experiences of Black teachers in rural Southeastern North Carolina. Factors such as cultural-ecological elements, deficit thinking, and racial identity can contribute to Black educators' decisions to join or leave the teaching profession. The two theories that structure this investigation are the cultural-ecological theory of

minority school performance and deficit thinking theory. These theories explore the different components of being a Black educator and how these features interact with the school environment.

The first theory that was utilized to examine these experiences was John Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance. This theory consists of two significant parts known as the system and community forces. The first portion of the theory concentrates on how minorities are treated within educational contexts in regard to pedagogy, policies, and the returns for their educational investments or school credentials. According to Ogbu, these parameters are known as the system. The second section of the theory is the manner that minorities view and react to school because of their treatment (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). This portion is known as community forces.

This theory explores the influence of White treatment on minorities and how this treatment connects to minority responses to education. Ogbu's other findings include involuntary minorities like Black Americans not trusting White-controlled institutions such as schools because of a history of racism, discrimination, and conflict (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Periodically, schools are met with suspicion by minorities because there is a belief that their children will not be fairly educated like their White counterparts (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). This distrust can be developed from a student's personal experiences or the experiences of peers or family members. Black Americans can have a negative dual frame of reference (Worrell, 2014). Within this context they compare themselves to successful people in the dominant group and dislike unfair circumstances such as only having access to poorly trained teachers and insufficient school resources. Due to the United States' history being of slavery and segregation, these minorities feel as though discrimination will always persist. This creates a mindset of discrimination

winning out over effort and a response of skepticism towards White-controlled institutions (Worrell, 2014). Before becoming teachers, some Black people experience this phenomenon as students and must combat these reactions to what Ogbu outlines as the system.

The second theoretical framework that guides this qualitative study is the deficit thinking theory. In 1997 Richard Valencia released a book entitled, *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking*. Within this book, Valencia argues that deficit thinking serves as the mainstream paradigm that impacts United States educators' understanding of school failure among minority and low-income students (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Educational deficit thinking can be defined as attributing alleged deficiencies of low-income or racial minority groups as being responsible for social outcomes, school problems, academic shortcomings, etc., but negating the responsibilities of systemic inequities or structural inequality (Valencia, 1997).

Deficit thinking is depicted as being embedded in the American educational system and can influence how children of color are serviced. As a result, children of color are consistently over-identified for special education, tracked into lower-level classes, exposed to harsher disciplinary actions, rejected from organizations, and considered "drop-outs," under-identified in academically gifted programs, and placed in remedial initiatives (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). This way of thinking can be translated into minority students being at or close to the bottom of several educational attainment measures such as grade point averages, college admissions scores, high school graduation rates, and college enrollment rates (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Deficit thinking presents a danger to the success of Black Americans and other minorities in academics, the job market, and various levels of society (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001).

This theory assists in outlining how Black professionals have experienced the educational system and why some may not desire to enter or remain in the educational profession. Deficit

thinking shapes how Black professionals are viewed and can impact the perspectives of Black professionals based upon the conditions that they endured in the school setting (Mosely, 2018). The limitations placed on Black teachers results in them having to challenge thoughts of inferiority and needing to prove one's worth (Kohli, 2016). Black teachers were once Black students, and they must face the deficit thinking that was imposed on them and how it can affect their students. According to John King (2016), former United States Secretary of Education, there is an invisible tax placed on minority teachers that include serving as disciplinarians instead of academic instructors, serving as uncompensated and unofficial liaisons to families of color, being overlooked for leadership opportunities and being expected to teach remedial and not advanced courses. Deficit thinking has lasting effects that can influence the treatment of Black individuals in academic spaces (Ford et al., 2001). The cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance and deficit thinking theory will help to inform the actions and decision-making process of Black educators in regards to teacher recruitment and retention.

Related Literature

Literature on the topic of Black teacher recruitment and retention can be examined through the history of these educators throughout the United States. Historical events such as the Reconstruction Era and Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka help to shape current teaching conditions for Black educators (Anderson, 2010; Johnson, 2019). Current literature also explores the contributions of Black teachers as role models and mentors as well as their impact on a diverse range of students (Williams, 2018; Darwich, 2021; Grissom & Redding, 2016). Additionally, the role of teacher preparation programs as foundational tools that propel or hinder the development of teacher candidates is used to examine the trajectory of teacher recruitment and retention (Leonardo, 2009). Furthermore, current recruitment and retention efforts as well as

an analysis of rural recruitment and retention measures assist in giving a well-rounded view of literature related to this specific research topic (Clark, 2020; Oyen & Schweinle, 2020).

History of Black Educators in the United States

The history of Black educators in the United States consists of key mile markers throughout the nation's tumultuous past. It is imperative to note that among all racial groups, Black educators have the highest rate of attrition (Johnson, 2019). Past and current practices contribute to issues with Black teacher recruitment and retention. These practices can also inform the steps that should be taken in order to diversify the teaching profession.

After the Civil War, the shaping of African American education in the United States begins through the efforts of several stakeholders. These stakeholders include Northerners, Black parents and guardians, and Black teachers. The role of Northerners can be seen through the provision of charity while Black parents, guardians, and teachers took on a more active role. The implementation of public schools in the South, as well as the development of common schools helped support the interests of former slaves and their desire for liberation (Anderson, 2010). African Americans benefited from philanthropy from Northerners, but they rejected any encroachments on their own self-reliance or plans. From 1866 to 1930, African American parental involvement in the school setting can be seen through the actions of Black parents and guardians founding new schools, providing financial support, organizing institutions, petitioning governmental agencies, holding conventions, conducting demonstrations and school boycotts, and utilizing lawsuits to create educational equity (Siddle Walker, 1998). Black teachers were also educational advocates during this time. Some of the challenges faced by Black teachers of this era included substantially higher student to teacher ratios than White Northerners and Southerners, irregular attendance, skewed grade distributions, "overagedness" of students, and

shortage of supplies created a less than ideal environment for recruiting and retaining Black educators (Fultz, 1995).

For Black educators in the United States, 1954 was a significant year. During this year *Plessey v. Ferguson* was overturned by the Supreme Court through the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case (Meatto, 2019). The benefits for Black children could be seen through desegregating schools and a transition away from intentionally anti-Black and segregationist educational policies (Johnson, 2019). However, minimal measures were completed to ensure the protection of Black people forced to integrate in this timeframe. Additionally, the effects of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* on Black educators in the South were often disregarded (Meatto, 2019). Prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case, there was *de jure* school segregation that prevented Black educators from teaching at all White schools (Johnson, 2019). During this timeframe majority of teachers were the same race as their students. This ruling gave little thought to providing recommendations, timelines, or assistance with enforcement and as a result there was a displacement of Black educators in the South (Johnson, 2019).

The schools that served Black students were underfunded, and this move towards desegregation led to the closing of Black schools. This resulted in some Black educators teaching at White schools. Black educators faced several obstacles in White school districts. For example, many Black educators did not have their teaching contracts renewed and they were involuntarily assigned to schools. They also faced hostility and were forced into leaving. This led to an approximate decline of all Black educators by 32% after this Supreme Court case ruling (Johnson, 2019).

Black Educators in North Carolina

The origins of Black educators in the Southern United States can be traced to the Reconstruction Era. The process of educating freed people began in the late 1860s due to confining slave codes that prevented the enslaved population from gaining numeracy or literacy skills (Williams, 2009). In the state of North Carolina, the racial makeup of teachers included Northern Whites, Southern Whites, and Black men and women from both the North and the South (Brosnan, 2019). Black teacher employment began to increase because there was a restricted number of Northern White teachers available due to funding and geographical constraints. This resulted in the practice of freed people educating other freed people (Brosnan, 2019).

In 1868, North Carolina created a free public school system for ages 6 through 21 during the state's Constitutional Convention. In its beginning stages, Black schools were supported by the local Black community, Northern aid, missionary societies, or the Freedman's Bureau (Brosnan, 2019). When occupying forces and Northern White teachers left North Carolina, the state legislature attempted to replace Black teachers with White Southerners. This was viewed as a method to supply White Southerners with employment and garner control over the Black community. However, over time school boards were intensely contested by the Black community and realized it would be cheaper to employ Black educators (Rabinowitz, 1974). Black teachers continued to face this level of opposition throughout other pivotal times in United States' history.

During the Civil Rights Era, it is estimated that 38,000 Black teachers in the South and southern bordering states lost their positions after the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling (Oakley et al., 2009). Other significant court cases such as *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950), *McLaurin v. Oklahoma Board of Regents* (1950), *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974), *San Antonio*

Independent School District v. Rodriguez (1973), *Regents of University of California v. Bakke* (1978), *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003), *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* (2007), and *Fisher v. University of Texas* (2013) have greatly shaped the landscape of race, educational access and equal opportunity under the law in American society (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Furthermore, the effects of the *Brown v. Board of Education* era can be seen in the state of North Carolina. In North Carolina there was a 96% decline in all Black faculty from 1965 to 1972 (Trinity College, 2020). In more recent times, the matter of Black teacher representation in North Carolina has been called into question. In North Carolina Black teachers make up 16.2% of the teaching force, while Black people comprise 22% of the state population (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021). The significant impact of Black educators must be examined in order to cogitate why some may perceive the percentage of Black teachers in North Carolina versus the percentage of Black people in North Carolina's population as concerning.

Importance of Black Educators

The presence of Black educators is foundational to the success of all students, but particularly to the advancement of students of color (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Black teachers only represent 6.7% of the teacher workforce (Taie & Goldring, 2017), but their existence can lead to decisive steps in the lives of Black students. For example, their involvement can be the deciding factor between students being accepted or denied from gifted and talented programs (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Black teacher representation can lead to students being celebrated and affirmed for their academic abilities instead of being excluded or dropping out of high school (Irvine, 2003; Gershenson et al., 2017). Additionally, Black educators can make a difference by directing students away from the school-to-prison pipeline (Evans-Winters, 2011).

Furthermore, research indicates that having just one Black teacher in elementary school increases Black students' likelihood of graduating and enrolling in college (Gershenson et al., 2017).

Several studies have been conducted that analyze the enigma of Black and Latino students falling behind their White, Asian, and economically-advantaged peers (Daniel, 2018). These metrics are not perfect and can omit certain strong suits of minority children, yet they do provide insight into future predictors such as employment, healthcare access, social mobility, etc. Teacher achievement expectations can highly impact student performance and these expectations are typically rooted in a student's race, gender, socioeconomic status, prior achievement, etc. (Peterson et al., 2016). For this reason, the role of Black educators cannot be ignored. This is clearly demonstrated through research studies focused on the impact of Black teachers on Black students.

The significance of Black educators can be seen through a study conducted from 2001 to 2005. This study examined 100,000 Black students that started third grade in North Carolina Public Schools. The findings from this research study revealed that 13% of these students dropped out of high school and approximately half graduated but had no plans to attend college (John Hopkins University, 2017). However, low-income Black students in third through fifth grade who were randomly assigned to at least one Black teacher were not less likely to drop out of school but 18% more probable to express interest in attending college when they graduated. Data revealed that Black male students who had at least one Black teacher in third through fifth grade were 29% more likely to consider attending college (John Hopkins University, 2017).

This study and research of a similar nature, points to the power of representation, expectations, and investments of teachers. When a Black teacher and a White teacher viewed the same Black student, the White teacher was roughly 40% less likely to estimate the student would

finish high school (John Hopkins University, 2017). A 2020 study about teacher expectations revealed that teachers tend to be overly optimistic, but White teachers are less optimistic with Black students (Gershenson et al., 2020). It is imperative for Black students to have representation of someone who looks like them and holds them to high standards in an academic space. This expands the capacity of their self-expectations and shapes their future aspirations regarding education (John Hopkins University, 2017). Black educators fulfill a unique niche by serving as role models, mentors, cultural brokers, surrogate parents, and advocates for students of color. All of these functions assist students in overcoming obstacles and excelling in future endeavors (Gist, 2018).

Black Teachers as Role Models for Students and Mentors for Colleagues

Black teachers are perceived as treasured resources in the school setting because of their variety of contributions (Gershenson et al., 2017). Black teachers impact Black student academic performance through improved test scores, college attendance, gifted and talented program referrals, and reduced discipline and dropout rates (Gershenson et al., 2017). One major asset that Black educators bring to academic spaces is their ability to serve as role models to their students and mentors to their colleagues.

Role Models

Black teachers' contributions as role models include assisting students in navigating identity misperceptions, building an understanding of racial and cultural identities, and maintaining high standards for students inside and outside of the classroom (Williams, 2018). They serve as "warm demanders" in the classroom setting where they can hold high expectations in the academic and communal setting coupled with an understanding of the obstacles students face (Ware, 2006). Black teachers are able to build relationships with Black students and create

an atmosphere where students feel connected to their schools (King, 1993). Additionally, the

presence of role models in the advanced course setting has a significant impact for Black

students. For example, students may be more inclined to take advanced courses if they see a

teacher of their own race (Boser, 2014). This can also extend to a student's performance in a

course in response to the racial identity of their teacher (Dee, 2004).

Mentors

Research notes that appropriate induction and mentoring for beginning teachers can

reduce teacher turnover (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Mentoring is essential to the success of

Black educators by creating systems of support and commonality among a population that is not

heavily represented in the teaching force. Mentoring, especially from Black colleagues, allows

for improved cultural understanding among teachers and administrators of varying racial

backgrounds (Villegas et al., 2012). Moreover, Black teachers reported feelings of kinship when

they had colleagues or mentors of a similar racial background. Mentors knew how to advise them

on difficult matters and understood some of the struggles that they encountered in predominantly

White educational spaces (Darwich, 2021). Additionally, they were also sources of

empowerment and encouragement, which affirmed cultural struggles and the Black identity

(Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Mentoring is also significant at the collegiate and pre-service stages of the teacher

development process. Meaningful interactions between Black faculty members and Black

students through mentorship has proven to be valuable to the development of coping skills and

the social and academic growth of Black students. Moreover, the presence of successful

mentoring programs have increased the retention and degree attainment of Black students

(Brooms, 2016). Mentoring programs can be utilized to correct issues of academic

unpreparedness and assist in addressing social voids that Black students may have in collegiate environments (Cuyjet, 2006). The presence of mentors in the form of peers or faculty members can enhance school environments and provide students with a source of comfort (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Mentors are crucial to the development of Black teachers and students within the academic sphere.

Black Teachers' Cultural Influences

An invaluable feature of Black teachers is their propensity to serve as cultural brokers. Cultural brokers are individuals who act as bridges between schools and families of diverse backgrounds (Torres et al., 2015). Within the umbrella of being cultural brokers, Black teachers are able to be translators and intercessors for Black students, which allows them to directly contribute to their school achievement (Irvine, 1989). Black educators are more likely to understand Black students' personal style of presentation as well as their language. This understanding permits Black teachers to have teaching styles that address cultural differences and perceptions of authority (Irvine, 1989). Additionally, Black teachers encourage and implement beneficial practices for students of color such as ethics of care, kinship roles and culturally responsive teaching (Ware, 2006). Furthermore, Black educators promote a culture of achievement in schools by incorporating cultural resources from Black communities (Perry et al., 2004).

Black teachers also use strategies such as "transfer" to broker cultural knowledge of their students. Transferring is the skill of utilizing student experiences in an attempt to connect new concepts and prior knowledge (Cooper, 2013). Bridging the gap in cultural understanding is necessary for all students to be reached in the classroom setting (Irvine, 1989). Black teachers that serve as cultural brokers set up classroom dynamics where they are culturally responsive by

allowing for relationship building with students of color. This can entail allowing students to share personal anecdotes and emotions while being non-judgmental and patient (Dillon, 1989). These cultural contributions significantly impact the participation and growth of Black students in the school setting.

Black Teachers' Impact on White Students

The significance of Black educators cannot be relegated to solely Black students. Black teachers benefit all students as well as other educational stakeholders such as parents. White students who have been exposed to non-White adults in high-status professional positions can not only learn from these individuals, but this can shape implicit racial biases about intellectual authority and the role of race in society (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Due to Black educators entering the profession with a variety of experiences they are able to identify and dismantle racial and cultural biases in the classroom (Quiocho & Rios, 2000). Moreover, they are more likely to engage topics such as social justice, which creates opportunities for critical and reflective relationships that assist in ending how racism is passed on from generation to generation (Quiocho & Rios, 2000).

Black Teachers as Surrogates

Black educators tend to adopt the roles of surrogate parents to their students. This is known as othermothering or other parenting (Irvine, 2003). Some Black teachers desire for their students to accomplish their best as if they were their own biological children. Students are able to perceive this level of care and commitment, which can impact student academic performance (Milner, 2012).

Black teachers often serve in the role of surrogate parents because of the familial conditions of their students. A 2006 research study found that 75% of Black male students lived

in female-led households (Snyder et al., 2006). This circumstance can create the conditions for Black male teachers fulfilling father-figure roles for their students (Sandals, 2018). Black female teachers practice othermothering by not only providing their students with academic knowledge but survival skills in a challenging society. Black women as teachers possess wisdom and experience that originate from societal hardships and can assist students dealing with disenfranchisement in educational settings. Black teachers operate in this capacity in order to promote community success and fill in gaps in familial structures (Sandals, 2018). Beyond serving as surrogates, Black teachers also advocate for their students in various aspects of society.

Black Teachers as Advocates

The researchers, Field and Baker (2004), define a teacher advocate as "one who pleads the cause of another or one that defends or maintains a cause" (p. 56). Researchers Athanases and de Oliveria (2007) argue that teacher advocacy is more than just building student relations, but it consists of envisioning how schools can more effectively meet all students' needs (Mawhinney et al., 2012). Black educators serve as advocates by not only operating in the capacity of the educational realm, but by serving as exemplars to their students. Many Black teachers desire to motivate their students to pursue professional careers. Black educators also advocate for their students by making sure school rules and policies are equitable (Mawhinney et al., 2012).

