A Qualitative Research Study Exploring the Lived Experiences of K-12 School Teachers Who

Serve African American Students Who Speak African American Vernacular English

by

Kayla Davies

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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Abstract

The purpose of the proposed transcendental phenomenological study will be to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of k-12 schoolteachers working with African American students and their usage of AAVE in the State of Maryland. The theories guiding this study are critical race theory and Krashen's second language acquisition theory. This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study will collect data from 12 participants in the state of Maryland using individual interviews, focus groups, and letters. The data will then be analyzed using Braun and Clarke's qualitative descriptive research data analysis plan. The data showed that k-12 schoolteachers mainly perceived AAVE as a community dialect. Although some teachers believed that AAVE was an acceptable academic dialect, there was a common theme among the participants preferring African American students to code-switch when necessary.

Keywords: African American Vernacular English, Dialect, Language, Linguistic Justice

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Jesus, the Light of my life!

I dedicate this to the little girl I used to be, who knew at the tender age of 6 she would become a Doctor.

To my family for their love and support.

To my Black Ancestors who paved the way for my education.

To my Black community that shaped who I am.

To the hope that I have for reducing systemic barriers for African American students.

To my beautiful daughter who is a princess in her own light, may she pursue education and righteousness all her life.

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Table 2. Themes

List of Abbreviations

AA (African American)

African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

English Learner (EL)

Krashen's Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Mainstream English (ME)

Speech Language Pathologist (SLP)

United Teachers Union (UTU)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Language is culture, and culture is language (Alba et al., 2020). The two are inextricably connected. Culture is defined as beliefs, traditions, and values and is responsible for shaping primary language development (Alba et al., 2020). Language affects grammar, sentence structure, the manipulation of concepts and meanings, and personal views (Everett, 2018; Gelman & Roberts, 2017). For this reason, this proposed transcendental study aims to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of elementary teachers who work with African American (AA) students who speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in Maryland. This chapter details the background of AAVE, the problem statement, the purpose statement, the significance of the study, the research questions, and pertinent definitions related to the study.

Background

AAVE has rich historical, social, and theoretical underpinnings. Each component helped to shape the connotation surrounding AAVE as a language dialect variation of Mainstream English (ME). The historical element provides details as to how AAVE evolved. The social element describes how the views of AAVE affect society, community, and educational systems. Lastly, the theoretical section outlines the theoretical concepts contributing to AAVE.

Historical Context

Historically, AAVE was viewed as a poverty language adopted by AA slaves in the United States of America (PBS, 2005). AAVE was once called Non-standard Negro English (Ellis, 2021). Taylor asserted that due to the negative connotation, the term ebonics was created by Robert Williams on January 26th, 1973 (McLaren, 2009; Taylor, 1973). The term was coined by merging the words' ebony,' defined as 'black,' and the word 'phonics' together.

Ebonics is described as the cognitive and language development of the Black child (McLaren, 2009; PBS, 2005). Ebonics resulted during the post-civil rights era and sparked controversy within academics. School systems aimed to educate AA students, but many educators credited ebonics as a barrier to doing so (McLaren, 2009). Educators believed that ebonics interrupted the flow of ME, which was required for academic success (McLaren, 2009). Ebonics later became AAVE (PBS, 2005; Sidnell, 2012). Though the term changed, many educators viewed AAVE as ME with mistakes (Pullum, 1999).

Social Context

Socially, AAVE is spoken predominantly by AAs. AAVE is also spoken among other cultures; some dialect components can even be seen within ME. Routinely, AAVE is associated with slang terms. However, slang and AAVE are two different concepts. Nevertheless, AAVE could frame slang terminology (Rickford et al., 2000). For example, slang recognized the term "phat" as meaning excellence.

Linguists such as Carmen Fought, Dennis Baron, and John Baugh declared AAVE a legitimate language with specific conventions, grammatical rules, and syntax (PBS, 2005). One example is what linguists call "negative inversion (Labov, 1968)." "Aint nobody talkin' to you" is an example of a negative inversion within AAVE (Labov, 1968.). The same statement may translate into "no one is talking to you" in ME. For similar reasons, AA students who speak AAVE are at high risk of being misdiagnosed within classrooms where teachers need to be made aware of the social implications surrounding the AAVE dialect (Brette-Hamilton, 2020).

Theoretical Context

Theoretically, Stephen Krashen aligned his philosophical views of language with Descartes. Descartes believed that it required very little reason to be able to speak. Borrowing

from Descartes's philosophical thought, Krashen coined a second language acquisition (SLA) theory which supported the belief that language is both acquired and learned (Descartes, 1996; Higgs & Krashen, 1983). The critical race theory (CRT) is aligned with a social justice agenda stemming from the civil-rights era. CRT inserts that racism is embedded in the systems that govern America. This includes preferential attitudes toward ME in academics because it is associated with the rich white culture while stigmatizing language dialects that are not ME.

This study provides a refined perspective by applying SLA and CRT to AA students who use AAVE. As a result, the study should reveal possible misconceptions teachers may hold regarding AAVE and their beliefs on teaching dialect shifting to ME (Jonsberg, 2001). The study should encourage educators to seek continued professional development within the work of Krashen and CRT regarding language acquisition and sociolinguistics to strengthen their approaches when serving AA students who speak AAVE (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; S. D. Krashen, 2003; Ray, 2019).

Problem Statement

The problem of the proposed research study is that k-12 schoolteachers are overly referring AA students to be evaluated for special educational services because of their usage of AAVE and, as a result, schools are misdiagnosing and misplacing AA students in special educational programs (Brette-Hamilton, 2020; Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Hallett, 2020; Mills et al., 2021). A professional's lack of pedagogical content and skills surrounding AAVE contributes to the problem (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Saad & Polovoy, 2009). Byrd and Brown (2021) suggested that original approaches for engaging AAVE at the K-12 level were racist and classist and suggested that teachers did not consider AAVE a legitimate language and, therefore, retaught language to AA students (PBS, 2005; Shah, 2019).

AA students who do not speak ME reported unworthiness, isolation, and inferiority (Dunstan & Jaeger, 2016; Shah, 2019). In many cases, speech-language pathologists have misinterpreted AAVE as a language deficiency because of an inability to recognize language dialect dexterity (Hallett, 2020; Robinson & Norton, 2019). As a result, AA students fell behind academically by being misplaced in educational settings due to their dialect (Brette-Hamilton, 2020; Mills et al., 2021; Saad & Polovoy, 2009).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the proposed transcendental phenomenological study will be to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of k-12 schoolteachers working with AA students and their usage of AAVE in the State of Maryland. At this stage in the research, AAVE will be generally defined as a dialect of English spoken by many AAs in the U.S., which share a set of grammatical and phonological rules (McLaren, 2009). Krashen's SLA theory and the CRT will guide this study. SLA relates to the characteristics of language development among students who already possess a primary language, while CRT highlights the racial biases embedded in society. Therefore, SLA and CRT will be applied to this study to help inform the importance of how AA students develop a second language dialect and navigate their educational journey as a minority (S. Krashen, 1991).