In addition to various types of students, Black teachers also help support parents in the school setting. Black teachers are advocates for students' success by attempting to incorporate parental and community support (Milner & Howard, 2004). Black teachers are able to communicate academic concerns, policy changes, and other issues in a manner that can engage

Black parents and other community members (Irvine, 2003). Black teachers participate in community organizations such as church and other societal clubs which allow them to extend their influence and build bridges to support student growth. Black teachers' presence is not significant for solely Black students, but for all students and parents (Quiocho & Rios, 2000).

Teacher Preparation Programs and Black Educators

Teacher preparation programs are pivotal instruments in the development of pre-service teachers. These programs have the propensity to either enforce or change injustice for minority students and teachers (Leonardo, 2009). Even though there has been attention brought to failing public schools and substandard educational opportunities for minority students, it is evident that transformation must happen at the fundamental level of teacher preparation programs (Harris et al., 2020). This change must target downfalls in teacher preparations programs such as racial inequality.

Racial Inequality in Teacher Preparation Programs

Racial inequality in the teaching force can be examined from the lens of poor pre-service preparation programs, negative experiences within the teaching field for teachers of color, as well as improvements needed in the teacher preparation process (Bristol & Goings, 2019; Dinkins & Thomas, 2016; Madsen et al., 2019). Teacher preparation programs at White institutions often are not in tune with the needs of minority students or do not teach concepts from a diverse perspective (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). Many of these programs pull insights that mirror values of Whiteness, female, English as a first language, and middle class points of view. Minority or Black students are also faced with covert racism and micro and macroaggressions associated with their identities (Carter Andrews et al., 2019).

Inadequacies in these programs develop into Black pre-service teachers being

underprepared for the teaching profession in comparison to their White counterparts (Jackson,

2015). For instance, when analyzing first-time passing rates for teacher certification exams,

Black teachers fall below the average passing rate of their peers (Petchauer et al., 2018).

Moreover, Black teachers are also dismissed at a higher rate than their colleagues of other racial

backgrounds. These compounding challenges make it difficult for Black teachers to enter and

maintain in the educational profession. They also emphasize possible structural inequities

(Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Furthermore, the expectations of faculty members can greatly influence the educational

achievement of Black college students (Bowden, 2014). Some teacher preparation educators can

possess misconstructions about the ability of Black students, especially those from lower socio-

economic backgrounds (Love, 1993). This can lead to the perception that Black students have

lower expectations (Jones, 2001). White faculty members may also make assumptions that Black

students have a lack of preparation, lack of ability, and other disadvantages (Green & Martin,

2018). This can result in Black students losing interest and motivation in their teacher

preparation programs.

Negative Student Experiences in Teacher Preparation Programs

Teacher preparation programs are instrumental to the success of Black pre-service

teachers, but obstacles are still encountered during this process. One of the first challenges that

some Black teaching candidates must overcome is feelings of isolation or loneliness when

attending predominantly White institutions. Human beings possess a strong desire to belong, be a

part of a group, and have affirming and positive social interactions (Besse et al., 2021).

Consequently, young adults spend about 75% of their waking time in the presence of others

(Franzoi, 2010). Socialization is a key factor in defining a student's collegiate experience (Kuh,

1993). These interactions between peers or faculty can determine whether the pursuit of higher education is a negative or positive event in the life of a pre-service teacher, which can encourage or derail degree completion (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Furthermore, a study revealed that loneliness can be linked to health concerns such as sleeping problems, tobacco usage, injury, aggressive behavior, and sexual risk behavior, which are problematic to students trying to reach academic goals (Hayley et al., 2016).

Other barriers within teacher preparation programs deal with White responses to Black identities. For example, some teaching candidates have been exposed to what is known as the stereotype threat. The stereotype threat is the fear of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype or acting in a manner that would inadvertently confirm a stereotype (Steele, 2018). White expectations being held as the standard in higher education in addition to microaggressions can exacerbate this problem. Microaggressions include behaviors such as professors abusing their power and privilege, having low expectations for Black students, verbalizing derogatory remarks about Black students, possessing perceptions of inferiority to Black students, and enabling White students to speak openly about their racial bias to students of color. These microaggressions can have a detrimental impact on Black teaching candidates' performance and decision to continue in their program (Dinkins & Thomas, 2016).

Other challenging or negative experiences within teacher preparation programs for Black students include increasing requirements to enter, maintain, and exit teacher preparation programs. This can be related to required grade point average (GPA) or Praxis scores throughout a Black student's time in a program, which can in some cases be historically difficult for minority teachers due to cultural and structural reasons such as a lack of preparation at the secondary level caused by poor funding, teacher quality, or unaddressed learning gaps (Ingersoll

& Strong, 2011). Additionally, Black pre-service teachers express a lack of racially diverse experiences being represented in their curriculum. Also, some White professors and faculty members do not push White pre-service teachers to critically analyze factors that impact students of color (Brown, 2014). Some Black pre-service teachers also feel as though they are intentionally placed in all Black schools to student-teach, volunteer, or observe and that their professor may allude to the idea that they would be able to best service only students of color (Woodson & Pabon, 2016). It is necessary to examine the obstacles and unique experiences of Black teaching candidates in order to understand the link to recruitment and retention of these teachers (Bristol & Goings, 2019).

Other Student Experiences in Teacher Preparation Programs

While negative experiences have been encountered by Black teacher candidates there are still other narratives present that express a different experience. Black male students that were participants in a high school pre-collegiate introduction to education course reported system factors such as teachers holding low expectations for Black males, microaggressions, stereotyping, and racism as being a part of their academic interactions. In response, this led to community forces such as them not being able to envision themselves as teachers (Goings & Bianco, 2016). Many Black students find it challenging to pursue a profession that has grossly marginalized and improperly educated them as students (Graham & Erwin, 2011). Within this same pre-collegiate course, students cited interactions with a Black instructor that attended the same church, lived in the same community, and utilized culturally relevant teaching strategies as a tool that persuaded them to enter a career in teaching (Goings & Bianco, 2016). These experiences help to frame the changes that must be established in order to refine teacher preparation programs.

Improvements to Teacher Preparation Programs

Teacher preparation programs require areas of improvement in order to educate and address the needs of teachers from varying backgrounds. One crucial first step in this initiative is the development of cultural competency. Cultural competency is the ability of an educator to effectively teach students with different cultural backgrounds than their own (Moule, 2011). Cultural competency is needed by faculty in teacher preparation programs to successfully incorporate culturally responsive teaching for their teacher candidates. Faculty must be equipped and understand the significance in effectively teaching an increasingly diverse college student population (Green & Martin, 2018). Pre-service teacher programs in higher education institutions must utilize culturally responsive pedagogy in instruction, interactions, and approaches. These programs should also include information about social justice, anti-racist and anti-oppressive teaching strategies. Culturally responsive pedagogy is linked to the work of Geneva Gay and provides empirical and theoretical evidence of methods used to assist in narrowing the minority achievement gap (Warren, 2018). Skills such as incorporating empathy, providing cultural perspectives, and exploring different backgrounds all contribute to the creation of well-rounded teachers. This training is helpful to all teachers when dealing with students, parents, and community members from varying backgrounds (Warren, 2018). Other points for concern about teacher preparation programs are connected to assumptions about Black educators.

When examining teacher preparation programs, it is imperative to not assume that Black teachers possess inherent knowledge that is needed to educate diverse groups of students. This is an oversimplification of their identities and omits overlapping elements of their social locations and development (Cheruvu et al., 2015). Teachers of all backgrounds can benefit from being educated on the concept of cultural competency (Green & Martin, 2018). Additionally, there

cannot be an assumption that Black educators only serve in the roles of disciplinarians and cultural representatives instead of instructional leaders. This limits opportunities for Black teachers and prevents Black educators from operating at their maximum capacity (Miller & Endo, 2005). Avoiding these assumptions will be beneficial to the creation of proficient pre-service and in-service educators. A final area of improvement includes the integration of Black perspectives in the teacher preparation process.

It is imperative that the voices of minority or Black educators are included in teacher preparation programs. Black teachers can provide further insight into some student behavior and patterns as a result of their lived experiences and shared cultural backgrounds. These insights are even necessary at the professional development level in order for there to be a better understanding of culture and minority perspectives for in-service and pre-service teachers (Gist, 2017). Furthermore, this level of professional development should be extended to administrators to help them to avoid systemic constraints that impact minority teaching practices and pedagogy. Similarly, administrators should help to push for culturally relevant teaching practices, view teachers of color as instructional leaders and actively prevent the overuse of minority teachers as disciplinarians. Moreover, teacher preparation programs should develop partnerships with school districts to share research and practices that are derived from Black educator experiences (Robinson, 2020). This information is paramount at the preparation and professional development stages of a teacher's career.

Black Teacher Recruitment

The role of teachers of color has been touted as a remedy for closing the minority achievement gap or addressing racial inequity in the educational setting. A research study was conducted to examine the notion that minority teachers had a significant impact on the

performance of minority students. The findings revealed that having just one Black teacher in elementary school increases Black students' likelihood of graduating and enrolling in college (Gershenson et al., 2017). For this reason, recruitment of Black teachers is crucial when addressing the needs of students, especially Black students, and other students of color (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). When examining recruitment efforts, obstacles to recruitment as well as current practices should be examined in order to get a well-rounded depiction of the recruitment of Black teachers.

Some of the obstacles to recruitment deal with teacher experiences prior to entering teacher preparation programs. Some Black students face discouragement when beginning the process of becoming a teacher because they are unprepared for college level work due to a lack of exposure at the high school level (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Additionally, there are other challenges such as family responsibilities, dissatisfaction with diversity among college faculty, and the hardships that come from being in an environment that does not possess their cultural background or experiences (Carver-Thomas, 2018). In terms of financial obligations, Black students are more likely to desire to borrow less for their college education, and to change career plans because loans were too burdensome (Scott-Clayton & Li, 2016). These experiences can cause apprehension to apply to teacher preparation programs at the collegiate level.

Current practices used in the recruitment of Black teachers include loan forgiveness and scholarship opportunities, teacher residencies, and Grow Your Own (GYO) programs. Loan forgiveness and scholarship programs assist in covering or reimbursing full or a portion of tuition in exchange for a teaching commitment (Carver-Thomas, 2018). In most instances this commitment is from three to five years. These programs help Black students that desire to enter the teaching field by funding educational costs that may have excluded them from pursuing this

profession (Podolsky et al., 2016). A recent study found that loan forgiveness programs increased the presence of teachers of color by four percentage points, which was 25% more than the average district (Hansen et al., 2018). An example of this type of program is the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program.

The North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program was created in 1986, as a way to solve the need for teachers throughout the state. The goal of the program was to recruit the top high school students into teaching and create teacher leaders throughout the counties of North Carolina (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2021). A competitive four-year scholarship was offered through the program in order to rival other professions such as law, business, and medicine. In return for the scholarship, teaching fellows were required to teach in the state of North Carolina. If this commitment could not be honored then the scholarship would become a loan with 10% interest (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2021). In 2017, the program was reestablished by the North Carolina General Assembly. It was reinstated to address the unique needs of the state in the areas of special education, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and low-performing schools (North Carolina Teaching Fellows, 2021).

Teacher residency programs, similar to the North Carolina Teaching Fellows, help to recruit teachers of color and are replicated after medical residencies. Residencies involve partnerships between school districts and universities that fund teacher training in high demand subjects and high need schools (Guha et al., 2016). Teachers work in the capacity of apprentices with mentors and still complete coursework. Students receive a stipend or tuition assistance in exchange for a commitment to teach three to four years (Carver-Thomas, 2018). An example of a current teacher residency program is the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University teacher residency program established in 2017 (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

The North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University teacher residency program was created to prepare graduate level students to earn a North Carolina teaching license (North Carolina Agricultural and Technical Teacher Residency, 2021). The program provides students with skills and knowledge to address the needs of rural counties in the Piedmont Triad region. The goal of the program is to create a pipeline of skilled and culturally competent teachers to close the achievement gap. A four-year college degree is required to participate in this program. This residency program offers the tracks of teaching at the K-5 level or high school STEM in either a biology, chemistry, or mathematics position (North Carolina Agricultural and Technical Teacher Residency, 2021). While teacher residency programs have left an imprint on North Carolina's educational system, the use of GYO programs cannot be omitted from this analysis.

The GYO programs recruit teacher candidates from nontraditional populations that are representative of local diversity and more likely to continue to teach in their communities (Carver-Thomas, 2018). This method of recruitment gives those that are disadvantaged due to class, social, and linguistic backgrounds, or environmental factors access to the teaching profession (Tanner & Tanner, 1968). When analyzing this type of recruitment program, the pool for teacher candidates is extended to community members with backgrounds as parents, school aides, activists, or etc. The relationship between community and serving as a teacher can be connected to the sociopolitical and historical nature of minority communities (Murrell, 2001). The GYO programs are different from traditional efforts to increase the racial and ethnic diversity in the teaching profession because these programs do not solely focus on the racial representation of teachers, but on recruiting minority teachers with local community connections, experiences, and skills that can lead to the presence of effective teaching and longevity in the

profession. Examples of GYO Programs include South Carolina Teacher Cadet and Colorado's

Pathways2Teaching (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

South Carolina Teacher Cadet Program

The South Carolina Teacher Cadet Program is a GYO Program that recruits high-

achieving high school students to consider teaching as a profession. A goal of this program is to

not only develop exemplary teachers but community leaders that advocate for public education

(Teacher Cadets, 2021). This program was originally piloted in South Carolina from 1985-1986,

but it now boasts 188 South Carolina high schools and 71,000 student participants. The mission

of the program is to impart knowledge to high students about the various aspects of the teaching

profession such as the nature of teaching, the problems of schooling, and the significant issues

that impact the quality of education in American schools (Teacher Cadets, 2021).

Colorado's Pathways2Teaching Program

An additional GYO Program is Colorado's Pathways2Teaching Program. The

Pathways2Teaching program is a concurrent enrollment program created for 11th- and 12th-

grade students. The students receive an introduction to the teaching field through the exploration

of issues such as educational justice while earning college credit (Pathways2Teaching, 2021).

This program was established in 2010 and has served hundreds of students in the Denver metro

school districts. Most of the Pathways2Teaching graduates enroll in teacher education programs

or pursue related professions such as social work (Pathways2Teaching, 2021).

Black Teacher Retention

While there are multiple recruitment measures in place to attract Black educators, the

number of Black educators remains significantly less in comparison to their White counterparts.

The shortage of Black educators in K-12 settings is of national concern for a myriad of reasons

(Rogers-Ard et al., 2012). The teaching force does not reflect the demographics of the student population, which creates a need to explore the reasoning for this occurrence. The value of Black teachers can be seen through their ability to fuse curriculum and their students' cultural identities (Villegas et al., 2012). Moreover, they are in tune with their students of color due to cultural understandings of their home and community lives (Easton-Brooks, 2019). In some instances, Black teachers demonstrate a commitment to teaching Black students by having higher retention rates in high needs settings that are culturally diverse and urban (Scafidi et al., 2007). However, being a teacher of color is a significant predictor for teacher retention (Hancock & Scherff, 2010). Retention must be explored as a contributing factor to the lack of representation in the teaching profession.

One major obstacle to the retention of Black educators is school conditions not conducive to their growth as professionals. Power structures are noted as major deterrents to remaining in the classroom environment (Achinstein et al., 2010). When teachers are not included in the decision-making process or if the administration is not supportive this creates conditions of greater teacher turnover (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Being treated as a professional and having opportunities to share with colleagues and receive guidance were a priority for teacher retention (Wynn et al., 2007). Poor working conditions such as Black teachers being bypassed for job promotions, being reduced to disciplinarians instead of authorities on content and de-professionalization of their roles as educators contribute to low retention among Black teachers (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). Additionally, feelings of marginalization are a common issue experienced by teachers of color (Bristol & Goings, 2019).

Financial reasons also impact attrition rates among Black educators. Teacher salaries discourage some potential Black teacher candidates. Black teachers were found to leave the

teaching profession at higher rates than White teachers to pursue higher paying salaries (Ingersoll, 2017). Black teachers were also noted as being unresponsive to slight raises in teacher pay (Hanushek et al., 2004). Likewise, other financial factors that impact retention include educators having to deal with high student loans and debt that cannot be effectively addressed in low paying professions such as teaching (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). The culmination of these elements contributes to lower retention rates among Black educators.

Teacher job requirements and workload can also be an impediment to retaining Black teachers. In recent times there has been an increase in accountability measures such as standardized tests, programs and paperwork that are beneficial to student growth, but overwhelming to teachers (Hughes, 2012). Inability to manage workload is cited as a major reason for educators vacating the teaching field (Leukens et al., 2004). These added responsibilities repel some Black educators from maintaining in the profession of teaching.

Recruitment and Retention Efforts in North Carolina

When examining issues with teacher recruitment and retention in the United States, North Carolina is not exempt from this conversation. In North Carolina, these topics are often tied to discussions about taxes and employment. The concepts of teacher recruitment and retention also reemerge during the season of political advertisements (McCoy et al., 2013). North Carolina has a history of producing initiatives to attract and maintain teachers. These initiatives range from financial incentives to specially designed programs to cultivate key demographics of teachers. Past and current efforts highlight the direction that teacher recruitment and retention should take in the future.

Past Efforts

There have been several efforts to recruit and retain educators in North Carolina. One

such program is the North Carolina Bonus Program. The North Carolina Bonus Program was

signed into law as Senate Bill 1005 on September 26, 2001. The purpose of this program was to

give an annual bonus of $1,800 to certified math, science, and special education teachers who

taught these subjects in disadvantaged middle and high schools. Over time, it was revealed that

the simple concept of the program was problematic to put into action without administrative

error and misunderstandings by school personnel (Clotfelter et al., 2008).

While in theory this program sounded like a solution to teacher vacancies, there were

several errors in regard to this program's application. The original list that was shared by the

North Carolina Department of Instruction was significantly incorrect. It contained 44 schools

that would be determined to be ineligible for the 2001-2002 year (Clotfelter et al., 2008). The list

also omitted 20 schools that should have been eligible. The correct list of eligible schools was

released in May 2002. The list of eligible schools was not made available until January 2003.

Audits were completed through the use of several databases to check the eligibility status of

teachers. Due to there being so many errors the program was ended during the summer of 2004.

During the three-year period that the program was in existence, state payroll records reveal that

1,992 teachers received the bonus (Clotfelter et al., 2008). Even though there were difficulties

associated with this program, this effort serves as a building block to the current recruitment and

retention initiatives practiced in North Carolina.

An additional recruitment and retention measure in North Carolina was the establishment

of new Mentor Program Guidelines for Beginning Teachers in September 2012. This initiative

allowed for better recruitment and retention of teachers by giving them the additional support of

a mentor as they grew in the teaching profession (McCoy et al., 2013). The new guidelines were

created by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Educator Recruitment and

Development Division and required site administrators to create induction programs on the local level. These induction programs gave beginning teachers a highly trained mentor to assist them in their first three years (McCoy et al., 2013). These mentors were master teachers that were trained according to the North Carolina Mentoring Standards. The mentors also served in the facets of being a listener, tutor, coach, and trusted friend. The mentors were able to provide beginning teachers aid through modeling instructional strategies, facilitating learning for students, and reflecting on practices in accordance with the new teacher evaluation standards (McCoy et al., 2013). These past recruitment and retention practices served as a foundation to the current efforts that have been put in place in the state of North Carolina.

Current Efforts

Recently, North Carolina has pursued ways to address this disparity through alternative teaching programs and incentivized programs such as the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program. Programs of this nature recruit more teachers of color but have high rates of attrition and a lack of educators from a diversity of backgrounds (Clark, 2020). In addition to there being a lack of strong minority representation in this program, this program is only offered at five universities and none of them are historically Black colleges or universities (Clark, 2020).

There is also the emergence of other programs such as the Marathon Teaching Institute (MTI). This program is intended to increase male teachers and high level administrators from diverse racial backgrounds with an emphasis on African American male teachers (North Carolina Central University, 2022). This program works in conjunction with North Carolina Central University's Teacher Education Program to recruit, retain, and mentor candidates. This work is done in hopes that students will reach their aspirations of becoming teachers, professors, administrators, principals, and superintendents (North Carolina Central University, 2022). While

programs like MTI exist, some argue for more GYO programs that focus on recruiting from high schools and other programs that create racial affinity peer-spaces for Black educators in the state of North Carolina (Clark, 2020). In order to further explore the topic of Black teacher recruitment and retention in rural Southeastern North Carolina, the distinctive context of rural education must be examined.

Rural Education

Perceptions of rural life and education can impact teacher recruitment and retention in rural school districts (Biddle & Azano, 2016). It is important to note that in more recent times, nearly one quarter of the total public school population in the United States attends schools in rural places (Aud et al., 2013). The number of students enrolled in rural schools in the United States is comparable to the total populations of Maine, Wyoming, Vermont, North Dakota, Alaska, South Dakota, Delaware, Montana, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Hawaii, Idaho, and the District of Columbia combined. Almost 64% of rural schools have 400 or fewer students, in comparison to only 39% of urban schools (Schafft & Biddle, 2014). However, even with the presence of these statistics rural children and teachers are an understudied population (Varghese et al., 2019).

Other characteristics of rural school environments include the school-community relationship being enhanced because of school or community size. The landscape of rural education can be seen through post-secondary measures and the productivity of rural communities. For example, in urban and suburban areas approximately 30% of adults have a four-year postsecondary degree. However, only 19% of rural adults have postsecondary degrees (Provasnik et al., 2007). When examining rural economic development, increasing the rural adult presence in post-secondary institutions is necessary. It is important to note that rural schools

serve as a primary source of employment in rural areas. Additionally, they offer career opportunities for rural residents who would like to stay in their home communities. Conversely, rural schools face challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers and administrators, and often have larger shares of inexperienced teachers (Fowler, 2012).

Features of Rural School Districts

Rural school districts meet not only educational needs, but other facets of life such as social, recreational, cultural, and employment necessities (Public Schools First NC, 2021). Rural districts are not all monoliths, but there are some commonalities in features such as smaller student populations, close-knit communities, poverty, underfunding and teacher shortages (Kollie, 2007). The advantages and challenges of these areas provide further insight into the features present in rural school districts. This information allows for a greater understanding of recruitment and retention to rural environments.

Advantages

Characteristics such as geographical locations, resources, community ties, etc. all serve as factors to consider when deciding to teach in rural areas (Oyen & Schweinle, 2020). Sense of community in these locales plays a major role in attracting and maintaining teachers. This can be seen through support offered at the supervisory, peer, and kinship levels. Many rural teachers are attracted to rural areas where they felt supported by their administration, peers, and familial or community connections (Oyen & Schweinle, 2020). Typically, teachers in rural communities have higher experience levels than teachers in urban communities and it is highly probable that they live in the communities where they teach (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2018). Furthermore, the presence of a more insulated school structure can lead to teachers having greater feelings of autonomy and the perspective that they can influence school policies (Monk, 2007).

Sense of community not only extends to teachers' personal networks, but the relationships established with other stakeholders. In the rural context, smaller schools commonly have smaller class sizes, which in some cases results in less discipline due to the class sizes and a strong sense of community. Rural teachers possess the ability to construct positive relationships with students due to rural areas having close knit social networks (Sheridan et al., 2016). These social networks extend to organizations such as church, social clubs, etc. where teachers, students, parents, and other community members can develop relationships outside the context of the school setting. Moreover, rural parents are more likely to attend school events and serve in voluntary roles than their urban counterparts. Some teachers find these attributes attractive in terms of working conditions and report higher levels of job satisfaction (Monk, 2007; Provasnik et al., 2007). Sense of community is valuable inside and outside of the school environment when examining factors that attract and sustain teachers.

Challenges

Rural school districts possess several beneficial features that attract educators, but there are some characteristics that repel educators from teaching in these environments. In rural locations smaller schools commonly have smaller class sizes, but financial constraints can lead to combining grade levels or classes. Furthermore, smaller class sizes can make it more difficult to offer specialized classes. This can be intimidating or overwhelming to new or pre-service educators (Monk, 2007). Additionally, youth in these school districts are more likely to experience a limited school curriculum and restricted access to career counseling and college preparatory programs due to the credentials of school staff members (Graham, 2009; Monk, 2007).

Other challenges include minimal resources when dealing with students with special

needs, limited English skills, high mobility rates, or obstacles going to college (Oyen & Schweinle, 2020). Underfunding is a problem experienced in a variety of rural contexts. For example, in North Carolina rural districts spend over $1,000 less per student than the average rural school district in the United States. The reason behind this discrepancy is that rural school districts receive less funding due to their population size. However, Lower population size does not always equate lower costs or needs (Public Schools First NC, 2021). Instability in student populations in these areas is usually the result of moving caused by parents struggling with poverty, escaping creditors, abusive dynamics, searching for job opportunities or being migrant workers. Small class numbers can result in more drastic changes from year to year due to the varied movement of students (Monk, 2007). These encumbrances can be perceived as unattractive to some educators.

Rural Teacher Recruitment and Retention

In terms of recruitment and retention strategies, rural schools have different opportunities and techniques than their urban or suburban counterparts (Rooks, 2018). One key strategy used in rural school districts are GYO programs. These programs exist on the premise that teachers who grew up in rural communities are typically more familiar with a rural lifestyle and school system than other educators in suburban and urban environments (Boylan & McSwan, 1998). These programs intend to create skill and interest in teaching in hard to staff areas such as rural environments. They focus on populations such as high school students, college students or adults interested in the teaching profession (Monk, 2007). In most cases, long-term employment of teachers is achieved in these instances because these individuals are already accustomed to life in rural areas (Cobbold, 2006).

Other recruitment and retention strategies used by rural school districts include peer

mentor programs that pair novice and veteran teachers together. Experienced mentor teachers are able to assist new teachers with the challenging features of rural school districts such as small size, multiple grade classes, and close relationships with students and parents (Sharplin et al., 2011). Mentoring can produce an increase in teacher retention rates, emphasis on student learning, and greater job satisfaction and efficacy (Sharplin et al., 2011). In a study completed by researchers, Smith and Ingersoll (2004), it was revealed that mentoring coupled with other induction processes for new teachers led to a 30% decrease in the risk of teacher attrition at the end of the year. Additionally, 91% of beginning teachers found having a mentor to be a beneficial experience (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). This information communicates the significance of teachers entering the profession in a rural school district.

Another recruitment and retention strategy at the pre-service level is changing perspectives on rural schools (Rooks, 2018). On the post-secondary level some colleges or departments of education have started to discuss the urban bias of their curriculum. The curriculum typically fails to prepare aspiring rural teachers for the unique characteristics of rural schools (Rooks, 2018). Pre-service teachers having an awareness of rural environments as viable options where they can be successful, can help in expanding the profession. Rural teachers with pre-service training on navigating the characteristics of rural schools tend to have higher job satisfaction and retention rates than those that have not encountered this form of training (Azano & Stewart, 2015).

Summary

Black teacher recruitment and retention is a major issue in the academic realm, especially in the rural context. However, there is minimal research focused on the experiences of Black educators in this specific setting. In reference to current research, there is a noticeable division

between the topic of Black teacher recruitment and retention and the general recruitment and retention of educators to rural environments. This information is separated into categories and not typically examined through the experiences of teachers of color in rural school districts. The Black teacher experience is widely explored in the urban context (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018), but more research needs to be completed in order to better understand the unique experiences of Black teachers in rural environments.

The theoretical and practical value of this study can be seen through the framework of the cultural-ecological minority school performance theory and deficit thinking theory. These theories outline the challenges experienced by Black professionals attempting to enter or maintain in the teaching profession. Key experiences and mindsets held by Black individuals as well as societal challenges are explored to make sense of recruitment and retention measures. This leads to a more thorough analysis of the importance of Black educators, teacher preparation programs, and recruitment and retention strategies used in North Carolina.

Examining the history of Black teachers in the United States and North Carolina aid in showcasing the necessity and influence of these educators. The significance of these educators can be seen through them serving in the capacities of mentors, role models, advocates, and surrogates. However, there are still struggles encountered by Black professionals, which is exemplified through negative experiences within teacher preparation programs. There have been strides made in recruitment and retention initiatives such as the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Programs and MTI, but many recruitment and retention plans still possess areas for improvement. Moreover, rural education must continue to be explored because of its unique context and set of obstacles to recruitment and retention of Black teachers in Southeastern North Carolina.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the factors that impact Black teacher recruitment and retention in rural school districts in Southeastern North Carolina. Even though there have been efforts and progress made in the arena of recruiting Black teachers, these initiatives are still not enough to support a growing minority student population. The teaching force is composed of 80% White and female educators while minority students comprise more than 50% of the student population in the United States (Plachowski, 2019). Inevitably, the racial and ethnic gap between minority students and their teachers alludes to several problems in schools throughout America (Villegas et al., 2012). Within this chapter the research design, procedures, and a data synthesis of this study are presented. This qualitative study examined Black teacher recruitment and retention efforts in rural counties in Southeastern North Carolina through individual interviews, exit surveys, and a reflective writing prompt.

Research Design

This study was a qualitative research study. The selection of a qualitative study was appropriate because the research began with assumptions and the use of theoretical frameworks. These assumptions and frameworks informed the research problem and created meaning for individuals or groups such as Black teachers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, in order to study this research problem, there was the utilization of qualitative approaches including inquiry of data, and data analysis to establish themes or patterns. Furthermore, there was an inclusion of the voices of participants, reflection on the part of the researcher, complex interpretation of the problem and contribution to the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Key characteristics of qualitative studies such as the researcher as a key instrument, multiple methods, multiple

perspectives, and reflexivity were used throughout this research.

The research design of this study was a phenomenological study. A phenomenological study is a study that evaluates the lived experiences or a phenomenon among several individuals. The purpose of this type of study was to lessen individual experiences with a phenomenon to a representation of a universal experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Key characteristics of phenomenology include emphasis on a phenomenon, exploration of the phenomenon in a group context and phenomenological reflection (Moustakas, 1994). This study fit into the scope of being a phenomenological study because it examined the experiences of Black teachers in relation to practices associated with recruitment and retention in rural Southeastern North Carolina.

The origins of phenomenological research can be traced to the works of a German mathematician named Edmund Husserl (Moustakas, 1994). Other researchers expanded on his work such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty. The researcher, van Manen, created the phrase "phenomenology of practice" to describe the methods of phenomenology based on the works of the aforementioned researchers (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology can be defined as the step-by-step process of eliminating prejudgments and setting aside assumptions in order to achieve a transcendental state of openness. This creates the ability for the researcher to view the research in an unbiased manner that is not compromised by beliefs, customs, or habits associated with everyday experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, Moustakas highlights philosophical tenets such noema, noesis, noeses, noetic, and epoche being utilized in phenomenological studies.

Moustakas expands on the two approaches of phenomenology (Blau et al., 2013). The hermeneutic approach can be described as research that involves lived experiences and

interpreting "texts of life" (van Manen, 1990). The creation of this approach was employed to justify the use of the researcher's self in scientific studies of human experience (Moustakas, 1994). The transcendental approach is not concentrated on the researcher's interpretations, but on the experiences of participants (Moustakas, 1994). The focus of this approach is to provide an existential scope to examine lived experience. Transcendental phenomenology is rooted in the idea that all preconceived notions should be set aside in order to view the phenomena through clear lenses. This allows authentic meaning of the phenomena to naturally surface and establish identity (Moustakas, 1994). This study was a transcendental phenomenological study because the researcher suspended their experiences in the teaching field in order to better understand the experiences of the research participants.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of recruitment and retention initiatives for Black teachers in rural Southeastern North Carolina?

Sub-question One

What impact does race have on recruitment into the teaching profession in rural Southeastern North Carolina?

Sub-question Two

What impact does race have on retention in the teaching profession in rural Southeastern North Carolina?

Setting and Participants

The setting of this study was the Southeastern region of North Carolina. Rural school districts within this region are the focus of the research. The participants within this study are

Black teachers from schools in these rural districts. These educators have a diverse range of backgrounds from their grade levels, subjects, ages, and experiences.

Setting

Southeastern North Carolina contains a population size of 1.77 million residents. Eighteen counties exist within this area and this region stretches from Anson County on the west to Onslow County on the east (North Carolina's Southeast, 2021). However, it is important to note that not all counties in North Carolina's Southeast region can be classified as rural. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (2019), defines a rural county as a county that is non-metropolitan or is located outside a metropolitan county. The counties that meet this requirement include Anson, Bladen, Columbus, Duplin, Montgomery, Moore, Pender, Richmond, Robeson, Sampson, Scotland, and Wayne (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). The specific school districts that participated in this study are Twine, Golfe, and Haire. Pseudonyms were utilized to protect anonymity.

When examining the demographics of Southeastern North Carolina, racial backgrounds must be taken into consideration. Within this region, 62.1% identify as White, 25.9% identify as African American, 10% identify as Hispanic/Latino, 4.1 % identify as American Indian, 1.1 % identify as Asian, .08% identify as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 3.6% identify as Multiracial, and 3.2% identify as Other (North Carolina's Southeast, 2021). The average household income in this area is $64,332 and the median age is 40 years old. The region's target industries include advanced textiles, agri-business and food processing, aerospace and defense, distribution and logistics and metalworking (North Carolina's Southeast, 2021).

In regard to education, 30.9% of the population has attained a high school diploma or GED, 22.6% have some college experience with no degree, and 7.2% have attained graduate

degrees (North Carolina's Southeast, 2021). There are 15 technical and community colleges in Southeastern North Carolina. An estimated 49,000 students attend these institutions on a yearly basis (North Carolina's Southeast, 2021). Additionally, there are six universities, which include institutions such as University of North Carolina at Wilmington, University of North Carolina at Pembroke, and Fayetteville State University. Approximately 36,000 students attend these institutions on a yearly basis (North Carolina's Southeast, 2021). At the local level, each of these counties contain public school systems that service elementary and secondary students as well as organizational structures that consists of school boards, superintendents, and school level administrators (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

Participants

The sample size of participants consisted of 10 Black educators. This sample size included teachers from rural counties in Southeastern North Carolina. This study used purposive sampling that involved intentional selection of the settings of the teacher in order to purposefully inform the researcher on Black teacher recruitment and retention in rural school districts in Southeastern North Carolina (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, snowball sampling, where participants were referred by other educators, was used in order to grow and establish a pool of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Within the pool of candidates there was diversity among participants even though they are all Black educators. For example, there were differences in gender, years of experience, and grade/content area taught. This provided balanced and varying insight into the phenomenon.

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Researcher's Positionality

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In terms of my own personal lens as a researcher, I grew up as a military child, which allowed me opportunities to travel throughout the United States and abroad. I am a doctoral

student through Liberty University, and I have served as a Black educator in North Carolina. I have been a student, teacher, and school administrator in the Coastal Plains region of North Carolina. My research was conducted at rural schools in Southeastern North Carolina.