Significance of the Study

In this study, participants will describe their experiences serving AA students who speak utilizing AAVE at an elementary school in Maryland. The findings from this study will be significant because the information can highlight the need for cultural awareness and linguistic training for elementary school teachers beyond ESOL. Cultural awareness and linguistic training can help teachers understand Krashen's SLA theory, which will help promote linguistic dexterity,

language diversity, and equity within classrooms (Hallett, 2020; Palinkas et al., 2015). While also enhancing a teacher's awareness of language development and intellectual understanding of the AAVE dialect (Loizos & Yiasemina, 2018). This study will also contribute to AAVE's theoretical, empirical, and practical components.

Theoretical Perspective

This study is guided by Krashen's SLA theory (S. Krashen, 1991). Krashen's SLA theory examines second language development (S. Krashen, 1991). However, SLA does not necessarily examine how a second language dialect is developed. It is argued that AAVE is not a different language but simply a dialect of ME. The tenets for acquiring and learning formal ME can be likened to developing a new language (Brette-Hamilton, 2020; S. Krashen, 1991). The results from this study help expand the current theory beyond second language development into becoming applicable to second language dialect development.

Critical race theory (CRT) is the study's theoretical foundation to investigate AAVE further. CRT was developed by prominent scholars such as Kimberle Crenshaw, Patricia Williams, and Richard Delgado. CRT seeks to understand social situations and how society ascertains itself along racial hierarchies to change them. The results from the study can highlight the ways that language dialects of marginalized communities frequently contribute to the sociocultural forces that perpetuate racism.

Empirical Perspective

This research study aims to fill a gap in the literature to address the problem of k-12 schoolteachers overly referring AA students to special education services due to their usage of AAVE. This results in the misdiagnosing and misplacing of AA students into special educational programs based on their AAVE dialect (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021). Little is known about

teachers' experiences serving students who speak AAVE and what teachers believe about language (Metz, 2019). Compared to that of English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), research is consistently reporting that teachers are preparing ESOL students to accept the notion that ME is the only valid and acceptable English dialect (Swift, 2022). Additionally, findings have shown that teachers who serve ESOL students are only cognizant in inviting their students' home language into the classroom, if those teachers have indulged in self-reflection to address any potential pre-conceived biases (Park, 2019).

Furthermore, Lippi-Green (2012) has conducted several studies examining AAVE from the lens of speech language pathologists, where it was concluded that AAVE was treated as a language deficiency due to a limited understanding and resources at the disposable of speech language pathologists (Lippi-Green, 2012). As stated afore, little is known about teachers' experiences serving students who speak AAVE and what teachers believe about language (Metz, 2019). There the findings from this study could present new information to support the existing literature.

Practical Perspective

AA students are more likely to drop out of high school and earn substantially less pay throughout their lifetime (Johnson et al., 2017). The onset of this cycle starts with academic experiences. Frequent misdiagnoses based on the AA students' usage of AAVE contribute to decreased student achievement outcomes. The results of this study could help create programs and interventions for professional training and community expansion to improve the understanding of language development and AAVE spoken code (Brette-Hamilton, 2020).

Research Questions

The problem of the proposed research study is that k-12 schoolteachers are overly referring AA students to be evaluated for special educational services because of their usage of AAVE and, as a result, schools are misdiagnosing and misplacing AA students in special educational programs (Brette-Hamilton, 2020; Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Hallett, 2020; Mills et al., 2021).The research questions will reveal possible misconceptions teachers may hold regarding AAVE and their beliefs on teaching dialect shifting to ME (Rickford et al., 2000). The research questions will explore the perceptions and lived experiences of k-12 schoolteachers working with AA students and their usage of AAVE in the State of Maryland.

Central Research Question

What have been the perceptions and lived experiences of k-12 school teachers who work with AA students and their usage of the AAVE?

Some teachers believe AAVE is acceptable in informal educational learning environments (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Mills et al., 2021; PBS, 2005). For example, when students are sharing personal narratives with the class. While other teachers feel inadequate when working with students who speak AAVE (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Siddaway et al., 2019). Professional development on AAVE could help resolve the sense of inadequacy, teachers need help welcoming dialect diversity and correcting the student's dialect to satisfy institutional requirements. Lippi-Green (2012) referred to this as the irresolvable conflict.

Sub-Question One

What are k-12 teachers' beliefs about using cultural dialects within the education learning environment?

Teachers believe AAVE is a community language dialect appropriate outside of the classroom (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; PBS, 2005). Some teachers acknowledge that there is an important cultural component to dialect. However, they also reported correcting their students' cultural dialect within the educational learning environment (Daniels, 2018). They shared the feeling that they were telling their students that their cultural dialect was wrong. Some teachers believe that ME is formal and correct and that cultural dialects are deviations from learning (Daniels, 2018; Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Hallett, 2020; Loizos & Yiasemina, 2018).

Sub Question-Two

How do k-12 teachers' perceptions of dialect variation contribute to the misdiagnosing and misplacement of AA students in educational learning environments?

There is a discrepancy between teachers' perceptions regarding AAVE and students' usage of AAVE (Hendricks & Jimenez, 2021). Frequently, teachers confuse AAVE with speech-language impairments (Hendricks & Jimenez, 2021). The teachers' role in assisting with diagnosing the Black child is critical. Speech-language pathologists often employ the teacher's perspective when assessing the child and determining educational placement (Brette-Hamilton, 2020; Gregory & Oetting, 2018). For that reason, Black children are typically over-placed in special education programs because of linguistic misdiagnoses (Brette-Hamilton, 2020; Mills et al., 2021)

Definitions

The following terms, concepts, and theories will be used throughout this research:

1. *African American English* (AAVE) - At its most literal level, AAVE means 'black speech' (Rickford et al., 2000).

2. *Code-Switching/Dialect-Switching*- Gumperz (1982) defined code-switching as the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems (Gumperz, 1982).

3. *Dialect*- A language variety shared by speakers (PBS, 2005).

4. *Language*- Linguist Carmen Fought explains that language expresses our identity and reflects who we are and want to be (PBS, 2005).

5. *Krashen's second language acquisition (SLA) Theory*- Language is acquired and learned. Developing a second language is formal and informal (S. Krashen, 1991).

6. *Critical Race Theory (CRT)* - Racism is embedded in educational systems that are continually perpetuated by preferential acceptance of the culture associated with power while diminishing the value of other cultures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Summary

The proposed qualitative phenomenological research study will be an exploration of the perceptions and lived experiences of k-12 school teachers serving AA students who speak utilizing AAVE. AA students are frequently misdiagnosed and misplaced in educational programs because teachers sometimes need more skills and pedagogical content regarding AAVE (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021). This chapter highlighted the relevant literature, theoretical framework, research questions, and definitions necessary for understanding the problem. The results of this study could inform practices for promoting linguistic equity, language dialect competencies, and educating teachers on how language is developed. Chapter two reviews the literature, chapter three details the methodology, chapter four discusses the research findings, and chapter five provides a summary, conclusion, implications for replication, and future research areas.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide details of the existing research surrounding African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Current literature shows that Mainstream English (ME) is formal and correct, while AAVE is viewed as a deviation from learning (Hallett, 2020; Loizos & Yiasemina, 2018). Moreover, teachers, parents, students, and speech-language pathologists tend to uphold this view regarding AAVE and other English varieties that are not considered ME (Metz, 2019; Sidtis et al., 2021). This chapter will present a comprehensive review of Krashen's second language acquisition (SLA) theory, the critical race theory (CRT), along with current literature concerning AAVE.

Theoretical Framework

The theories guiding this study are CRT and Krashen's SLA theory, which comprises five hypotheses: the acquisition-learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the input hypothesis, the affective filter, and the natural order hypothesis (Higgs & Krashen, 1983; S. Krashen, 1991). Krashen aligns his philosophical views of language with Descartes. Descartes (1996) believed that it required very little reason to be able to speak. Krashen coined the SLA theory, supporting that belief and reinforcing that language is acquired and learned (Higgs & Krashen, 1983; Oller & Krashen, 1988).

Krashen believed that acquiring language took very little reason because it is unintentional learning (S. D. Krashen, 2003). First, students develop language subconsciously through exposure to their community, culture, and parents (S. Krashen, 1991). They pick up the form of communication modeled within their environment. However, learning a language means that the learning is intentional. It is a conscious process that usually takes place in the classroom.

According to Krashen, error correction is a concept used within the school to promote learning a new language (S. D. Krashen, 2003).

If a student says, "I eats lunch every day," the teacher responds, "no, it's 'I eat lunch every day," the student should realize that the –s does not pair with the first-person singular form of the verb (S. Krashen, 1991). Students have two dominant methods of developing linguistic skills: their natural language and the language of development (Abukhattala, 2013). The second component of SLA is the natural order hypothesis, which states that language has a predictable order (S. Krashen, 1991). To advance in developing a new language, a student must first master basic grammatical rules.

The third component of SLA is the monitor hypothesis. This is where students focus on form and think about the correctness of their grammar (S. D. Krashen, 2003). The success of this stage is mainly dependent on the student. Students who think about correctness and are focused on the form are typically the students who succeed. The fourth component of SLA is the comprehension hypothesis. Here, students acquire language when they understand what they are told and what they read (S. Krashen, 1991).

Last is the affective filter hypothesis, which highlights the student's level of self-efficacy. If a student has low self-efficacy, the student will present with low self-esteem, anxiety, and thoughts of inferiority within the group or with group members who speak the language they are working to develop. This can result in students blocking their learning ability while obliterating previous language development progress (S. D. Krashen, 2003).

SLA has existed for more than 60 years (Gumperz, 1982). SLA has been widely used since then to help understand the development of a second language; the theory does not necessarily examine the development of a second language dialect. However, it is argued that

AAVE is not a different language but simply a ME dialect. The tenets for acquiring and learning formal ME can be likened to developing a new language (Brette-Hamilton, 2020). The results from this study help expand the current theory beyond second language development into becoming applicable to second language dialect development.

Critical Race Theory and AAVE

Critical race theory (CRT) dissects the relationship between racism, race, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Prominent scholars such as Kimberle Crenshaw, Patricia Williams, and Richard Delgado are responsible for the framework of CRT. These scholars recognized the racism embedded in textual sources such as literature, film, law, and education among racialized groups and individuals. Birthed from civil rights, CRT has shifted into a broader perspective now focusing on economics, group and self-interest, feelings and the unconscious, splinter groups (Latino American, Asian American, etc.), and education.

CRT has four tenets, and the first tenet is that racism is the everyday experience for people of color in America. A "White-over color" mentality is often ingrained in society and displayed in societal rules, practices, and assignments (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Racism is currently considered an inescapable component for people of color. CRT dissects sociocultural forces that drive the perceptions and experiences of those who perpetrate and those affected by racism. Literature, legal forms, and other cultural pieces are used as evidence of the values and beliefs of the American people.

Unlike many other theories, CRT has an activist dimension (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT in education dissects the power structures, hierarchies, achievement gaps, and school discipline issues. The second tenet is interest convergence. Brown vs. the Board of Education exemplifies an excellent win for civil rights litigation. However, the win is believed to have

stemmed from the self-interest of elite Whites than a genuine desire to help African Americans. Interest convergence is the act of Whites helping only to avoid disrupting their sense of comfort instead of helping minorities from a place of morale and sincerity.

The third tenet is known as social construction. Social construction holds the belief that race is a social thought. It is a phenomenon invented, manipulated, and controlled by society. Society is responsible for placing pseudo-permanent characteristics onto race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

The last tenet is differential racialization (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Attention is placed on minorities' societal roles, specifically in the labor market, such as Asian farmers, Latino maintenance persons, and African American caregivers (Chmarkh, 2021). The dominant society places minorities into labor roles based on the group's genetic makeup and skill set. This later translates into negative representation and over-representation of minority groups in imposition as second-class citizens to the dominant group, displayed throughout social media, the justice system, educational systems, and other political arenas (Tan & Preece, 2022).

CRT dissects social situations and how society ascertains itself along racial hierarchies in an attempt to change them. The theory posits that revolutionizing a culture begins with a radical assessment (Bell, 1976). CRT challenges the notion that "White" is correct and that the experiences of the dominant group are normative experiences for people of color within society (Evans et al., 2018).

Sociolinguistics contests White supremacy and the notion that the language used by the dominant group is the only acceptable language dialect (Wiley & Lukes, 1996). The results from this study can help expand the current theory to focus on linguistics. Specifically, the ways that

the language dialects of marginalized communities are frequently a contributor to the sociocultural forces that perpetuate racism.

<div align="center">**Related Literature**</div>

This section highlights the literature on AAVE. This segment focuses on key differences between dialect and language. Additionally, this literature review highlights the perspectives of many stakeholders in the educational realm.

Dialect vs. Language

Speech Language Pathologists often have varying professional opinions regarding AAVE (Lippi-Green, 2012). Some SLPs say AAVE is a dialect of ME, while others believe AAVE is a different language. Wichmann and Taraka (2021) unequivocally stated that it is essential to distinguish the two and the information gleaned from the distinction is used for transmission purposes. For example, language maps, diversity studies, assigning language codes, technology systems, and textbooks (Wichmann & Taraka, 2021).