The motivation of this research study can be seen through the selected interpretative framework and three philosophical assumptions. The transformative framework was implemented in this study in order to advocate for change and societal improvement for disenfranchised groups such as Black teachers and minority students. The three philosophical assumptions that were utilized are the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions. My ontological assumption was that there is a singular reality, but I am aware that the study's participants may have differing views. My epistemological assumption involved my rapport with participants in the form of emails, interviews, and discussions about the reflective writing prompt. Additionally, my relation to what is being studied can be seen through my racial background and experiences in education. My axiological assumption included being transparent about my positions on race and the success of minority students. My assumptions about the benefits of Black teachers is rooted in my experiences as a Black student, educator, and administrator in a rural context. I acknowledge my stance on the perceived advantages of having educators with diverse backgrounds and experiences in a school environment. This has prompted me to explore why there is not more of a stronger presence of Black teachers in rural Southeastern North Carolina.

My Biblical worldview is founded on the principle that there should be just practices and equitable opportunities for all students. I believe students should be able to see themselves represented in all facets of society, including academic spaces. My conviction as an educator is that teachers should serve as advocates and support justice for all students regardless of their

racial background or socioeconomic status. Isaiah 1:17 (*English Standard Version*, 2014) states, "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause." Christians are called to not only do good, but to rectify injustice in society, especially for groups that cannot reform inequitable situations for themselves.

Interpretive Framework

The interpretative framework that was used for this study was the transformative framework. The transformative framework proposes that knowledge is not neutral, and it has the ability to showcase power and social relationships in society. Additionally, this framework denotes that the purpose of knowledge is to assist in societal improvement (Mertens, 2003). This framework is emancipatory and participatory because it advocates for action and change for marginalized groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This framework is representative of my thoughts as a researcher because I believe in the power of using research to bring forth societal change. Furthermore, I maintain that it is significant for marginalized groups such as Black educators to have research studies conducted that examine important factors such as recruitment and retention in the rural context in order close the achievement gap.

Philosophical Assumptions

This qualitative phenomenological study examined ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions. These assumptions cover the topics of the nature of reality, the exploration of knowledge and its justification and the role of values in research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These assumptions provided insight into my thought processes and decisions throughout the research study.

Ontological Assumptions

Within this philosophical assumption, my belief is that there is a singular reality as

reflected in the Word of God. Scripture states, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (*English Standard Version*, 2001, I Corinthians 2:14). This verse examines the natural and spiritual elements within the world and how they are not easily discernable to all people. It is my conviction that there are always natural and spiritual components to every situation, including this study. However, the beliefs of the researcher may vary from those of the participants. Different participants may accept the belief of multiple realities. In this study, these different realities are reported and served as evidence to varying experiences of Black teachers in rural school districts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While all participants in the study shared the same background as a Black teacher, they still viewed their experiences in a diverse manner (Moustakas, 1994).

Epistemological Assumptions

The epistemological assumption involved a closeness to the participants being studied. In this context, subjective evidence was collected through individual views (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was conducted in the form of individual interviews, exit surveys, and a reflective writing prompt. Additionally, there was an attempt to minimize distance between the researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, a rapport was built with participants through initial forms of contact (email/phone call) and interactions such as individual interviews. In relation to the researcher and what is being studied, it is important to note my background and experiences in education as a Black woman and as a student and educator in the rural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My views about knowledge are rooted in scripture. The Bible states, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction" (*English Standard Version*, 2001, Proverbs 1:7). I believe that knowledge is derived from God

and instruction. Instruction can come in the form of academic pursuits such as studying and researching or a person having experience in a particular area.

Axiological Assumptions

The axiological assumption analyzed the value brought to research studies. Within qualitative research, values and biases brought to the study must be addressed in order to reveal positionality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This can be seen through positions based on race, personal experiences, and professional beliefs (Berger, 2015). I am transparent about my position as a Black woman, former educator, and former school administrator. There are several factors that I must acknowledge in reference to the context and setting of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a former Black educator, I am passionate about the success of minority students and closing the minority achievement gap through exposure to various opportunities and types of educators. I support the presence of more minority educators in order to service the vast needs of all students through a variance of perspectives. Furthermore, I have experience as a student and educator in Southeastern North Carolina. My values as a researcher are founded on my former experiences within education and as Black woman in North Carolina. I believe that Black educators are valuable to the teaching profession because of their ability to relate to minority students and create inviting and inclusive classroom environments. I contend that their presence has the ability to enhance school environments and create much needed diversity in educational spaces.

Researcher's Role

Within this phenomenological study, I served as a human instrument. I do have a collegial relationship with some of the teacher participants, but I am no longer an administrator in their school districts. A key assumption that I bring to this research is that there is minimal

effort being put towards the intentional recruitment of Black or other educators in rural environments. As a result of these minimized initiatives, minority students suffer. I have also worked and been a student in rural counties where I feel the presence of more teachers of color could have contributed to the greater success of minority students. For this reason, techniques such as member checking, triangulation, thick description, and reflexivity were utilized throughout this study. I addressed my own bias by utilizing reflexivity through memoing. I kept a journal with my thoughts throughout the research process in order to outline the intersection of relationships with topics such as race, cultural background, etc. between me and the participants (Dodgson, 2019). This not only assisted in developing the research topic, but contributed to the study's credibility (Berger, 2015).

Procedures

The first step in the procedural process was to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This was a fundamental step that was necessary when dealing with human participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once IRB approval was provided, then snowball sampling was implemented to assist in the recruitment process of participants. Teachers were able to aid in referring other teachers that met the criteria of the research.

While snowball sampling was utilized for recruitment, the overall sampling process was purposeful, and criterion based. There was an intentional selection of rural school districts and Black teachers in order to address the goals of the study. The selection of teachers was completed by contacting potential participants through email and phone, by using information provided through school or district online resources. Once teachers were selected, they referred other potential candidates. Once candidates were selected from the pool, consent forms were issued in order for teachers to know this was a voluntary study that they could opt out of at any

time without any repercussions. Signed consent forms were in place before progressing to the data collection process.

Pseudonyms were assigned to teacher participants in order to preserve anonymity and allow responses to be as honest as possible. Individual interviews were conducted with each teacher through the Google Meet platform. The interviews were recorded within this medium. Participant responses were transcribed by the researcher after the interview and participants were able to view the transcription to ensure accuracy of their responses. Exit survey responses were collected through the online medium of Google Forms and were sent via email. Teachers had the opportunity to review these materials as well. One of the last steps for participants was to respond to a writing prompt about recruitment and retention. Teacher participants were able to review their responses prior to their final submission.

The data analysis process consisted of triangulation. Triangulation included testing data sources against each other, analyzing various patterns of thought and behavior, as well as evaluating key events (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Method triangulation was involved in this study because there was a variety of methods in the research process such as individual interviews, exit surveys, and a reflective response (Polit & Beck, 2010). Data source collection triangulation also contributed to this study by there being a diversity of participants from different schools in Southeastern North Carolina (Carter et al., 2014). Member checking was utilized to ensure credibility of the study through consulting participants to review the data that was collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Permissions

The first step within this process was to complete the IRB application and obtain IRB approval (see Appendix E). Once teacher participants were selected they were sent an overview

of the study and consent forms (see Appendix A). This informed participants of the purpose of the research and its voluntary nature.

Recruitment Plan

The second step included the manner in which participants were selected. This involved the researcher contacting Black teachers that work in Southeastern North Carolina that matched the participant qualifications through online information such as documents and pictures on school or district websites. Then snowballing was used in order for these participants to refer other potential participants who match the candidate description (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once several viable candidates had been established, an email inquiry was sent to potential participants. Phone calls were utilized for teachers that wanted additional insight or desired to discuss any apprehensions before volunteering their participation. Once candidates agreed to participate, they were sent an overview of the study and consent forms. The sample pool was Black teachers from each of the three rural school districts. The sample size was a total of 10 Black teachers. A purposeful and criterion sampling method was completed in order to ensure that participants represent people who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The third step involved the researcher setting up interviews with each participant using the platform of Google Meet. Each interview was recorded to assist with accurate transcripts. Within these interviews the researcher and participants discussed their perceptions of being a Black teacher in a rural school district and if they had encountered any instances of bias or discrimination. Their current work environment as well as any challenges they faced were examined during the interview process. Also, how participants were recruited, and their school district's current equity plan or minority recruitment initiatives were analyzed. Suggestions for

improvement that relate to better retention of Black teachers were discussed in addition to teacher interactions with minority students. After the interview, I transcribed all information covered in the interviews and any field notes. Next, teachers were emailed an exit survey through Google Forms. These documents solicited teacher advice for the school district's Human Resource department and were sent to the researcher once the submission button is clicked. Then teachers were asked to engage in a reflective writing prompt that further examined the research topics and allowed them to give their final contributions to the study. The last step included participants' ability to review the findings from the interview recording/transcript, exit surveys, and writing prompt to ensure accuracy of the study.

Data Collection Plan

Data for this study was collected through three methods. The first method was conducting individual interviews with each participant. These interviews were conducted through the medium of Google Meet due to travel constraints. The second method was an exit survey. The exit survey was in the format of teachers providing advice to the Human Resource department through the medium of Google Forms. The last method was the participants responding to a reflective writing prompt about their perspective on Black teacher recruitment and retention in the context of rural Southeastern North Carolina.

Several factors were taken into consideration when creating a plan for gathering data for this study. The types of data that was collected and the procedures that were used in the study should be explored, but other key factors such as preempting any ethical concerns associated with gaining permissions, implementing effective sampling strategies, and solidifying the manner in which information will be recorded, should also be included in the data collection plan (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The first step in the data collection process for this study was to obtain

IRB approval as well as consent forms from teachers involved in the study. This was established by developing a rapport with these individuals through various means such as emails and phone calls (Creswell & Poth, 2018). School and district websites assisted in locating potential candidates. Candidates were informed of the voluntary nature of this study and the need for teacher participation. Purposeful and criterion sampling were utilized in the intentional selection of rural school districts and Black teachers. Additional teacher selection was conducted by snowball sampling where teachers referred other potential participants to enhance the candidate pool. There was a total of 10 teacher participants. As aforementioned, participants were volunteers and were informed about the mediums that were used in the study such as phone conversations, email, video-conferencing, or in-person communication if needed. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point in its duration. The data collection methods that were used during this study include individual interviews, exit surveys, and a reflective writing prompt. Personal interviews were conducted through the medium of video-conferencing through the platform of Google Meet. Pseudonyms were used to conceal the identity of the participants and allow them to speak freely and honestly about the topics of Black teacher recruitment and retention. Exit surveys analyzed teacher beliefs and attitudes about their school district's recruitment and retention strategies. The reflective writing prompt served as an opportunity to collect final thoughts from participants. Multiple collection strategies were utilized in order to achieve triangulation. By implementing these data collection procedures, the researcher was able to gain a wider perspective of rural teacher retention and recruitment efforts for Black educators by delving into the experiences of the 10 teacher participants.

Individual Interviews

Each interview was conducted through the online platform of Google Meet. A Google

calendar invitation was sent out to schedule an appropriate interview time with each candidate.

The interviews were conducted after school hours on weekdays or on the weekend when teachers

were available. The interviews were recorded through the Google Meet platform. The questions

in the interview focused on the teacher's personal experiences and challenges within their school

district, methods in which they were recruited, description of their workplace, interactions with

their students, and current recruitment and retention methods of their school district. They were

also asked what could be done to better improve the presence of Black educators in rural

environments. Appropriate interview protocol was followed during these interactions (Creswell

& Poth, 2018). The interview process allowed knowledge to be constructed between the

interviewer and interviewee. Within this interaction the interviewer attempted to understand the

interviewee's point of view and their lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The individual

interview questions that were utilized are listed below and in Appendix B.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Explain your educational background (high school, college and beyond)? (CQ)

2. How did you become a teacher in X school district? Did you attend a teacher
   preparation program? (CQ)

3. Why did you become a teacher in X school district? Were you intentionally recruited?
   (CQ, and RQ1)

4. What age were you and what was your experience level when you began working in
   X school district? (CQ)

5. Prior to teaching in X school district, what affiliation did you have with this school
   district? (CQ)

6. How would you describe this school district in terms of organization, opportunities,

and community mindsets? (CQ)

7. What has been your challenges working in this school district? Any of your challenges specific to being a Black educator? (CQ, and RQ2)

8. How does your school district respond to diversity, equity, or cultural education initiatives? (CQ, and RQ2)

9. Explain whether you feel supported working in this school district? At the school level? At the team level? (CQ)

10. Describe any bias, discrimination, or opposition that you have encountered due to your race? (CQ, and RQ2)

11. Give an example of when you were not afforded the same opportunities as your White counterparts in your school environment? (CQ)

12. Give an example of any instance of hostility or confrontation that you have encountered on the basis of race in your school environment? (CQ, and RQ2)

13. How would you describe the student population and school community that you service? (CQ)

14. How do you feel about the notion that having more Black teachers will improve or benefit the performance of Black students? (CQ, and RQ1)

15. What do you feel is the greatest challenge of Black students in today's society? (CQ)

16. How does your school or school district intentionally address the needs of Black students? (CQ)

17. What does your school district currently do to recruit and retain Black educators? What has been done in the past? (RQ1, and RQ2)

18. What could be done differently to increase or retain the numbers of Black teachers?

(RQ1, and RQ2)

19. What are the views and attitudes towards Black educators in your school district? (CQ, RQ1)

20. What other topics related to Black teacher recruitment and retention, do you feel should be discussed that were not mentioned during this interview? (CQ, RQ1, and RQ2)

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

The interview was one-on-one and included seven steps to the interview process as outlined by the researchers Rubin and Rubin (2012). These steps involved thematizing the inquiry, designing the study, transcribing the interview, analyzing the data, verifying validity, examining reliability, generalizing the findings, and reporting the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Within the individual interview, Questions 1 through 5 provide insight into the background of each participant as well as their relationship with their school district. Teacher preparation was also incorporated into these initial questions (Ginsberg et al., 2017). Questions 11, 12, and 13 scrutinize the environment that Black educators are subjected to when they enter into the teaching profession. This could include teachers not having promotion opportunities in the workplace, being relegated to discipline, or only being viewed as an expert on Black culture (Madsen et al., 2019). Teachers' attitudes toward progress are examined in Questions 15 through 20. These questions provide a wide array of chances for each participant to honestly articulate their perspectives about the recruitment and retention of Black teachers. The data analysis strategy for the individual interviews included protocols such as writing margin notes, creating field note summaries, identifying codes, noting patterns, identifying relations, and making comparisons (Huberman & Miles, 1994).

These protocols entailed printing the interview questions and writing margin notes while the interviewee responded to the questions. These margin notes were additional details such as the tone that the question was answered in, notes about body language, and any hesitations that may be present. Field note summaries were written in the form of a paragraph at the end of the interview questions. It encapsulated the interview experience by giving a summarization of the timeframe, temperament, and other important factors discovered throughout the course of the interview. Transcription of the interview was completed by the researcher and the responses were handwritten in a journal. The interviews were recorded through the Google Meet platform. The researcher reviewed each interview and made sure the written transcription was accurate and then typed the transcription in a Google document on a secure laptop.

Coding was conducted using Grbich's (2013) process for audiovisual coding. This process included the following questions: What codes would be expected to fit? What new codes are emergent? and What themes relate to other data sources? Additionally, Huberman and Miles' (1994) method of preliminarily counts of data codes and determining how frequently codes appear in the research was included in the coding process. However, a more detailed version of coding such as the inductive analysis of coding was also be completed in this study. This method included the initial reading of individual interviews, identification of specific text segments related to the research questions, labelling these segments of the text to create categories, reducing overlap and redundancy among the categories, and outlining the most important categories (Thomas, 2006). Saldana's (2016) In Vivo coding procedure assisted in ensuring accuracy of each interview by using the exact word choice of the participants.

Human Resource Advice Exit Survey

Qualitative exit surveys allow for a deeper analysis into the reasons behind Black teacher

attitudes toward recruitment and retention. It also presents an opportunity for teacher

introspection and permits a breadth of exploration that is not possible through quantitative

measures (Young & Hagerty, 2007). Exit surveys serve a significant role in identifying an

institution's strengths and validating existing practices that are effective. Additionally, they have

the ability to encourage reflection and prompt action (Young & Hagerty, 2007). An exit survey

was given to teacher candidate participants after they completed the individual interviews. The

exit survey was constructed through the Google Forms template via email. There was a total of

six questions that examined topics such as the greatest obstacles faced by Black educators,

necessary supports for Black educators and new methods of recruitment and retention needed for

their respective school district. The responses to the survey were in the short answer format and

written from the perspective of teachers providing advice to the Human Resource department

about recruitment and retention. Once all questions were completed they could be easily turned

into the researcher by clicking the submit button. This data collection method provided insight

into how participants have constructed meaning about what they are experiencing in regard to the

phenomenon of recruitment and retention (Moustakas, 1994). The exit survey questions that

were utilized are listed below (also see Appendix C):

Exit Survey Questions

Please respond to the following questions listed below as if you were given the

opportunity to advise your school district's Human resource department on recruitment and

retention measures. The questions are constructed within a Google Form and will be

automatically sent to the researcher once the survey is submitted.

1. What do you feel is the greatest obstacle to Black teacher recruitment in your school

   district? (RQ1)

2. What do you feel is the greatest obstacle to Black teacher retention in your school district? (RQ2)

3. List two methods that can be added to your school district's current recruitment plan. (RQ1)

4. List two methods that can be added to your school district's current retention plan. (RQ2)

5. What supports are needed from your school district for incoming Black educators? (CQ)

6. What supports are needed from your school district for current Black educators? (CQ)

Human Resource Advice Exit Survey Data Analysis Plan

After exit surveys were collected from participants, an analysis of this information was completed through the use of horizontalization. Horizontalization involved being receptive to the exit survey and acknowledging that each exit survey response holds equal value (Moustakas, 1994). Analysis strategies such as noting patterns, identifying relations, and making comparisons was applicable to this method of data collection through practices such as coding (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Coding revealed patterns and allowed for relations or comparisons to be made. There was a preliminarily count of the data codes and a notation of the frequency of the codes that appeared in each exit survey (Huberman & Miles, 1994). The inductive analysis of coding strategy, which includes initial examination of exit surveys, identification of specific elements related to the research questions, labelling these elements to create categories, reducing overlap and redundancy among the categories, and highlighting the most important categories was utilized (Thomas, 2006).

Reflective Writing Prompt

The final method used for data collection was a reflective writing prompt that was proposed to each teacher participant. This data collection method that allowed participants to share their personal and authentic reactions to the research topic. Each participant was emailed the prompt and asked to respond by typing their reflection via email (also see Appendix D).

Writing Prompt

As a Black educator in rural Southeastern North Carolina, what measures have been put in place in your school system to recruit and/or retain Black educators? How have these measures personally impacted you, your peers and future teacher candidates?

This was the last step in the data collection process and served as a final opportunity for participants to give their closing thoughts about the recruitment and retention process for Black educators in rural Southeastern North Carolina.

Reflective Writing Prompt Data Analysis Plan

The analysis strategy of field notes provided additional information that was not demonstrated through the reflective writing responses such as temperament and timeframe surrounding this process. This provided a well-rounded depiction of this collection method (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Further analysis of the reflective writing prompt responses were in the form of developing textural and structural descriptions as well as horizontalization. These descriptions focused on themes and commonalities that revealed information about context or setting in which participants experience the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Horizontalization ensured that each participants' response was viewed as equally valid, and this allowed for the creation of clusters of meaning (Moustakas, 1994).

The horizontalization process followed the same process that Huberman and Miles

(1994) outline for developing codes. This involved preliminarily counts of the data codes and determining the frequency of the codes appearance in research (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Additionally, Thomas' (2006) inductive analysis of coding strategy examined how frequently codes appeared in the research. Each reflective writing prompt were read then segments of the prompts that relate to the research questions were identified. These segments were placed into categories and there was an additional analysis to prevent overlap or redundancy. Lastly, important categories were outlined (Thomas, 2006). Saldana's (2016) In Vivo coding or literal coding was used. This form of coding allowed participant voices to be magnified by implementing their verbatim phrases and fostering the emergence of themes (Saldana, 2016).

Data Synthesis

Within this research, data was manually analyzed the data and incorporated synthesis methods outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Moustakas (1994). Triangulation was implemented by testing data sources against each other, examining patterns of thought and behavior as well as scrutinizing key events (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The in-depth description of how data was synthesized for each data collection method is explored in the following paragraphs.

This study involved an individual interview using the platform of Google Meet and contained 20 questions that cover a variety of topics related to retention and recruitment. Margin notes were added to the responses of the participants during the interview for the purpose of providing insight into body language, tone, and other key factors that may not solely be represented in the interview questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Then a field summary was written at the end of each set of interview questions. This accounted for observations such as temperament and timeframe of the interview, which are not covered in the actual interview

process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transcriptions were completed by hand by the researcher. The researcher checked for accuracy by reviewing the recorded interview through the Google Meet platform and typing the interview questions and responses into a document on a password protected computer. Coding was completed by using the strategies outlined by several researchers. Saldana's (2016) In Vivo method of coding where verbatim responses are noted was incorporated. Grbich's (2013) questions for audiovisual coding were also be answered once all responses from interviews had been gathered. Huberman and Miles' (1994) coding strategy of conducting preliminary counts and focusing on frequency of phrases was implemented in this synthesis. Lastly, Thomas' (2006) inductive analysis of coding method which builds categories and omits redundancy was utilized and allowed the researcher to pinpoint emerging themes.

Exit surveys were collected to provide additional insight into the attitudes and perceptions of Black educators about the recruitment and retention practices in their rural school districts. This was completed through the online medium of Google Forms. Horizontalization, where each exit survey is regarded as possessing equal value was utilized in this study (Moustakas, 1994). Patterns were noted, relations identified, and comparisons were made through the use of coding. The inductive analysis of coding process was used to categorize information derived from the examination and labeling of the elements of each exit survey (Thomas, 2006). The research questions assisted with building categories to code the exit surveys such as lived experiences, race and recruitment and race and retention. Huberman and Miles' (1994) coding strategy involving preliminary counts and frequency was examined when coding exit surveys.

Conclusive participant thoughts were presented in the form of reflective writing responses. After the individual interviews, each participant was emailed a reflective writing

prompt. Teacher candidates typed their responses and sent it to the researcher via email. The researcher recorded field note summaries at the end of each response, which helped with providing additional details such as timeframe and temperament surrounding the conditions of the responses and aid in the process of horizontalization (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Horizontalization did not only ensure equal value being placed on each response but assisted in the creation of textural and structural descriptions that outlined themes and commonalities while working with the coding process (Moustakas, 1994). Huberman and Miles' (1994) use of preliminary counts and frequency within coding was implemented. Saldana's (2016) In Vivo coding was used when examining the word choice of each response. Lastly, the inductive analysis of coding process was conducted to identify, label, and eventually categorize important segments that led to the development of themes and commonalities (Thomas, 2006).

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined trustworthiness as a method of convincing the researcher and readers of a study that the findings are deserving of attention. The characteristics of trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, these researchers paralleled the characteristics of trustworthiness to the quantitative concepts of validity and reliability (Nowell et al., 2017). The concepts of trustworthiness and how trustworthiness was established in this study and are discussed in the following sections.

Credibility

Tobin and Begley (2004) define credibility as the union between the participants' views and the researcher's representation of views. Additionally, credibility evaluates how credible or accurate a study is in relation to reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985)

outline several ways to establish credibility such as member checking, method triangulation, and data collection triangulation. These methods were used to establish credibility for this study.

Member Checking

Member checking was completed as a way to prove the credibility of this study. This technique involved the researcher collecting data, analyzing data, interpreting data, and establishing conclusions. These processes were taken back to the participants in order for them to judge the accuracy of the account (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Teacher participants were able to review the individual interview recording/transcript, typed exit survey responses, and their typed reflective writing response. This allowed participants to play a role in analyzing how well data captured or represented their experience, which enhanced the credibility of the research (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Method Triangulation

Triangulation in qualitative research can be defined as the use of multiple methods or data sources to create an in-depth understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999). Method triangulation refers to the use of multiple procedures of data collection for the same phenomenon (Polit & Beck, 2010). This practice is frequently used in qualitative studies (Carter et al., 2014). A variety of data collection methods were utilized such as individual interviews, exit surveys, and a reflective writing prompt. The individual interviews delved into the personal experiences and perspectives of each participant. Exit surveys gave insight into teacher perceptions of recruitment and retention measures established by each school district. The reflective writing prompt allowed each participant to contribute their final thoughts regarding the research. Credibility was achieved by having a diversity of methods of data collection.

Data Source Collection Triangulation

Data source collection triangulation requires the collection of data from different types of people, which can include various individuals and communities in order to acquire varying perspectives and credibility of data (Carter et al., 2014). While all participants in this study are Black educators in rural school districts, there still was diversity among the participants. This diversity can be seen through different genders, school demographics, grade levels, subject areas, years of experiences and school districts. This provided well-rounded and credible viewpoints about the concepts of recruitment and retention of Black educators.

Transferability

Transferability examines whether the discoveries of a study can be applied to another context. In order to create transferability, thick description is needed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A rich description allows researchers to not only transfer the information from the study to other settings, but it allows for the evaluation of shared characteristics in different environments or contexts (Erlandson et al., 1993). In this study, thick description was seen through the individual interviews, exit surveys, and a reflective writing prompt. Transferability was achieved by revisiting raw data as soon as it is collected through interview transcripts, exit surveys, and a reflective writing prompt then providing further descriptions that were helpful during the analysis process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This came in the form of asking follow-up questions or writing additional notes to clarify information from the interviews, exit surveys or writing prompt. It must be noted that the researcher can only create the conditions for transferability but cannot assure transferability.

Dependability

Dependability relates to the consistency and steadfastness of a study (Creswell & Poth,

2018). The researcher used the strategy of an audit trail to ensure the dependability of this study. The researcher provided notes on decisions made during the research process, my reflective thoughts, information about sampling, adopted research materials, data management information and emergent findings. This allowed for transparency of my research path (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Member checking, triangulation, and thick descriptions were utilized to make sure this study could be replicated regardless of time or rural location. Member checking involved being transparent about the research process with the participants through initial contact and acquiring consent. Teachers were made aware of their voluntary participation in the study and their ability to opt out of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, teachers were able to review the interview recordings, transcripts, reflective writing prompt as well as the exit survey responses that they provide. This ensured the study accurately and consistently reflects participants insight (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation of the methods and data sources created varying perspectives and different mediums for revealing the participants experiences (Patton, 1999). Thick description highlighted the shared characteristics among the participants as well as a better understanding of each context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An inquiry audit was conducted by the dissertation committee and Qualitative Research Director.

Confirmability

Confirmability involves establishing neutrality and understanding the subjectivity of data (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). The interpretation of data was not based on my preferences or perspectives but rooted in the data results. As mentioned in the previous section, the auditing process was crucial to the confirmability of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The use of member checking, triangulation, and thick descriptions created a repeatable auditing trail. These strategies ensured that the study was not grounded in the researcher's perspective, but the

experiences and interpretations of each participant. Lastly, reflexivity through memoing was implemented in order to eliminate researcher bias and maintain neutrality. Reflexivity is when a researcher clearly chronicles the intersection of relationships in terms of race, socioeconomic status, age, and cultural background between the participants and the researcher (Dodgson, 2019). Reflexivity possesses the ability to increase credibility and expand knowledge of a research topic (Berger, 2015). The researcher kept memos in a journal that highlighted personal perspectives within the various stages in the research process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were in place throughout the entire research process. The IRB approval was obtained before the collection of data or selection of participants. Proper protocol was followed when soliciting teacher participation in the study. Prior to the start of the study, teachers were notified that this study was a completely voluntary process that they could opt out of at any time throughout the duration of the study. All documents such as individual interview transcripts/recordings, exit surveys, and reflective writing prompts were kept on a password protected laptop and in a locked file cabinet. The researcher is the only individual that has access to the laptop and file cabinet. Participants, schools, and school districts were given pseudonyms. An additional layer of protection for participants included anonymizing data by removing any indicators that could identify individuals during the interview transcription, exit survey process, or reflective writing response. At any point, participants would have been released from the study at their request and any of their information would have been destroyed through shredding; and they would have been removed from all records of the study. The results of the study present no impact to the teacher participants, their students, their families, the school, the school district, or the researcher. All guidelines by the IRB, informed consent, and Liberty University were

followed.

Summary

In Chapter Three, the reasoning behind my selection of a transcendental phenomenological study was explored in detail. Key elements such as the setting, participants, researcher positionality, and study procedures were discussed in this chapter. This chapter outlined the data collection and analysis methods used in this qualitative study (Moustakas, 1994). The data collection strategies include individual interviews, exit surveys, and reflective writing prompts. Participants were made aware of the volunteer nature of the study and permission was garnered from these educators. Method and data source collection triangulation were also a part of the synthesis of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Trustworthiness was examined through the mediums of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). This study was significant because it gave voice to a demographic and phenomena that has not been heavily studied.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore teacher recruitment and retention practices for Black educators in rural counties in Southeastern North Carolina. This study is significant because when examining the process of closing the achievement gap, the role of the educator cannot be negated in regard to their capacity to impact student learning and motivation (Bowman et al., 2018). Additionally, studies have shown how minority and White students benefit from the presence of Black educators in the classroom setting (Egalite et al., 2015). This study was theoretically framed through the theories of the cultural-ecological theory for minority school performance and deficit thinking theory. These theories focus on systems and community forces that can impact Black educators (Ogbu & Simons, 1998) and the perceived deficits that they may face in society (Valencia, 1997).

The analysis utilized in this study includes method triangulation, data source collection triangulation, and member checking. Method triangulation is seen through the practices of individual interviews, exit surveys, and reflective writing responses (Polit & Beck, 2010). Data source triangulation is demonstrated through diverse backgrounds of teachers from rural Southeastern North Carolina that have participated in this study (Carter et al., 2014). Member checking is conducted through including participants in the review of their data that has been collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this chapter, the findings are presented as individual interviews, human resource exit surveys, and reflective writing prompts. The types of coding used in the data analysis process include inductive analysis of coding (Thomas, 2006) and in vivo coding (Saldana, 2016). Research was gathered from participants that were teachers in Twine, Golfe, and Haire counties in rural Southeastern North Carolina. A description of each

participant and a discussion of themes that emerged from data analysis are examined in this chapter.

The following research questions were used to guide this study and were addressed in individual interviews, exit surveys and reflective writing prompt responses:

Central Research Question: What are the lived experiences of recruitment and retention initiatives for Black teachers in rural Southeastern North Carolina?

Sub-question One: What impact does race have on recruitment into the teaching profession in rural Southeastern North Carolina?

Sub-question Two: What impact does race have on retention in the teaching profession in rural Southeastern North Carolina?

Participants

Ten educators from the Southeastern counties of Twine, Golfe, and Haire were participants in this study (see Table 1). Pseudonyms were utilized in order to preserve anonymity. There was one male and nine females in the study. Seven were elementary teachers, one was a middle school teacher, and two were high school teachers. This section will depict each teacher participant through the data derived from individual interviews, exit surveys, and reflective writing prompts.

Jessica

Jessica is a Black, female teacher that started her teaching career in Twine County through a preschool program. She attended high school in Twine County and has raised her family in this county. Jessica coaches basketball and volleyball and considers Twine County to be her home.

Jessica is very aware of the unique challenges and demographics of her school setting. In

her individual interview she stated,

I would maybe have to say as far as with me where I'm at now we do have a good number of Hispanic students, ESL students where I work at. I think I want to say maybe about 70 percent maybe like Hispanics or Spanish speaking students. So just trying to reach those children trying to make sure they have what they need in order to learn on the same level that all of our other children are learning on.

Table 1

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Age When Hired	Gender	School Type	Subject/Grade Level
Jessica	24	Female	Elementary	4th
Martin	48	Male	High	JROTC
Yvette	41	Female	Elementary	Music
Corrina	62	Female	Elementary	4th
Ashley	32	Female	Elementary	Kindergarten
Gina	24	Female	Elementary	Kindergarten
Olivia	30	Female	Elementary	Special Ed.
Bianca	43	Female	Elementary	PE
Tasha	24	Female	High	Social Studies
Megan	36	Female	Elementary	Kindergarten

Martin

Martin is a Black, male teacher that recently started teaching in Haire County. He is a retired military officer that teaches high school Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps

(JROTC). He is originally from South Carolina and is only affiliated with Haire County because it is where his home is located.

Martin brings a variety of experiences to the classroom setting from his military career. In his individual interview He mentioned,

> It's a little bit different than the army where it was mandated that we did these diversity type of professional developments like once every three months, once a quarter. I think they deal with it. Do we do small group facilitation like we do in the military, like sit down and actually talk about it in the group amongst different ranks? They don't do that. I haven't seen that in Haire County.

Yvette

Yvette is a Black, female teacher that has served in the leadership capacity of teacher of the year. She is originally from South Carolina but relocated to Golfe County due to her husband's career. She teaches music in the elementary setting.

Yvette is a perfectionist that strives to advance her professional career and promote initiatives for bettering the lives of teachers in Golfe County. In her individual interview she stated,

> And for me personally, I haven't had any personal challenges with the district or my school. If I could call it a challenge, I would just say, finding out more ways to get more involved. Like how to find out more things going on in the district and how can I be of help.

She is professional and wants to start an initiative that creates a path to certification for substitute teachers and instructional assistants in Golfe County.

Corrina

Corrina is a Black, female teacher with a unique path to becoming an educator in Twine County. She had experience in Calloway City Schools and Haire County Schools. Additionally, she served in the capacity of a college instructor, administrative assistant, and substitute teacher. Corrina was able to give insight into being a Black teacher in a majority Black student school setting. During her individual interview she said, "So no, I don't really feel anything, no negativity about being a Black teacher. Because it is a Black population".

Ashley

Ashley is a Black, female teacher that was raised in Haire County. She had experience at the Pre-K level and worked in West county schools prior to working in Haire County. Ashley commutes from West County to work in Haire County. She is young and reserved but gave insight into her unique experiences in Haire County.

In her individual interview Ashley stated,

I got a chance to come back and teach where I received my education and give back to the district. When the opportunity presented itself, I still lived in Copperboro, which is in West County, but I commute back and forth every day because I have an opportunity to work with teachers that taught me.

Gina

Gina is a Black, female teacher that works in Twine County. She is a young kindergarten teacher that is the product of Twine County Public Schools. She has family members that also work in Twine County Public Schools.

This participant's involvement was valuable to the research process because she was honest and provided meticulous details about her experiences. Her analysis of school structure

and organization gave valuable insight into her school setting. In her individual interview she stated, "In my opinion, I would say that it is very unorganized. A lot more could be done. I feel they are stuck in the old way, the traditional way, the Caucasian way."