Dialect Defined

Dialect is defined as the language characteristics of a specific community (Etman & Beex, 2015). It is the most complex aspect of speech recognition (Aronoff, 2007). Dialect indicators include the speaker's tonality, loudness, pronunciation, use of phonemes, and nasality. This differs from the accent, which mainly refers to the speaker's pronunciation (Etman & Beex, 2015). Dialect is a system of communication that may obstruct but does not entirely prevent a listener from mutual comprehension (Robins & Crystal, 2022). This principle is also known as mutual intelligibility (Zampieri & Nakov, 2021).

Aronoff (2007) suggested that individuals who perceive no difference in one another's speech can speak the same dialect. Different dialects are associated with geography, social class,

and ethnicity. William Labov (1972) launched a social experiment using the rhoticity of the pronunciation of "r." He found that a higher pronunciation rate of "r" correlated with individuals who represented higher social classes.

Vowel spacing is one identifier of dialect. Their background affects an individual's ability to produce a particular vowel sound. The pronunciation of consonants is also an identifier of dialect and social class (Robins & Crystal, 2022). Being able to correctly distinguish dialect accurately aids in improving application systems such as e-health, speech recognition, and e-learning (Etman & Beex, 2015). The degree of difference needed to promote a dialect to a language is unknown (Robins & Crystal, 2022). This is why some linguists claim that AAVE is not a different language from ME yet, a dialect. Research in dialect linguistics is minimal (Etman & Beex, 2015).

Language Defined

The Biblical story of the Tower of Babel is an attempt to describe the beginning of different languages (King James Bible, 1769/2017). Currently, more than 7,000 languages exist in the world (Aronoff, 2007). Language is an essential human activity. It is a system of arbitrary vocal and written symbols that social groups use to cooperate (Kurath et al., 1945). Language is primarily spoken, and written language often reflects what is said (Aronoff, 2007).

Though languages are different, they are fundamentally the same. Unlike dialect, linguists say a language is distinct when 'speaker A 'and 'speaker B' cannot comprehend each other (Aronoff, 2007). There are many approaches to studying language: historical linguistics, descriptive linguistics, sociolinguistics, and language acquisition. Sociolinguistics and language acquisition are generally the scientific approaches responsible for language dialect perceptions (Parveen & Santhanam, 2021).

Language includes many different dialects (Etman & Beex, 2015). English phonetician Henry Sweet says language expresses ideas (Robins & Crystal, 2022). Its function is to express identity, culture, and emotions. Linguistics is a social science; young children naturally acquire language when exposed (Aronoff, 2007). No language is more evolved than the other.

All languages share general structural properties such as lexemes, phonetics, syntax, morphology, semantics, pragmatics, and phonemes (Aronoff, 2007). Realizing that all-natural languages are equally evolved is an important indicator that all humans are equal. Likewise, standard features exist among dialects of the exact wording (Wichmann & Taraka, 2021).

AAVE vs. Slang

Language variation, including slang, exists within all languages (Thomason, 2022). However, slang is said to be influenced by AAVE (J. Roth-Gordon et al., 2020) largely. Slang can be described as a language that is often disconnected from its intended meaning (Godley et al., 2007). Frazer and Eble (1997) defined slang as colloquial vocabulary that creates solidarity within a cultural group—often conveying playfulness and creativity.

There is a negative connotation surrounding slang. Frequently, it is identified as the language of criminals (J. Roth-Gordon, 2021). Since slang rejects formal linguistic rules, it is paralleled to the behavior of those individuals who reject the formal rules that govern society. This stigma contributes to language ideologies perpetuating classicism that predetermines who speaks appropriately (MacSwan, 2020; J. Roth-Gordon, 2017). Dumas and Lighter (1978) believed that slang should be avoided because of its associations with disease, dirt, and social failings labeled the "have-nots (Dumas & Lighter, 1978)."

Slang is multilayered. It is sociopolitical in nature. Speakers use slang to align with their communities. Many listeners may tap into negative associations when in contact (J. Roth-

Gordon, 2017). Slang is said to have a deviant register that should be dismissed and often disdained (Agha, 2015).

Slotta (2016) indicated that slang is a set of expressions used differently to say different things. All languages have a variety of slang. In Indonesia, university students & middle-class youth use Bahasa Gaul to communicate (Smith-Hefner, 2007). However, Bahasa Gaul is frowned upon and is said to be ruining proper Indonesian (McCluney et al., 2019). In Brazil, the slang associated with youth, Blackness, poverty, and shantytowns is known as "Giria."

Slang constantly changes. The most desirable source for new slang terms is AAVE. It is important to note that slang can originate from many different contexts. For example, the term "going viral" is popular on social media-originated from medical terminology. However, it is not considered slang because it is not associated with socially marginalized groups (J. Roth-Gordon et al., 2020).

Mock Spanish words such as "El Chapo" and "El Sicko" is considered slang (Hill, 2008). Racial ideologies exist concerning the inferiority of AAVE and Spanish speakers compared to ME. Once slang words debut, White ME speakers take the terms and semantically bleach them. This eradicates the negative racial associations, and then the terms are used by a broader range of speakers to index Whiteness (Bucholtz, 2011). An example is the term *dude* (Kiesling, 2004). Slang involves changes made to the lexicon (J. Roth-Gordon et al., 2020). It is regarded as linguistic inaccuracy and wasted effort to create an alternative vocabulary for existing words.

AAVE and the Legal System

AAVE speakers are more likely to be discriminated against during trial. AAVE influences juror's decisions regarding a guilty verdict. Kurinec and Weaver (2019) stated that dialect is an under-investigated phenomenon within the courtroom. Accent biases also affect

juror judgments of culpability (Cantone et al., 2019). Dialect activates stereotypes that are usually aligned with negative stigmas.

AAVE speakers have more negative legal evaluations than ME speakers (Kurinec & Weaver, 2019). Unfortunately, individuals are perceived as guilty simply of their accent and dialect (Cantone et al., 2019). The biases against AAVE speakers perpetuate criminal justice equality. African Americans and Latino Americans have punitive outcomes compared to White Americans when facing convictions. The sound of the defendant's voice is judged.

Non-ME accents and dialects often made the jurors believe that the defendant was less intelligent, uneducated, and trustworthy. Accent discrimination does not only affect communities of color within the courtroom but extends to the poor White class. White Americans of lower social-economic status are usually associated with being White trash and speaking in an accent that is considered "red neck speech" (Cantone et al., 2019). Their dialect and accent are also associated with poverty and being uneducated (Knowles, 2016; Rumberger, 2020).