Olivia

Olivia is a Black, female middle school special education teacher. She started as a special education teacher assistant in the class that she currently teaches in. She graduated from a high school in Twine County and considers Twine County to be her home. She is reserved but very intuitive to issues impacting special education students.

Her analysis of the experiences of Black teachers was unique because her school setting is predominantly White. In her interview she mentioned,

So, I mean, we feel that each school does a little bit different. Depending on the number of Black teachers or White teachers or the number of students, the race of the students. So, it's done a little bit different at each school.

Bianca

Bianca is a Black, female physical education teacher at the elementary level. She has a diverse educational background. She previously worked in Peace County and is one of the few Black physical education teachers in Haire County.

Bianca had a variety of perspectives about recruitment and retention of Black educators. She also showcased positive experiences in the rural school context. In her interview she stated, "Opportunities are far more greater than anything that I had ever imagined. Compared to Peace county, for an example." She has visited the Ron Clark Academy and China as a result of the opportunities afforded to her through Haire County.

Tasha

Tasha is a Black, female teacher that is a product of the Golfe County school system. She is recently married and works in the high school that she graduated from. She is one of two Black teachers that work in her school setting. She also leads several clubs and coaches softball.

Her insight was honest and gave a different perspective of Golfe County because her school is positioned in a sparsely populated area of the county. In her individual interview she mentioned, "They actually had me teaching an AP course. And so, I had an issue with parents constantly. A particular parent was constantly comparing me to what was going on at another high school in that position." She has experience teaching at the AP and standard level in the social studies department and shared the challenges associated with this position.

Megan

Megan is a Black, female teacher that worked in a kindergarten class in Golfe County. She has data manager experience and teacher assistant experience. She is new to the county and has even worked as a director of an afterschool program. She was helpful and interested in contributing to the research process.

During her interview Megan stated,

I mean, I had an issue with a student that made a racial comment. I can be honest, I had an issue with a student and I kind of felt like the principal, even though I love him, he didn't have my back with what was being said.

Results

In this section, the results of individual interviews, human resource exit surveys, and reflective writing prompts are presented by examining the emergence of prominent themes. The individual interviews consisted of teacher participants answering 20 questions that were aligned

with the central research question, sub-question 1 and sub-question 2. These interviews were

completed using the Google Meet platform and the candidates' responses varied based on their

personal experiences and school communities in rural Southeastern North Carolina. The human

resource exit surveys and reflective writing prompts were completed through participant emails.

Table 2

Themes and Sub-themes

Theme	Sub-theme	In Vivo Quote(s)
Feelings of Home	Product of Rural School System	"That's home. I got a chance to come back and teach where I received my education and give back to the district" (Ashley, Individual Interview).
		"I am a product of Twine county schools. I went through the early college program and graduated with an Associates. I also attended college in North Carolina for early childhood development" (Gina, Individual Interview).
Culture of School District	Experiences with Racism & Various Levels of Support	"I feel they are stuck in the old way, the traditional way, the Caucasian way. There tends to be a lack of resources, but we don't see that in the White schools" (Gina, Individual Interview). "This girl ended up getting the full scholarship to some college in Virginia. But when kids tell you that they want to be the manager of a blackberry farm. It shows how we have to fight against certain community mindsets" (Martin, Individual Interview).
Diversity and Equity Initiatives	Absence of a Recruitment and Retention Plan & General Teacher Recruitment	"Specifically, I don't see them doing anything for Black educators. I just think that they need educators period. Whatever race it is" (Olivia, Individual Interview). "They're not doing anything … But I think they should, you know, recognize and know the importance of diversity. Maybe visit some of the HBCUs. I think that would be a good start" (Ashley, Individual Interview).

Feelings of Home

A key theme that was revealed during the research process was the attachment to these

particular rural environments because it provided a sense of home. Concepts like family,

community events, and being raised in these locales played a major role in why teachers chose to teach in these rural school districts. During her interview, Gina, a kindergarten teacher from Twine County stated, "My mother worked for Twine county schools, so this is home." This speaks to the family tradition associated with serving in her rural school district. There were many other teachers that echoed this theme throughout the research. When asked about his recruitment to Haire County, Martin, a JROTC teacher stated, "Matter of fact, I just sold a house. I bought a house down here in like 2002 when I came back from Korea. So yeah, everything about my decision to teach here is because it's home." Additionally, when asked about her recruitment to Twine County, Olivia, a middle school special education teacher, mentioned, "So, I just decided that I'll stay close to home and just work in Twine County. I was, I did have offers in other counties, but Twine County was just where I wanted to stay." Concepts such as family, purchasing homes in the area and familiarity aid in the creation of a sense of home for these teacher participants.

Product of Rural School System

Within this research it was revealed that there is a connection between the retention of Black educators in rural Southeastern North Carolina and these teachers being products of the school district where they currently teach. This association with the county and school system contributes to their decision to remain in the school district. For example, during her interview Gina mentioned, "I am a product of Twine County schools. I went through the early college program and graduated with an Associates. I also attended a college in North Carolina for early childhood development." There was a sense of pride and familiarity conveyed through the conversations with these teachers about the rural district that they know as home. During the interview Ashley, a kindergarten teacher commented, "But my main reason for going back to

teach in Haire County was I wanted to get back and teach with the teachers that taught me." This teacher participant gave insight into how connected she was to her community and how she desired to come back for the opportunity to work with those that had contributed to her education and upbringing.

When asked about being intentionally recruited to Twine County, Jessica, a fourth-grade teacher responded, "It was my children that started going to school here. I came to school here. Well, I went to school here. So, it was just. So, it was just a home area." This participant saw Twine County as home because of her high school attendance in this location and raising her family in this environment. Many of the participants desired to teach and remain in Twine, Golfe, or Haire County because it was what they associated as home based on attending school in the environment and sharing in the traditions and customs of their rural context.

Culture of the School District

The teacher participants in this study provided descriptions of the culture found in their rural school district. The culture of their school district was an important facet to examine because it possesses the propensity to attract or repel potential educators and contribute to the decision of whether current educators want to remain. When asked to describe organization, opportunities, and community mindsets in her school district Gina divulged,

> In my opinion, I would say that it is very unorganized. A lot more could be done. I feel
> they are stuck in the old way, the traditional way, the Caucasian way. There tends to be a
> lack of resources, but we don't see that in the White schools.

Gina pointed out some concerns regarding a lack of advancement and bias in her current school setting. She further continued to state, "Some people in the community are driven to make a difference, but others are stagnant. There are not many opportunities for kids. They promote

STEAMA, but they lean towards agriculture and not other professions." These quotes revealed

how this participant did not see her rural school district in a progressive fashion. Furthermore,

she referenced a focus on agricultural professional opportunities over other career paths.

During his interview, Martin discussed a decision made by one of his students that

reflects the mindset and culture of his school district. He mentioned,

> This girl ended up getting the full scholarship to some college in Virginia. But when kids
>
> tell you that they want to be the manager of a blackberry farm. It shows how we have to
>
> fight against certain community mindsets.

His statement reveals longstanding beliefs about employment and opportunity in his area.

Additionally, cultural facets such as cost of living in a rural school district was presented

by Yvette, an elementary music teacher from Golfe County. In her exit survey she revealed,

"Majority of my school district's housing is either very rural/poor or high end with homes to

buy starting at $500, 000. There are few affordable options for teachers to live on their

salaries alone in my school district." A school district not having affordable nearby housing

options can be a deterrent to incoming teachers and also contribute to current teachers having

to relocate outside of the school district. These perspectives are valuable to understanding the

cultural lived experiences of teachers and the challenges they encounter in their rural school

districts.

Experiences With Racism

When examining the culture of each school district the topic of challenges faced as a

result of race was explored when discussing recruitment and retention measures. Understanding

the lived experiences of these educators assisted in analyzing how race impacted their

recruitment or retention. Participant experiences with racism varied in terms of school locations

and could not be generalized to a specific school district. Six out of 10 teachers believed the challenges that they faced in their school environment were not the result of race. However, six out of 10 teacher participants could give examples of hostility or confrontation that they faced due to their race. Megan, a kindergarten teacher from Golfe County, highlighted an incident involving race during her interview by stating, "I had an issue with a student that made a racial comment. I can be honest, I had an issue with a student, and I felt like the principal, even though I love him, he didn't have my back."

Additionally, Gina discussed an incident involving t-shirts during her interview. Gina commented,

> Not blatantly. There was one time where a group of Black teachers got t-shirts that said, "Black educators matter." We were called into the superintendent's office. Some of the other teachers felt it could be offensive or racist. They said it was bias, so it was a situation.

Their experiences provide awareness of some of the possible challenges related to racism that could be faced by teachers in these environments. However, Yvette is representative of other teachers that have had opposite experiences. She mentioned, "Not that I can point out and say, oh, this is due to my race." She was referencing the fact that she had never encountered confrontation or hostility due to her race in her school district. When asked the same question Bianca, a Haire County physical education teacher, replied, "I'm thinking, I don't think there's anything as far as race is concerned, just hostility about other things but not based on my race." These interactions depict the various elements associated with school culture in these rural contexts. Some teachers have encountered incidents of discomfort surrounding the issue of race while other teachers were unfamiliar with any hostile or confrontational situations even within

the same district.

Various Levels of Support

The need for support was a reoccurring sub-theme within the discussions with teacher participants. The examination of teacher support was paramount to this study because it emphasized the impact of race on the retention of the Black educators. Five out of 10 teacher participants expressed feeling supported at their school level. However, only one teacher participant reported feeling supported at the district, school, and team levels. Concepts like lack of support and resources could not be generalized to specific school districts and were unique to each school environment. During her interview Olivia responded,

> I think that at each school there's a difference between Evergreen and Dogwood
> Elementary. The way that they click together. I think in comparison to Dogwood, we're
> more close knit. We have a leader who tries to listen to all of us and tries to pull us
> together and work out anything. Any problems that we have. He just tries to keep us close
> and keep us in contact if we have a death or someone has a baby. That's part of our
> family. So, he sees us all as family.

> Olivia addresses how she perceives there being differences between the relationships

present at two elementary schools in Twine County. She highlighted being able to work out problems and how community is constructed in her school environment. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Gina gave the example of how there was a lack of support in her school environment during her interview. She mentioned,

> I haven't really thought about it. I would say new teacher support. I had a mentor
> assigned by the county and she would check on me once a week, but for some of her
> Caucasian teachers she would be in their classrooms every day. But I had a Black woman

that served as a mentor that took me under her wing. So, I did not miss out on anything, and I still see her as a mentor now.

She highlighted a gap in support in comparison to her colleagues. When asked whether she felt supported at the district, school, and team level, she further explained,

At a district level, no. We are the Black and Hispanic school. At a school level we have a change in admin, so it is to be determined. On a team level, it's go along to get along. There used to be an even split of the race of teachers. As Black teachers we gravitate to each other. However, there is division in meetings. As department chair, Caucasian teachers will overstep and not go with protocol. Sometimes it is hard to put in words.

Other teachers repeated similar sentiments. For example, in her exit survey Megan mentioned the following when asked about obstacles to Black teacher retention: "They have no support, and they are burnt out." When asked about methods to improve recruitment and retention in her district she added, "Show support and give them what they are worth … engage teachers more effectively and create better work conditions." These challenges demonstrate a lack of support in some teachers' workplaces and how support is not consistently felt at the district, school, and team levels.

Yvette reflected other teachers' experiences with support and mentioned,

Like I said before, my principal and assistant principal, my colleagues, I mean everyone who I've met in my school district, they have always extended a helping hand or hey I'll point you in the right direction if I'm not able to help you directly. I do feel supported and now I am an educator that even if I didn't feel supported I'm going to find a way anyway.

She has had positive experiences in her school district and praised the level of support that she received from all levels within her school system. Jessica also discussed,

I feel very much supported by admin, by my team, my coworkers, my grade level. We have great coping skills where we are able to work out issues, solve problems together. I feel like I can reach out to anybody if I do have any issues.

This teacher's experiences also demonstrated constructive relationships in her school setting, which showcases the varying perspectives regarding support.

Diversity and Equity Initiatives

The lived experiences of teachers related to diversity and equity initiatives influences perspectives about how race impacts recruitment and retention. When asked about their school district's response to diversity, equity, or cultural education initiatives, nine out of 10 teachers answered that their schools had something in place that ranged from Black history and Hispanic heritage month celebrations to rezoning practices. Teacher participants were also asked about current recruitment and retention measures that are in place at their school district. Three teachers discussed diverse hiring while seven out of 10 teachers did not know of a specific plan or discussed their school/district not doing anything. Many of the responses sounded similar to the information revealed by Martin. He stated,

I didn't directly hear this, but I do know there was a rumor going on about the current superintendent. The thing was he wanted to recruit more minorities. He was pushing for that life of diversity. I think that's the reason a lot of the schoolteachers left when my new principal came on board. I don't think they agreed with a white male pushing for Black leadership. So, I see this as if he is the top person talking about it, then there's a second and third order trickle-down effect. So, it's being pushed. I don't really sit in the meetings, but I can see it in the recruiting. I don't know exactly what they have in place to do it, but I can see it on the ground level. I see it's being done. So, it's being addressed.

Corrina, fourth-grade teacher from Twine County, discussed there is a presence of Black educators in her county, but like Martin, could not trace a specific plan for recruitment. When discussing positions being filled in her county she responded,

I think perhaps they were filled by Black people. Young men and young female teachers as well. So, I haven't heard them say we're recruiting Black teachers. I haven't heard them say that. But in seeing who replaced those who left, the majority of them are Black.

Moreover, in her reflective writing response about current recruitment and retention measures in Twine County Corrina stated, "As a Black educator in rural Southeastern NC I am unaware of any measures that have been put in place by the school system to recruit and/or retain Black educators." Additionally, Ashley discussed a similar reaction in her reflective writing prompt in reference to Haire County. She mentioned, "They're not doing anything that I am aware of." These responses demonstrate how some teachers may not be able to name specific recruitment or retention measures but feel as though diversity within hiring is present or being promoted while others do not feel that anything is actively being done to focus on the recruitment and retention of Black educators.

Absence of Recruitment and Retention Plan

Seven out of 10 teacher participants cited not knowing their rural school district's comprehensive recruitment and retention plan. The teachers emphasized their district having good intentions through practices such as hiring diverse candidates, minority heritage months, or putting multicultural information on their district website, but most could not reference a solidified or intentional plan that was put in place to address the desire to recruit and retain a more diverse teaching force. Jessica described her knowledge of the district's recruitment and retention plan in the following manner during the individual interview by stating,

And that's what I don't know if I can actually pinpoint. I do believe they try to keep it diverse as far as whenever they're doing the hiring process. I want to say I've heard just making sure that we keep a diverse population. Teachers, educators, and social workers. However, when asked what measures have been put in place in her school system to recruit and/or retain Black educators in the reflective writing prompt, her response stated,

> As a Black educator in rural Southeastern North Carolina, I have not come across any measures that have been put in place in my school system to recruit and/or retain Black educators, that I am aware of. I do know that my school system encourages a diverse environment and seems to have a various number of different races where I am employed. Therefore, I feel like these measures have not personally impacted me, my peers or future teacher candidates.

While she surmised her district is participating in practices that could impact Black educators such as diverse hiring, she could not confirm whether there was a specific plan in place that addressed Black teacher recruitment and retention.

During the individual interview, Yvette provided insight into her school district's measures by responding,

> I actually now serve on the recruitment and retention team for our school district, and that is something that we have been discussing. We are trying to find ways to, you know, recruit more and so what I've been doing when I see substitutes come in the building, because a lot of them are African American, I'm like hey, you know our babies need you. And so, I'm constantly asking them if they are interested in becoming an assistant teacher or maybe becoming a certified teacher because there are programs in place. I tell them that they could do it through the district and things like that.

However, this demonstrates her individual actions towards diverse recruitment and not a holistic, coordinated effort involving her school district. Additionally, in her reflective writing prompt response she mentioned,

> Also, I recently pitched the idea to the District Teacher Advisory Council to create cohort programs that help educators gain the necessary certified skills needed to fill and/or create leadership roles needed at schools. This will give teachers a sense of growing professionally and help fill needed positions essential to schools and the district such as instructional coaching, STEM certification, School Counseling as well as reading and math interventionist and so on.

While this proposal has the propensity to positively impact Black educators, it is not specifically constructed for this group's overall success, recruitment, or retention.

The following teacher's perspectives further analyze thoughts about recruitment and retention measures in the rural context. Tasha, a high school social studies teacher from Golfe County, stated,

> I couldn't tell you, to be honest. I do know one time they were going to teacher fairs, the principal, and another staff member. I don't know where they went. I know A&T used to have a job fair. I don't know if they went to UNCG or wherever. Also, I guess they could put the information on the website in regards to openings.

Many teachers knew that their school district valued diversity to some extent but could not give an example of measures that were put in place to specifically attract the talents of Black educators. When examples were given about current recruitment and retention practices teachers mentioned initiatives that were targeted at recruiting all educators from various backgrounds. A concept that emerged was the focus shifting to recruitment and retention of teachers from all

racial and ethnic backgrounds due to there being a teacher shortage in some districts.

General Teacher Recruitment

The response of teacher participants when asked about current recruitment and retention strategies focused on attracting Black educators was that they either could not provide specifics about a plan, or that their district had a teacher shortage and did not actively consider elements such as race. Olivia mentioned,

Specifically, I don't see them doing anything for Black educators. I just think that they need educators period. Whatever race it is. We have a low retention rate when it comes to educators. In Twine County, it's hard for us to keep them a lot of other counties grab our teachers. Straight out of college and then if they're teaching here, then they go to another county. So, we're competing for teachers within the county, trying to get our teachers prior to the end of the school year so that we have teachers who actually want to teach.

Her words depict how she viewed the mindsets of district leadership and the human resource department. There is not only a shortage in some districts, but there is competition to attract teachers that desire to teach in their particular locale.

In some cases, Black teachers are recruited, but there were not specific practices purportedly put in place. Corrina asserted,

Well, now, see, that's a good question because I don't really know if they're actively recruiting Black educators. And again, like I said, with that big exodus we had at the end of last year and all positions were filled when we came back in August. I don't know because some of them are White, and I think maybe those positions were filled by Black people. Young men and young female teachers as well. So, I haven't heard them say we're recruiting Black teachers. I haven't heard them say that. But in seeing who replaced

those who left, the majority of them are Black.

Another teacher participant even discussed a possible rumor regarding recruitment being geared toward other teacher demographic groups such as Hispanic teachers during the interview process. Gina quipped, "I do not think they are doing anything special for Black educators. They want all teachers. There are recruitment committees and there are some whispers of Hispanic teacher recruitment." These responses detail how Black teacher recruitment and retention may not be a priority to some rural school districts based upon their need to fill certain positions and cater to the needs of specific student groups.

Outlier Data

An unexpected finding that was revealed from this study was the impact that Hispanic students had on Black educators' perspectives about recruitment and retention initiatives. Five out of 10 teacher participants described their student population demographics as being majority Hispanic. While three teacher participants had majority Black student populations, two teacher participants had majority White student populations. Teachers were open about the challenges associated with educating Hispanic students and how this growing demographic has become the focus when dealing with minority or cultural initiatives.

There were two schools of thought held by the teacher participants when approaching the matter of Hispanic students. The first mindset was that these students had their own unique set of challenges that impacted how Black educators interacted with them. For example, when asked about the challenges she faced as a Black educator, Jessica mentioned, "I don't feel like I do now. Except for the fact of not being able to reach all of my students, me not being bilingual as far as that part." Martin also expressed how there were some challenges associated with soliciting participation from the families of Hispanic students. He responded,

I would say a majority of the community are Hispanic or Latino. A lot of times the

Hispanic parents won't come to the school like at the beginning of the school year, we

signed the different forms and stuff like open house. And I think some don't want to

expose themselves as being undocumented immigrants. So, I mean, it's just the fact they

think they won't come to certain stuff. They don't feel comfortable when we do parades

and things like that.

 Language barriers, undocumented statuses, and lack of participation due to fear or discomfort

were reoccurring themes among some teacher participants when interacting with Hispanic

students.

The other group of teacher participants described this demographic as becoming the more

dominant minority group in rural school districts. When asked about her district's response to

diversity, equity, or cultural education initiatives, Gina stated,

At times there can be what seems to be favoritism. African American culture can be

swept under the rug. As you know Black history month is coming up, but they do not

treat it the same as Hispanic heritage month.

Additionally, Tasha mentioned,

For example, our principal, you know, he sent out an email to all the department chairs

asking what we were going to do for Black History Month. They do a really big deal,

make a big deal for Hispanic Heritage Month. You may know we have a huge Hispanic

population.

These thoughts are reflective of teachers feeling as though there is a more concentrated effort to

support Hispanic students over Black students due to there being large Hispanic student

populations present in some rural school districts. This in turn can influence where school district

leadership may focus their efforts when it comes to teacher recruitment and retention. Gina further explained, "There are recruitment committees and there are some whispers of Hispanic teacher recruitment." Being the largest minority group in a school district can impact the focus of cultural celebrations and diversity measures. While it is only a rumor, there are feelings that more attention will be given to recruiting Hispanic teachers because of the needs associated with the Hispanic student population. On the other hand, the presence of teacher shortages in some districts could lead to there not being a focus on recruiting Black educators even with their being a knowledge of the benefits they possess. This could be linked to Black students and Black teachers being one of smaller minority groups, and there being a demand for teachers in general regardless of their racial or ethnic background.

Research Question Responses

The research questions that guided this study include: What are the lived experiences of recruitment and retention initiatives for Black teachers in rural Southeastern North Carolina?; What impact does race have on recruitment into the teaching profession in rural Southeastern North Carolina?; and What impact does race have on retention in the teaching profession in rural Southeastern North Carolina? The answers to these research questions are explored in the following sections with information gleaned from individual interviews, exit surveys, and reflective writing prompts.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of recruitment and retention initiatives for Black teachers in rural Southeastern North Carolina? The lived experiences of recruitment and retention of Black educators varied depending upon their school district and specific school setting. Seven out of 10 teachers were unaware of a specific plan for recruitment or retention for Black teachers

in their school district. Three out of 10 teachers were able to reference practices such as diverse hiring, but they were a small fraction of participant responses to this question. Teacher replies tended to range between not knowing of a recruitment plan to only having recruitment strategies that impact all teachers. For example, in regard to recruitment Megan stated, "I haven't seen anything. I'm gonna be honest." However, Yvette replied, "We are trying to create an alternative program to help people get those course credits so you can, you know, get ready to become a certified teacher." Overall, most teachers referenced multicultural month celebrations, but there was not any certainty about specific recruitment measures geared towards attracting Black educators.

Sub-question One

What impact does race have on recruitment into the teaching profession in rural Southeastern North Carolina? Information gathered from individual interviews, exit surveys, and reflective writing prompts revealed there were not specific initiatives aimed at intentionally recruiting Black educators. Some school districts are experiencing a teacher shortage, so the focus is on recruiting all teachers and not a specific demographic. Additionally, it was also mentioned there could be a possible interest in recruiting Hispanic teachers due to their school or district's large Hispanic student population. Olivia best reflects the reality of teacher recruitment in recent times by stating, "Specifically, I don't see them doing anything for black educators. I just think that they need educators, period. Whatever race it is." In her reflective writing response Gina also shared similar thoughts by mentioning, "I do not think they are doing anything special for Black educators. They want all teachers." When asked about current recruitment measures in place in her county Corrina responded, "Well, now, see, that's a good question because I don't really know if they're actively recruiting Black educators."

Sub-question Two

What impact does race have on retention in the teaching profession in rural Southeastern North Carolina? Discussion of retention measures in regard to race was similar in scope to recruitment practices. Many teachers referenced there not being targeted retention practices in place to explicitly support Black educators. The focus of retention was expressed as being for all educators regardless of race and teacher participants were eager to suggest practices that could be put in place to address the needs of current and incoming Black educators. For example, many teachers referenced the significance of feeling supported in their current school district. Corrina discussed the value of providing quality support to Black teachers. She stated,

> I'm not saying, excuse my language, kiss my behind. I'm not saying that. I'm saying let me know. I mean, give me a pat every now and then. You don't got to be all gushy, but can you let me know if I'm doing a good job? Like with the students, if a person or a child is encouraged and feel like that they're doing good, they're going to work even harder. I know. I mean, I will … Recruiting Black teachers and then giving them that support. I mean, sure enough bonafide support, not you going through the motions.

Bianca also mentioned,

> I feel like teachers need a lot of support. A lot. They need to know that they're doing a good job. They need to know that you care and that you support them, give them the resources, be present, help check in on them. Those beginning teacher meetings are awesome, but you need to do more than just meet with them once a month.

When participants were asked about what could be done differently to increase or retain Black educators more support for teachers was offered as a solution after other techniques such as

partnering with HBCUs/teacher preparation programs and salary increases.

Salary increases and offering incentives were some of the most noted responses to addressing issues with retention. In her exit survey Olivia stated, "Incentives and more recognition to give people the feeling of self-worth and motivate them to want to stay, and a pay raise." Yvette also alluded to monetary incentives by mentioning, "The other method is to offer supplemental pay for additional roles performed during the school day such as department chair or committee chair and for afterschool work that is done by teachers such as providing tutoring or enrichment activities." Gina shared similar thoughts by stating, "Make it a comparable rate of pay. If I can make more on line at a turkey plant then why would I pursue education. Also, make it cool to be a teacher." These responses showcase the significance of support and financial incentives in the retention process.

Summary

After conducting individual interviews, exit surveys, and reflective writing prompts with 10 teacher participants, three major themes emerged from the research findings. The first theme examined feelings of home. Several research participants were connected to their school district because they were products of the school systems that they currently teach or connected to the community through family or other close-knit experiences. The second theme analyzed the culture of the three school districts used in this study. Experiences with racism varied among teacher participants. Some teachers had vivid examples of encountering bias or hostility on the basis of their race while others had never encountered any issues. However, the desire to feel and be supported was mentioned by teachers from differing backgrounds and experiences. The last theme dealt with diversity and equity initiatives. When asked about current recruitment and retention measures the majority of teachers were unaware of a comprehensive plan in place by

their school district. Moreover, there is an emphasis on recruiting all teacher groups due to some school districts experiencing teacher shortages. Outlier data revealed that large Hispanic student populations caused there to be more concentration on Hispanic heritage months and possibly hiring Hispanic teachers to address the needs of this student group.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine teacher recruitment and retention practices for Black educators in the context of rural counties in Southeastern North Carolina. Even though research denotes that the presence of Black educators can positively influence students from various backgrounds (Easton-Brooks, 2019), there are still struggles with the recruitment and retention of Black professionals into the teaching field (Scott, 2019). On the national level there is a dearth of Black educators, and the teaching force remains substantially homogenous (Ingersoll et al., 2019). Past research outlines that the challenges to recruiting and retaining Black educators such as other lucrative careers, lack of mentorship opportunities, and inadequate working conditions (Ingersoll et al., 2019) are compounded by the additional obstacles in a rural school districts like low salaries, high instances of students in poverty, and remote locations (Beesley et al., 2019). The theoretical basis for this study is founded on the theories of the cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance and deficit thinking theory.

This chapter will explore this study through the discussion of several fundamental topics. This analysis will provide further insight into the study and conclude the findings of the research. These topics include interpretation of findings, implication for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implication, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for further research.

Interpretation of Findings

After collecting data in the form of individual interviews, exit surveys, and reflective writing prompts a series of themes and subthemes emerged in the analysis process. The first

theme that was explored was Feelings of Home. This theme focused on participants'

relationships with their community, school districts, and families. The subtheme was product of

rural school system, and it discussed how some of the teacher participants decided to teach in a

specific school district because they went to school in this district. The second theme was culture

of the school district and examined the mindsets, attitudes, and other cultural practices that

persisted in the selected rural school districts. The subthemes were experiences with racism and

various levels of support. The final theme was diversity and equity initiatives. The subthemes for

this category included absence of a recruitment and retention plan and general teacher

recruitment. These themes and subthemes will be further discussed in the following sections.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The thematic findings that emerged from the research will be analyzed through the

interpretations outlined in this section. The interpretations will concentrate on the themes of

Feelings of Home, Culture of the School District, and Diversity and Equity Initiatives.

Connections to Rural Environments. With the many challenges that rural school

districts face, it would be sensical to assume that educators would opt to teach in other

educational environments outside of the rural context. Rural districts are not all monoliths, but

there are some wide-spread similarities such as smaller student populations, poverty,

underfunding, teacher shortages, and close-knit communities (Kollie, 2007). Many educators in

this study prided themselves on graduating from a high school in their school district and

returning to their school district as a teacher. It was apparent that these educators had

intentionally chosen to make this rural county home because they had experience with the district

or felt some sort of connection to the area. This connection could also be in the form of

purchasing a home in the area or being a part of career relocation that they felt brought new

opportunity. Yvette serves as an example of this finding by stating, "Oh, so my family and I, we moved up here at the time because my husband had got another job near this area and so moved up here." The element of also having children attend schools in these areas cemented some of the participants' commitment to the school district. This can be seen through experiences of participants like Jessica that mentioned, "It was my children started going to school here. I came to school here. Well, I went to school here. So, it was just. So, it was just a home area."

Ultimately, having these connections to the rural school district served as a mitigating factor even when these educators faced obstacles, which led to their retention in the school districts. The findings are in alignment with research on rural teacher recruitment and retention because there is typically a focus on GYO programs or initiatives that recruit individuals from rural communities. These candidates are more accustomed to the rural lifestyle and school system than other educators in suburban and urban contexts (Boylan & McSwan, 1998). The interpretation of the findings revealed that many candidates that were recruited to the rural environment either originate from this environment or have life experiences linked to rural school districts.

Rural Lifestyles and Traditions. The culture of a school district is an imperative component when attracting and retaining teachers. The interpretation of the findings revealed that the lived experiences of Black educators such as varying levels of support or encountering racism can influence the desire of teachers to begin working or remain in a rural school district. For some Black educators, rural environments are not seen as appealing because they do not have the advantages of larger cities (Goodrich, 2016). Concepts such as traditionalism and mindsets that value rural lifestyles can be aversive to teachers coming from different backgrounds. Gina provides evidence of this phenomena by mentioning, "I feel they are stuck in

the old way, the traditional way, the Caucasian way. There tends to be a lack of resources, but we don't see that in the White schools." Experiences with racism can also be a point of concern associated with rural areas. Bias and having incidents involving race were a reality that some teachers faced. Megan highlights this experience by discussing a student making a racial comment toward her. She analyzes the school's culture by incorporating the principal's response and stating, "I had an issue with a student and I kind of felt like the principal. Even though I love him. He didn't have my back with what was being said."

These conditions can be exacerbated by the historical events of the past and the current social climate in the United States. Historical events such as the Reconstruction Era and *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* help to comprehend current teaching conditions for Black educators (Anderson, 2010; Johnson, 2019). Additionally, cost of living is problematic in some of these areas, which can serve as a major deterrent. A 2023 study on the cost of living in rural areas revealed that the mean price of purchasing a home was higher in urban counties, but homes in rural counties had to account for factors such digging a well, installing septic tanks, and running electricity if the home was not located in a subdivision or positioned outside of a county seat. This can result in rural housing prices that rival urban counties (Zimmerman et al., 2023). Yvette addressed this concern in her exit survey by mentioning, "Majority of my school district's housing is either very rural/poor or high end with homes to buy starting at $500,000. There are few affordable options for teachers to live on their salaries alone in my school district." These factors impact the recruitment and retention of educators in these school districts.

Absence of Targeted Initiatives. When interpreting the findings associated with diversity and equity initiatives in rural school districts it was discovered that many teachers

expressed that they felt their school district valued diversity or the contributions of Black

educators, but they could not produce or outline a comprehensive plan for recruitment or

retention of Black teachers. Research showcases that the presence of Black educators is

foundational to the success of all students, but specifically to the advancement of students of

color (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Black teachers possess the benefits of serving as mentors, role

models and providing cultural synchronicity (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2019;

Williams, 2018). However, even with the prevalence of this information there were not

concentrated efforts to actively recruit or retain Black educators in these school districts.

While there were some initiatives that could indirectly impact Black educators there was

not a holistic plan in place. Some teachers pointed to there being a teacher shortage and school

leadership focusing on all educators instead a specific demographic. This is evident through the

perspective shared by Olivia when she stated, "Specifically, I don't see them doing anything for

Black educators. I just think that they need educators period. Whatever race it is. We have a low

retention rate when it comes to educators." It was even discussed that a rise in the Hispanic

student population has been rumored to shift the focus to recruiting Hispanic educators. This is

vividly displayed through the perspective shared by Gina when she commented, "I do not think

they are doing anything special for Black educators. They want all teachers. There are

recruitment committees and there are some whispers of Hispanic teacher recruitment." Overall, if

there are not an intentional and focused efforts to recruit and retain Black educators then

progress could only result from fortuity.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The recruitment and retention of more Black educators in rural school districts can be

encouraged through policies and practices focused on pay/incentives, increased support, and

building relationships with the community and academic institutions. This section will detail ways that school districts can create policy that will target some of the challenges experienced by Black educators in the rural setting. Practices that can be followed by school district leadership, teachers, and other educational stakeholders will also be outlined as well as how it can be implemented in other transferable contexts.

Implications for Policy

The fact that majority of the teaching force is homogenous and there is a 24% higher attrition rate among Black educators is indicative of the need for a change at the policy level (Ingersoll et al., 2019). After interviewing teachers from Golfe, Haire, and Twine counties it was revealed that these rural school districts currently lack specific programs or initiatives that directly focus on the recruitment and retention of Black educators. Other recruitment and retention measures used in North Carolina include the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical Teacher Residency (2021) program, North Carolina Teaching Fellows (2021) program, and North Carolina Central University's (2022) MTI Program. However, these programs are not specifically geared toward addressing the recruitment or retention of Black educators or educators in the rural environment.

The implications for policy can be seen through recruitment and retention initiatives that focus on the areas of providing pay/incentives, standardized levels of support, and creating programs that connect the community and collegiate institutions to the K-12 academic space. The initiation of a policy that provides a housing/relocation stipend would assist in attracting potential Black educators to rural areas by providing them with the ability to afford housing in rural communities. Furthermore, the introduction of a Black educator retention stipend would allow Black teachers to have additional income as they remain teaching in a rural school district

for the first three years of their career. This policy surrounding teacher payment would have to be enacted at the state, and district levels.

Moreover, the incorporation of a district level policy that creates support positions such as instructional coaches or beginning teacher coordinators that specifically work with Black or minority educators would allow this demographic to receive support on not only lesson plans or student needs, but on issues that are unique to their experiences as Black educators. These positions may not be at every school but can be shared throughout the school district in order to address the needs of Black educators. The last policy that can be created in these rural school districts are programs that connect with the community through GYO teacher cadet programs at the high school level and connecting with local community colleges and all North Carolina HBCUs to form recruitment initiatives. The rural school districts could work with these entities to increase the number of Black educators from their institutions that desire to teach in a rural area.