Even in the United Kingdom, racism informs decisions made within the courtroom (Frumkin & Stone, 2020). The testimonies of eyewitnesses are perceived as less valid and reliable when spoken by individuals with stigmatized accents. High-status accents suggested that individuals with a higher education level were more trustworthy.

Language discrimination can threaten the success of non-ME speakers (Brown, 2021). AAVE faces criticisms within sociology, linguistics, folklore, anthropology, psychology, and education (M. Morgan, 2021). The Black English Trial in Ann Arbor displayed a powerful statement when a judge concluded that 11 AAVE-speaking plaintiffs placed in remedial special education classes were lawful according to speech pathology (Junior, 2005). The 11 AAVE

speakers continually failed their linguistic evaluations when assessed. However, the proctor or the judge should have considered the speakers' culture and linguistic background (Baugh, 2018).

Scholarly discussions continually explore how power and status are expressed within society. Often, it is negotiated through social-economic status, which is frequently reflected in linguistics. Inside the courtroom, none-ME dialects and accents are negatively judged and impact the verdict, especially for AAVE speakers. The testimonies of AAVE speakers are viewed as inadequate and faulty (Baugh, 2018; Brown, 2021; Kurinec & Weaver, 2019).

English Speakers of Other Languages

English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) do not practice English as their primary language. In many cases, English is not their native tongue, so they are considered English Learners (EL). ELs must be equipped with linguistic tools that will help them obtain success.

Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) is critical in helping ELs navigate and assimilate (Norman & Eslami., 2022). *Foreign language anxiety* is a phenomenon that many ELs experience (Park, 2019). For example, they need help translating certain words into English and look to their English-speaking peers for help. Typically, the ELL feels embarrassed or incompetent when they cannot transmit (Park, 2019).

Operational learning tools such as visual aids, sentence frames, and pre-teaching assessments are necessary to help instructors create equitable classroom spaces for the learner. The need to normalize translation and translanguaging is critical (Poza, 2017). Culturally sustaining pedagogy is vital to helping ELs succeed in the classroom and a diverse world.

The ELL community is unique from the AAVE community because AAVE is considered a variety of ME (Lippi-Green, 2012). In comparison, ESOL is not a ME dialect but a different

language. There are classes for ELs at local community centers and often community colleges. These classes are generally designed to teach the speaker ME.

The courses are typically designed to assimilate the ELL while abandoning and devaluing their current linguistic background. Instructors of ESOL must engage in self-reflection and use higher-order thinking skills. Then, the instructor can better understand how language and culture are associated (Park, 2019).

Mainly ESOL courses deliver the same content, obliterating and depreciating the students' language background (Matsuda, 1991). The ELs are taught to write and speak in ME. Although instructors report that working with ELs is an important task and a job that they do because it aligns with their personal beliefs, they unintentionally perpetuate societal xenophobia patterns (Swift, 2022). Xenophobia patterns propagate dislike against people from other countries. Rather than dissimilating linguistic hierarchies of power, ESOL is focused on assimilating the immigrant.

By doing so, structural conditions linked to linguistic racism and classicism are practiced within the learning environment (Park, 2019; Swift, 2022). Larrotta (2017) found that non-profit ESOL program funding was directly linked to the measurable outcomes of the ELL learning ME. For example, standardized tests were used to measure the ELL knowledge of ME and their ability to secure employment. For this reason, no variations of dialect were taught in ESOL classes (Swift, 2022).

The language was treated as a stable object that the instructor and the student needed. It was discovered that teachers were shaping ELs to believe that only ME was acceptable (Swift, 2022). All other varieties of English spoken outside the course were not to be trusted or duplicated because they needed to be corrected. The instructors spoke ME and highlighted the

hegemonic ideology. Rarely did the instructors invite the ELL's language experiences into the academic space (Swift, 2022).

Advocacy is an essential component of TESOL. The teachers must be mindful of internal advocacy within the classroom and school and external advocacy within the community on a political level. Douglas Fir-Groups' model of the multifaceted nature of language learning and teaching captures three different levels of advocacy (Douglas et al., 2008). The micro, meso, and macro levels. The micro includes classroom instruction, interacting with others, linguistic prosodics, and non-verbal communication. The meso level represents advocating for ESOL within the school and community, and the macro level represents advocacy within policy reform (Douglas et al., 2008).

English language acquisition is not easy for ESOL students; therefore, the teacher's advocacy is required for the student's success (Kim et al., 2017). According to the US Department of Education, the number of ELs in the United States from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade rose from 3.8 million to 5 million over several years (Sheets, 2000). Thiers reported that multilingual teachers typically advocated more for ESOL students than their peers who were not multilingual (Thiers, 2019). Teachers often note that their reasoning for teaching ESOL students is their commitment to their beliefs and values. A White teacher highlighted that she knew of her privilege and wanted to work alongside ESOL students who did not share her experiences (Thiers, 2019).

Although many ESOL teachers mean well, the students are reported to continually fall behind their White peers on standardized tests (US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). ELs are overrepresented in special education programs and underrepresented in gifted programs (Becker & Deris, 2019; Hulse & Curran, 2020). Often, the

parents of ELs need to be equipped to address academic concerns on their child's behalf (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). The parents are frequently disadvantaged because they may not understand the educational system and encounter language barriers (Cranston et al., 2021). Culturally sustaining functional literacy practices are necessary at all educational levels for ELs (Cavallaro & Sembiante, 2021).

An issue that impedes ELs' middle school reading is the disconnect between their culturally informed experiences and the curriculum. Siddaway shared that perceived institutional bias, such as welcoming ME and discounting other linguistic varieties, contributed to poor completion rates (Siddaway et al., 2019). Additionally, the perceived institutional bias caused ELs to experience nervousness, a lack of confidence, depression, and other negative emotions (Rawal & De Costa, 2019). The teacher's role is pivotal in ELs' lives (Siddaway et al., 2019). Teachers are to advocate for ELs because frequently, the student's ability to advocate for themselves is impeded by an array of barriers (Giambo, 2018).

Harrison and McIlwain found that the school culture influences the rate and depth of advocacy work (Harrison & McIlwain, 2020). Classroom and political advocacy are linked to social justice and equity work (Linville, 2020). Advocacy is needed to address the reoccurring concerns regarding inequitable access to educational resources and the achievement gap (TESOL, 2018). ELs experience triple segregation within American school systems in race, economics, and linguistics (Shin, 2018). Often American schools believe that they are promoting an agenda of diversity and inclusion when they are perceived as anti-immigrant and practice intolerance towards linguistic diversity (Linville, 2020).

Instructional and political advocacy for ELs is necessary. Linville (2020) stated that it is an expectation of the teacher (Linville, 2020). The teacher's beliefs and attitudes impact the

outcomes of the student (Kim et al., 2017; Tan & Preece, 2022; Tang & Hu, 2022). Unfortunately, some teachers consider linguistic diversity a burden and do not value it (Mariano et al., 2017). As stated afore, the teacher's beliefs differ depending on the race and English fluency of the ELL.

If a teacher is unprepared with limited linguistic knowledge, they can create negative attitudes that produce misunderstandings of the ELL (Kim et al., 2017). Inopportunely, some teachers do not advocate for ELs because of low confidence and disinterest in doing so. Teachers have reported that it is not their responsibility to effectively advocate for ELs within the classroom and therefore, they do not contribute (Kim et al., 2017; Kolano & King, 2015).

Advocacy goes beyond the classroom and involves helping students prepare for college (Rawal & De Costa, 2019). Teachers must meet with the administration to ensure that ELs are prioritized within the school schedule (Shapiro & Ehtesham-Cating, 2019). Factors that influence the level of teacher advocacy for ELs are the years of experience teaching, exposure to working within a racially diverse school system, and the teacher's background.

Discursive pedagogical practices highlight that race intersects and informs standard language ideologies (Swift, 2022). ELs model the framework and beliefs that are reflected in their learning. ELs take their social cues from those who are teaching and who are in power. Therefore, the way that ELs view other varieties of English, such as AAVE and even their home language, can be tainted or shunned. There is an unhealthy authoritative relationship between linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics that ESOL teachers often perpetuate when supporting ELs (Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Larrotta, 2017).

Teachers and AAVE

Not only are SLPs misdiagnosing African American students due to a lack of linguistic knowledge regarding AAVE, but teachers are often misinterpreting AA students' actions as early as preschool. Three out of four teachers in America are White women (Cooper, 2003). Behavior labeling and racial disproportionality in discipline tend to be high, particularly among Black boys who are under the tutelage of White female teachers (B. L. Wright & Ford, 2019). In general, African American students are suspended and expelled at alarming rates when explicitly compared to their White peers (Gopalan & Nelson, 2019). Additionally, African American students are largely misdiagnosed with language development issues and are placed more in special education programs than their White peers.

The United States disproportionately represented Black children in the speech-language impairment category, according to statistics collected from the Office of Special Education Programs and general enrollment data from the National Center for Education Statistics for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (Robinson & Norton, 2019). Elementary school teachers are often unaware that starting in preschool, African American students are navigating an academic journey that causes them to be bidialectal (Washington & Seidenberg, 2021). This means they are situating the usage of their home language while trying to make sense of ME as an academic language (PBS, 2005). Achieving bidialectal is difficult (Johnson et al., 2017). African American students are expected to read, spell, and write utilizing ME in educational contexts and return to their communities where they engage in AAVE. This can be a complex and exhausting process for both the student and the teacher.

The African American student is responsible for learning, engaging, and applying ME language codes for academic purposes as early as five years of age (Washington & Seidenberg,

2021). Research suggests that some African American students will not correctly adapt to dialect shifting, and when that occurs, they will "shut down" and ultimately will not learn to read (Junior, 2005). Bowie and Bond (1994) found that elementary school teachers regarded AAVE as illogical. Therefore, teachers corrected African American students who spoke using AAVE language codes. This action made African American students feel academically inadequate, insecure, and confused (Smitherman & Villanueva, 2000). The teacher is responsible for recognizing that a linguistic difference can impact a student's development rate (Washington & Seidenberg, 2021).

A preponderance of evidence suggests that AAVE negatively impacts African American students' reading and writing. Especially students who speak using AAVE regularly (Washington et al., 2019). However, developmental impact due to linguistic differences does not always necessitate the need for placement in special education programs or equate to a language disorder (Brice Heath, 1983). African American students are underrepresented in gifted programs but overrepresented in special education programs (Hamilton & DeThorne, 2021). With predominantly White elementary school teachers, Fogel and Ehri (2000) suggested that teachers need to become more aware of linguistic diversity.

Consciously or unconsciously, teachers bring their views and beliefs regarding AAVE into the classroom. Often their ideas are misguided (Fogel & Ehri, 2000). Generally, teachers are not trained in linguistics and can be overwhelmingly misinformed about AAVE (Alim, 2005). Furthermore, the importance of dialect awareness is frequently snubbed in teacher education programs (Fogel & Ehri, 2000). Elementary school teachers reported considering AAVE as a short form of ME (Labov, 1972). A lack of knowledge regarding dialect leads to negative attitudes surrounding AAVE (Bowie & Bond, 1994; Fogel & Ehri, 2000).

Frequently, teachers hold a hegemonic view regarding dialect and are entirely unaware of how their views transform students' lives (Silverstein, 1996). Silverstein (1996) described the hegemonic view of language as the monoglot standard. The monoglot standard refers to the ideology that there is one correct and natural form of English, and anything other than that is a deviation and flat-out wrong. This view is held by many teachers (Metz, 2019). Hence, this is one of the reasons why teachers feel inclined to correct AA students who utilize the AAVE language dialect. As mentioned, the hegemonic language ideology can be wholly unconscious and invisible.

Taylor's (1973) Language Attitude Scale and Knowledge and Awareness Survey revealed that high school English teachers generally had a positive view of language dialect variations. Teachers of color had a more positive stance on linguistic diversity than their White peers (Metz, 2019). In general, teachers did not believe that language was associated with levels of intelligence or kindness. Some teachers also believed that students should be taught different language dialects in school. However, the same teachers succumbed to the hegemonic language ideology (Silverstein, 1996; Taylor, 1973).

Though those teachers believed in linguistic equity, they attested to accommodating the social hierarchies ascribed to language, which Lippi-Green (2012) notes as the "irresolvable conflict." Although teachers shared that there is value in knowing variations of language dialects, they undeniably categorized ME as the dominant school language and as the requirement for all academic intents and purposes (Metz, 2019). Though, there is no basis for claims that using a stigmatized language dialect variety in the classroom increases interference in acquiring the standard (Siegel, 1999). Maher et al. (2021) found that the original approaches for engaging AAVE at the k-12 level were racist and classist and suggested that teachers acted as if AA

students had no language at all and "re-taught language" to the student. Lee (2017) found that k-12 teachers who corrected the grammar of AAVE students were counter-productive. Fixing the students did not necessarily set them up for success.

Teachers are not necessarily challenging the practices of hegemony by disrupting the unfair distribution of power (Loizos & Yiasemina, 2018). Yet, they may be unintentionally perpetuating the standard language ideology disbarring variation of language dialects in schools by reinforcing the phenomenon of linguistic discrimination (Metz, 2019). Teachers' lack of cultural-linguistic competency regarding AAVE may be a contributing factor to the underrepresentation of AA students in advanced placement programs and the overexpression of AA students in special education programs. Teachers must be culturally aware and create a space for linguistic dexterity (Hallett, 2020). The role of the teacher in diagnosing the AA student is critical because, often, the speech pathologist will employ the teacher's perspective when assessing the student (Brette-Hamilton, 2020; Gregory & Oetting, 2018).