Further, a recruitment and retention goal could be put in place for every school district that is reviewed every three years to examine whether key markers of growth in recruitment and retention have been attained. If the goal is not met then there should be a review conducted of the strategies utilized by the school district and school level leadership. The aforementioned policies should be easily accessible to all educational stakeholders and communicated through mediums such as the school district website, social media, and during face-to-face meetings at the county and school levels. The policies should also be a part of each rural school district's strategic plan.

Implications for Practice

In terms of practice, the implementation of the above mentioned policies have the propensity of attracting and retaining Black teachers if appropriate execution of these measures

are put into place. Incoming Black educators should be given a stipend that can help to offset the cost of housing or be used for relocation expenses to a rural school district. This will aid in housing not being a deterrent to Black educators that are considering moving to a rural school district. An additional stipend should be given to Black educators that agree to teach in a rural school district for a minimum of three years. Each year the stipend should gradually increase, and this stipend should extend to their third year. This stipend can be used to supplement income or for additional classroom supplies and materials. This benefit would attract potential teachers that were looking into other professions due to them being more lucrative and it would retain teachers due to gradual increase from year one to year three. This should add a form of stability to the lack of pay that is available to teachers in recent times. Other incentives that were outlined by teacher participants are allowing teachers to receive additional pay through fulfilling leadership positions, tutoring, club facilitation, etc.

The process of incorporating support staff such as instructional coaches and beginning teacher coordinators that specifically assist Black or minority teachers could contribute to retention measures in these areas. These support staff members could meet with teachers two to three times a week in the format of face-to-face meetings and classroom observations. This will give teachers insight into their performance and help them to not feel alone in their development process. At the beginning of the year a plan for growth and support can be developed between the teacher and the support staff in order for there to be accountability metrics in place to ensure the district and teacher's personal goals are being accomplished. Moreover, county level meetings that allow Black educators to assemble, fellowship, and learn to navigate the unique challenges that they face can also aid with retention. These meetings can be in the form of orientations to the school district as well as gatherings that allow them to be recognized for their

performance in the classroom or community.

Additionally, the creation of a program that focuses on growing its own teachers and connecting with local community colleges and HBCUs can be beneficial to addressing the needs surrounding the recruitment and retention of Black teachers. The GYO programs should be established at each high school in the rural school district. This will allow for educators to be cultivated from the rural community and can assist with the intentional recruitment of Black educators if Black students are encouraged to be a part of these programs. There should then be a partnership established between the local community colleges and all North Carolina HBCUs. The partnership could reduce the cost of potential teachers' education if they are a Black educator and agree to teach in a rural school district. This would aid in incentivizing students that have not even graduated their teacher preparation programs. While in the program, the participants would be able to volunteer, and student teach in these rural districts in order to become accustomed to the different rural school districts and make the best career decisions. After graduating they would be able to have guaranteed employment in a rural school district. While the policies and practices outlined here are geared toward the three specific rural school districts in this study, they may also be effective for other rural school districts.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This section will analyze the theoretical and empirical implications associated with the study. The theoretical basis of this study was established through John Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance (Ogbu & Simons, 1998) and Richard Valencia's Deficit Thinking Theory (Valencia, 1997). Ogbu's theory highlighted how minorities respond to treatment from institutions such as schools (Ogbu & Simons, 1998) and Valencia's theory examined how Black teachers may have to deal with perceived deficits being placed on

them as educators (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). This study revealed that the lived experiences of Black educators in regard to rural recruitment and retention varied, but typically lacked comprehensive and targeted plans to address recruiting and retaining Black educators. In terms of the empirical implication, this study adds to the literature by bringing attention to experiences of Black educators in the rural context. This gap in literature sets the stage for more research about the impact of Black educators being recruited and retained in diverse locations.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications of this study are noteworthy because they help to frame the challenges experienced by Black educators in this specific setting. Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance focuses on the concepts of systems and community forces (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). This study revealed that systems such as the treatment that teachers received in their school settings or school districts impacted their response or community forces. Some teachers felt they had more opportunity in their rural setting while other teachers acknowledged obstacles that they encountered in their schools or school districts.

Factors such as their sense of home, culture of the school district, and diversity and equity initiatives shaped how they viewed their experiences. Some teachers continued to function in their school district regardless of the challenges they faced because it was established as home through raising their family, buying a home, or being there majority of their lives. The culture of the school district such as being focused on traditionalism, agricultural careers, or indirect and direct experiences with racism impact whether teachers are attracted or repelled from these school districts. Additionally, there being a lack of a concentrated plan to address the needs associated with recruitment or retention of Black educators can influence community forces or the responses of these teacher participants.

The findings shed new light on Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance by revealing how there is a lack of systems or policies present that address the recruitment and retention of Black educators. This diverges from the traditional understanding of the theory because there is usually a policy, pedagogy, or educational returns that serve as the system, but this element is missing from this study (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).The response to this treatment or community forces can be seen through Black educators projecting a range of behaviors such as being successful in these environments while other teachers are aware of deficiencies and are disgruntled with the progress in rural school districts.

Valencia's (1997) deficit thinking theory examines how marginalized groups such as Black educators are unfairly viewed as inadequate or inferior without any sound evidence to support this conclusion. Some Black educators may have had to face this form of thinking from others or themselves throughout their academic career. This way of thinking can contribute to some teacher participants feeling as though they were viewed differently than their White counterparts or not given the same resources as other schools with different demographics. The lack of comprehensive plans to handle the recruitment and retention of Black educators can also lead to some educators feeling as though they are less important due to their recruitment and retention not being at a high level of priority. Beliefs or perceptions of inferiority can lead to teachers leaving the profession or not desiring to enter. The theoretical implications of this study assist in adding understanding the lived experiences of Black educators surrounding recruitment and retention in rural Southeastern North Carolina.

In regard to the deficit thinking theory, Black teachers viewed themselves as competent educators but were unsure of how their district viewed them due to there being little investment into the specific initiatives that targeted Black educators. The fact that there is a lack of clarity on

the perceptions of Black educators in this setting demonstrate a divergence from the deficit thinking theory, which outlines marginalized groups as being viewed as having shortcomings (Valencia, 1997). This study reveals that the lived experiences of Black educators in rural school districts varied among educators, but there was an insufficient amount of intentional strategies for recruitment and retention of Black teachers.

Empirical Implication

The empirical implication of this study can be seen through the contributions to the fields of Black teacher recruitment and retention and rural teacher recruitment and retention. The novel contribution or findings of this study reveal that Black educators in the rural context possess a variety of lived experiences (Gist, 2018). Some teachers experience life in majority Black and Hispanic schools and face obstacles such as lack of resources and support. Other teachers were the minority at their predominantly White school but still faced challenges like affordable housing and experiences with racism (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Zimmerman et al., 2023). A common theme that uniquely contributes to the research and showcases a gap in literature is the absence of intentional recruitment and retention plans or measures for Black teachers in the participating rural school districts. The use of methods such as individual interviews, exit surveys, and reflective writing prompts allowed teachers to freely express their viewpoints without the concern of being judge or there not being any anonymity (Polit & Beck, 2010). The interview platform of Google Meet allowed for the interview to be scheduled at a reasonable timeframe and the interview to be conducted in an intimate space. The exit survey and writing prompt also encouraged participation through the use of mediums such as Google Forms and email, which allowed these items to be completed at the participant's convenience. The design of this study being a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study aligned with the purpose of

the study by allowing the participants' voices to be heard and the researcher to reflect on the

findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations of this study include the sample only consisting of one male. The study could

have been more multifaceted if more insight was provided from Black males at all levels of

education. It would have been valuable to hear their voices in the individual interviews, exit

surveys, and reflective writing prompts as well as have access to a different vantage point on

issues surrounding recruitment and retention. The implementation of more diversity with the

levels of teachers that were selected would have advanced the study. Having more teachers that

taught at the middle school level would have given an even more well-rounded depiction of the

unique experiences of Black educators.

Moreover, the utilization of a different platform other than Google Meet would have been

beneficial because there were times when this medium did not interact well with the school email

addresses of teachers. Participants had to use their personal email accounts in order to

accomplish the individual interviews in some instances. This platform was chosen because of

teachers being familiar with this medium due to the pandemic and its ability to easily record but

was not absent of challenges. In terms of recruiting research participants there was a challenge

due to the topic being about Black educators' recruitment and retention. Some Black teachers felt

the topic was controversial and opted out of participating in the study. Also, teachers are busy

with lesson planning, grading, afterschool activities, family, etc. and there were times when

interviews had to be rescheduled several times to accommodate when teachers would cancel or

miss interviews.

Delimitations of this study include using only the rural counties of Golfe, Haire, and

Twine. These counties provided valuable information and are a part of Southeastern North

Carolina, but the feedback could have been different if more counties would have been included.

Three counties were selected to maintain a reasonable number of participants in the study.

However, results from other rural counties in North Carolina would also be valuable for future

studies. Other delimitations include not using pre-kindergarten teachers in this study due to this

type of teacher not being prevalent in all school districts. In some districts there was a surplus of

Black pre-kindergarten teachers, but in other districts these teaching positions were confined to

the daycare setting. This would not have produced a controlled comparison between the districts

because the treatment of teachers and students may vary based upon the pre-kindergarten

location.

The terminology of "African American" or "Minority" recruitment and retention was not

utilized in order to focus on the specific lived experiences of Black educators. The term "Black

educators" includes the vast array of educators from African, African American, and Caribbean

descent. Lastly, a transcendental phenomenological study was used over a hermeneutic study

because the transcendental approach does not concentrate on the researcher's interpretations, but

on the experiences of participants while the hermeneutic approach involves lived experiences

and interpreting "texts of life" (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). This facilitates authentic

voices of participants surfacing, meaning to the phenomena being provided and new identity

being established (Moustakas, 1994).

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research include reevaluating the sample of teacher

participants and supplying more individual interview questions to address teacher participants'

plans regarding recruitment and retention. Exploring a wider range of rural counties in the state

of North Carolina has the propensity to further develop the study. The use of only three counties could be limiting to understanding the full gamut of Black educators' lived experiences. It would be interesting to have used a larger number of counties and different rural counties in Southeastern North Carolina. Furthermore, the incorporation of teachers from a variety of rural counties throughout the state of the North Carolina could have possibly rendered different findings based upon the different geographical region.

Additionally, examining the experiences of other minority groups would have added to the richness of the study. Many teacher participants mentioned having large Hispanic student populations and rumors of Hispanic teacher recruitment were discussed. It would have been beneficial to see the experiences of this teacher demographic and to analyze the advantages of recruiting teachers with this background. The incorporation of this group would assist in understanding how school districts handle the recruitment and retention of groups other than Black educators. This could start discussions about the necessity behind recruiting each group and reveal whether all teacher recruitment is the actual goal of rural school districts.

Lastly, in order to provide additional clarity about the teacher participants' feelings regarding recruitment and retention, the introduction of the following individual interview questions could be implemented. The interview questions include: Would you advise a new teacher to begin teaching in your school district? and In the future, do you envision yourself retiring from this school district, leaving this school district to teach elsewhere, or leaving the profession? These questions would provide closure about how teachers felt about the recruitment and retention process in their district as well as how their lived experiences will impact their futures.

Conclusion

The objective of this transcendental phenomenological study was to investigate teacher recruitment and retention practices for Black educators in rural counties in Southeastern North Carolina. The research question that served as the fundamental basis of the study was the following: What are the lived experiences of recruitment and retention initiatives for Black teachers in rural Southeastern North Carolina? Black teachers from the high school to elementary levels of Golfe, Haire and Twine counties served as participants in this study. The data collection methods of individual interviews, exit surveys, and reflective writing prompts were used in order to encourage triangulation. The data analysis strategies in this study include inductive analysis of coding (Thomas, 2006) and in vivo coding (Saldana, 2016). The themes that emerged from the study were Feelings of Home, Culture of the School District, and Diversity and Equity Initiatives. Implications for policy include the creation of legislation to increase pay/incentives, support, and connections with other academic institutions. The key interpretations derived from the research are that the lived experiences of Black teachers were varied in the rural school districts, but there was a lack of understanding or knowledge of a holistic recruitment and retention plan for Black educators. Implications for practice are stipends for housing/relocation and retention as well as support staff specifically for Black teachers. Additional implications include Grow Your Own high school programs and partnerships with local rural community colleges and all North Carolina HBCUs. The theoretical implications are that systems, community forces, and deficit thinking can impact the recruitment and retention of Black teachers through their lived experiences. Empirical implications highlight the gap in literature of Black educators' recruitment and retention in the rural context. Limitations of the study were the sample needing to be more diverse in terms of grade levels and gender of participants.

Recommendations for future research include using different rural school districts inside of Southeastern North Carolina, involving other rural counties throughout the state of North Carolina, exploring Hispanic teacher recruitment and retention and the inclusion of more individual interview questions.

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APPENDIX A: Teacher Consent Form

EDUC 989 Qualitative Research Study (BLACK TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN RURAL AREAS OF SOUTHEASTERN NORTH CAROLINA)
Angelina Cobb, M.A.Ed., Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a qualitative research study. In order to participate, you must be 21 years or older work in a rural school district and identify as a Black educator. The years of teaching can span from first year to 30 + years. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. The researcher is required to submit an IRB application and receive approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board.

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 the study is to examine recruitment and retention efforts in rural school environments. This study is significant because it can assist with closing the minority student achievement gap.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Individual Interview-You will complete a one on one interview through Google Meet. The interviews will be 30 minutes to an hour in length.
2. Exit Survey- Each candidate will be asked to provide responses to six questions in the form of giving advice to their Human Resource department. The online medium of Google Forms will be utilized, and the survey will be submitted through email. It should only take ten to fifteen minutes to complete.
3. Reflective Writing Prompt- The reflective writing prompt will collect any final thoughts on the recruitment and retention measures utilized in each candidate's school district. The prompt will be typed and submitted through email. It should only take ten to fifteen minutes to complete.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are improved recruitment measures of Black teachers, more diversity in rural environments and discussion about equitable practices.

Benefits to society include assisting to close the achievement gap among minority students and their White counterparts.

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 from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation, such as in a personal office or through an online medium.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations or research studies. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Teacher participants 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.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study. Participation within this study is completely voluntary.

Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?

The researcher served as an administrator at a middle school in Southeastern North Carolina. To limit potential or perceived conflicts the researcher will ensure that all data is stripped of identifiers before it is presented. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

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 or any rural school district. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

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 from interviews, exit surveys or reflective writing prompts 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 Angelina Cobb. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Rogers, at ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓.

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, video-record, and photograph me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

_____

Signature & Date

_____

APPENDIX B: Individual Interview Questions

1. Explain your educational background (high school, college and beyond). (CQ)

2. How did you become a teacher in X school district? Did you attend a teacher preparation program? (CQ)

3. Why did you become a teacher in X school district? Were you intentionally recruited? (CQ, and RQ1)

4. What age were you and what was your experience level when you began working in X school district? (CQ)

5. Prior to teaching in X school district, what affiliation did you have with this school district? (CQ)

6. How would you describe this school district in terms of organization, opportunities, and community mindsets? (CQ)

7. What has been your challenges working in this school district? Any of your challenges specific to being a Black educator? (CQ, and RQ2)

8. How does your school district respond to diversity, equity, or cultural education initiatives? (CQ, and RQ2)

9. Explain whether you feel supported working in this school district. At the school level? At the team level? (CQ)

10. Describe any bias, discrimination, or opposition that you have encountered due to your race. (CQ, and RQ2)

11. Give an example of when you were not afforded the same opportunities as your White counterparts in your school environment.

12. Give an example of any instance of hostility or confrontation that you have encountered on the basis of race in your school environment. (CQ, and RQ2)

13. How would you describe the student population and school community that you service? (CQ)

14. How do you feel about the notion that having more Black teachers will improve or benefit the performance of Black students? (CQ, and RQ1)

15. What do you feel is the greatest challenge of Black students in today's society? (CQ)

16. How does your school or school district intentionally address the needs of Black students? (CQ)

17. What does your school district currently do to recruit and retain Black educators? What has been done in the past? (RQ1, and RQ2)

18. What could be done differently to increase or retain the numbers of Black teachers? (RQ1, and RQ2)

19. What are the views and attitudes towards Black educators in your school district? (CQ, RQ1)

20. What other topics related to Black teacher recruitment and retention; do you feel should be discussed that were not mentioned during this interview? (CQ, RQ1, and RQ2)

APPENDIX C: Exit Survey Questions

Please respond to the following questions listed below as if you were given the opportunity to advise your school district's Human resource department on recruitment and retention measures. The questions are constructed within a Google Form and will be automatically sent to the researcher ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ once the survey is submitted.

1) What do you feel is the greatest obstacle to Black teacher recruitment in your school district? (RQ1)

2) What do you feel is the greatest obstacle to Black teacher retention in your school district? (RQ2)

3) List two methods that can be added to your school district's current recruitment plan. (RQ1)

4) List two methods that can be added to your school district's current retention plan. (RQ2)

5) What supports are needed from your school district for incoming Black educators? (CQ)

6) What supports are needed from your school district for current Black educators? (CQ)

APPENDIX D: Reflective Writing Prompt

Type your response to the following prompt and send via email to ▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆:

As a Black educator in rural Southeastern North Carolina, what measures have been put in place in your school system to recruit and/or retain Black educators? How have these measures personally impacted you, your peers and future teacher candidates?

APPENDIX E: Institutional Review Board

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 5, 2022

Angelina Cobb
Sherrita Rogers

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-417 Black Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Rural Areas of Southeastern North Carolina

Dear Angelina Cobb, Sherrita Rogers,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) 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(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

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