For this reason, it is paramount that teachers are mindful that background is a factor in language development. Positive student outcomes are associated with culturally relevant education (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Teachers are responsible for being knowledgeable about linguistic differences (Fogel & Ehri, 2000). Being unaware places teachers at a disadvantage for teaching ineffectively. Furthermore, according to Higgs and Krashen, the teacher is responsible for helping the student to digest the linguistic materials (Higgs & Krashen, 1983).

Speech-language pathologists such as Megan Brette-Hamilton (2020) have worked to help dismantle the negative stigmas surrounding AAVE. Wolfram (2018) posed the question, "why have schools been so slow to take up linguistic knowledge?" There has been a dismissive attitude to sociolinguistic facts regarding language diversity (Wolfram, 2018). Specifically,

White female teachers allow deficit thinking to compromise their views of Black boys' literacies and languages (B. L. Wright & Ford, 2019).

The goal is to help align the teachers' beliefs and views with linguistic facts (Metz, 2019). Linguistic facts suggest that language derives from the same primitive system that governs religion, morality, and politics and that the act of simply "correcting" is inadequate for motivating social change (Wolfram, 2018, p375). Admittedly, teachers have shared that they have corrected AA students who used AAVE in their classrooms. The action of "correcting" an AA student's usage of AAVE can be classified as "dialect intrusion" (Hallett, 2020). Or viewed as an attempt to eradicate the student's language and identity, even if done by the most well-meaning teachers (Alim & Smitherman, 2012).

Elementary Principals and AAVE

McClendon and Valenciano said principals should be prepared to lead teachers in linguistics training. Although code-switching is necessary, AAVE should be perceived as a valid dialect (L. M. Koch et al., 2001). Bowie and Bond found that school teachers regarded AAVE as faulty and illogical (Bowie & Bond, 1994). McClendon and Valenciano surveyed and found that Latino and Black's principals had a higher acceptance rate for AAVE than their White peers (L. M. Koch et al., 2001; G. McClendon & Valenciano, 2018).

Principals set the tone for their academic establishments. Their perceptions impact the school's cultural climate (G. H. McClendon, 2016). Administrators and teachers tend to succumb to the school's culture, which the principal often sets. The African American English Teacher Attitude Scale (AAAS) is used to measure teachers' attitudes toward the legitimacy of AAVE (Hoover, 1978). The AAAS assessment is also popular when measuring the attitudes of school administrators toward AAVE.

Unconscious negative attitudes toward AAVE negatively impact the perspective of the AA student. The administrator's attitude regarding AAVE plays a crucial role in shaping the academic environment (G. McClendon & Valenciano, 2018). Younger principals in age tend to have a higher acceptance rate for the legitimacy of AAVE, while the acceptance rate decreases for principals aged 40-59 (G. McClendon & Valenciano, 2018). The AAAS scale helped describe the relationship between demographic characteristics and principals' perceptions regarding AAVE (G. H. McClendon, 2016). Code-switching has a function (Greene & Walker, 2004). All AAVE-speaking students are believed to learn to code-switch for survival purposes (G. McClendon & Valenciano, 2018). Bilingual principals tend to be more accepting of AAVE than principals who solely speak ME.

Penrod et al., stated that bias against a student's dialect might produce lower teacher expectations and student performance. Principals are to promote social justice by coaching the faculty to accept AAVE as a legitimate dialect (G. H. McClendon, 2016; Penrod et al., 1959). Godley and Minnici (2008) refer to a student choosing a dialect to use as a "dialect dilemma." The dialect has the propensity to affect the listener's overall behavior, perceptions, and expectations (G. McClendon & Valenciano, 2018).

It is imperative to address the demographic imperative that has existed for years. Administrators lack knowledge of AAVE and therefore have negative attitudes informing their views (Wetzel et al., 2019). Preparing school administrators to work with diverse learners is critical (Clark & Medina, 2000). Redd and Webb (2005) proposed five pedagogies that school administrators can use to teach AAVE speakers.

The traditional approach forbids home dialect and focuses entirely on immersing the speaker in ME. Delpit and Dowdy (2008) encourages losing this approach because rejecting a

person's language is ultimately viewed as dismissing them. According to Delpit (1998), children have a right to their spoken language.

Redd and Webb (2005) stated that the second approach is to implement strategies from an English as a Second Language curriculum. At the same time, creating a space for AAVE speakers to practice being bidialectal. Redd and Webb (2005) suggested that the third approach is inspired by the idea that all dialects of English are accepted and should not be subjected to language prejudice.

The fourth approach dictates being culturally appropriate and centered on designing a curriculum utilizing African American culture. The bridge approach is the final, allowing students to use their language before transitioning to ME (Redd & Webb, 2005). According to Aronoff (2007), written language must be taught, and it is rarely perfect. Following the outline, approaches can help school administrators better connect with their AAVE-speaking students and maximize their learning (G. H. McClendon, 2016).

AAVE in Colleges and Universities

Instructors at the community college level tend to hold a monolingual ideology regarding English (Davila, 2016; Gallagher, 2020). Instructors often believe that it is their job to move students towards standardized English, both verbally and written (Davila, 2016). By doing so, they are in jeopardy of washing away students' language identities. Many times, the washing away of a student's language is unintentionally caused by instructors. Students who speak AAVE and other dialect varieties are subjected to linguistic discrimination, especially those students who are pursuing careers in healthcare and law (Ogunniyi & O'Neil, 2022).

Frequently, college communities are unaware of their assumptions and attitudes regarding AAVE. According to Lawton and de Kleine (2020), most instructors mean well when

working with students who speak AAVE; however, they are uninformed. Many college instructors unintentionally expect for students to properly code-switch for academic purposes (Ogunniyi & O'Neil, 2022). However, there should be a consideration of employing efficacy models when instructors are working with students who speak using the AAVE dialect. Instructors ought to explore their own languages and identities to help them become aware of how it plays a role in their perceptions of dialects that are considered nonstandard (Suh et al., 2021).

Flores (2020) stated that educators define academic language as content-specific vocabulary involving complex sentence structures. It is viewed as unacceptable or incorrect if college students present written work or verbal work informally unless instructed to do so. Lawton and de Kleine (2020) posed that if ME is academic language and AAVE is non-academic language, then a judgment is made potentially judging AAVE speakers. Academic language is aligned with White ME, ultimately reinforcing raciolinguistics ideology. The raciolinguistics ideology frames racialized students as linguistically deficient and in need of remediation (Lawton & de Kleine, 2020).

AAVE is fully equipped to meet the academic conventions of college writing (Young, 2020). There are 13 grammatical features of AAVE (Aryani & Widodo, 2020). Sociolinguistics established that all language varieties are valid (Lawton & de Kleine, 2020). However, Weaver (2019) found that instructors privileged ME at the expense of certain minority students, which perpetuated unequal social boundaries.

College instructors claimed to tolerate AAVE usage in their classrooms. According to Lawton and de Kleine (2020), tolerating something reveals that there is a lack of appreciation and validation. Furthermore, tolerance has an underlying tone of rejection. Lippi-Green (2012)

stated that standard language ideologies are dangerous because of the power it holds to discriminate invisibly. The discrimination leads to linguistic violence, persecution, and marginalization of AAVE speakers in schools and in their everyday lives (Baker-Bell, 2020).

Anderson (2015) noted that a student's right to their own language is an idea that was never achieved. In fact, language discrimination is not a new problem in community colleges. A half-century ago, language discrimination was addressed in college composition and communication (Lawton & de Kleine, 2020). The matter is still being addressed today. According to Gallagher (2020), writing in nonstandard English has value. In fact, simultaneously writing in two different language dialects is challenging (Smitherman & Villanueva, 2000). The writer is forced to think of multiple audiences, which is difficult. Elbow (1999) found that many instructors guided students to write "inviting the mother tongue." Meaning students can write in their natural dialect but are expected to transcribe their writings into Standard English.

Instructors should encourage code-meshing in community colleges (Gallagher, 2020). This provides students with a craft approach to writing in a way that addresses problems of language discrimination (Ogunniyi & O'Neil, 2022). Many instructors prefer that student's code-switch and use ME rather than AAVE during class (Koch et al., 2001).

A recent survey showed that 65% of Maryland college instructors never received professional linguistic development (Lawton & de Kleine, 2020). ME is the goal for writing and literacy in the academic space. MacSwan (2020) inserts an asset-based perspective where language is not a barrier but a resource. This challenges the status quo of academic language.

Often, the language is unproblematic. Rather it is the view of the language dialect that is problematic. The lived experiences of instructors account for their perspectives concerning

language dialect. Most instructors teach from a knowledge base developed through their educational experiences (Reeve, 2009).

However, recent research shows that there are very few linguistic trainings that challenge the ME ideology to help prepare instructors in higher education. Professional development focused on developing critical language awareness is necessary for instructors (Lawton & de Kleine, 2020). Many students of color reported experiences of biases on predominantly White campuses, often displayed through dress, lack of culture, and language (Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015).

AAVE is necessary for linguistic inclusion (Wright et al., 2022). America is comprised of many different cultures and backgrounds. All language dialects are to be appreciated, celebrated, and welcomed into academic spaces. In 1998, The National Head Start Association (NHSA) won the annual Athena Award offered by the Newspaper Association of America (Lippi-Green, 2012). The ad written by NHSA had an agenda to obliterate the use of AAVE and assimilate all AAVE speakers to ME beginning as early as head start.

According to the ad, AAVE was language for the poor and uneducated (Oakland, California School Board, 1997). To allow it to be spoken in school was acceptance of poverty and ignorance (Junior, 2005; Lippi-Green, 2012). The article was published free of charge in the New York Times (NYT) newspaper as a public service announcement. The advertisement followed the debate regarding Oakland public schools and the use of Ebonics. Shortly after NYT released the ad, school districts from Richmond, Virginia, to Miami, Florida, were requested copies to abide by (Lippi-Green, 2012).

Successful African American professionals affiliated with Atlanta's Black Professionals are responsible for creating and submitting the advertisement to NHSA. They made it

indisputably clear that AAVE was a disaster for the African American community and that not assimilating into ME was due to stubborn resistance (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Lippi-Green (2012) concluded that all speakers of AAVE are not willfully stubborn, but some are simply unable to assimilate to "good English (Krashen, 2003)."

Educational Policy and AAVE

Linguists have debated AAVE as a language or a dialect of ME. Although many linguists settle for considering AAVE a dialect of ME, it is essential to note that AAVE is a legitimate linguistic system (Fogel & Ehri, 2000; Lippi-Green, 2012). The system includes unique features and a variety of phonological and lexical differences from ME. LSA resolved that AAVE is distinguished socially and politically rather than linguistically. For that reason, the dialect is often judged against ME which viewed as a superior variety of English (Pullum, 1999).

James Harrison coined the term "Negro English (Harrison & McIlwain, 2020)." The term then evolved into "Nonstandard Negro English (Ellis, 2021)." As time progressed, the words used to describe this linguistic system changed. Some familiar terms include ebonics, Black English, Black English vernacular, Africanized English, and African American Vernacular English (Ellis, 2021; McLaren, 2009; PBS, 2005; Smitherman & Villanueva, 2000).

The United States District Judge Charles Joiner charged the school board of Ann Arbor with failing to provide the necessary linguistic resources for their elementary school teachers to teach AA students effectively and equitably (Kurinec & Weaver, 2019). This case orchestrated a foundation for language policy and dexterity within school systems (Junior, 2005). However, many found that the case for lack of language dexterity was farfetched and remained unperturbed by the implemented goals (Junior, 2005; Kurinec & Weaver, 2019).

There are several reasons why AAVE has been a dilemma for decades, especially in the political realm (Billings, 2005). One issue is that many consider AAVE a dialect of English and not necessarily a different language (Wolfram, 2018). The validity of AAVE as a language and a language dialect has been questioned.

Language myths, also known as bad grammar, date back to the eighteenth century (Luu, 2020). There has been a vast amount of confusion when separating a language from a language deficiency (Peele-Eady & Foster, 2018). Language professionals such as linguists, sociolinguists, and dialectologists have not made much progress in understating language diversity (Wolfram, 2018). Frequently, language was examined, and language dialect issues were quieted.

The popular belief was that language was a legitimate system, while language dialect was a socio-educational faddish and not an authentic educational need (Wolfram, 2018). That view hindered the progress of language dialect and education. The public perception of AAVE was that it was linguistically backward (Luu, 2020). The myths and perceptions translated into negative repercussions for communities of color. There was an adverse effect on communities of color that jeopardized their livelihood. Luu (2020) listed the following examples: renting apartments, job interviews, and having academic and legal disadvantages.

What made a system of speech a language, a dialect, and even viewed as a broken speech was subjective and political (Luu, 2020). The Oakland School Board Resolution (OSBR) highlighted people's beliefs concerning language diversity, with misinformation about language variation (Oakland, California School Board, 1997). OSBR took place in Oakland, California (Bell, 1976; Oakland, California School Board, 1997). A group of teachers realized that the students they were serving spoke AAVE, which created a barrier to their learning because they

taught utilizing ME. Many teachers wanted class materials and resources to reflect their students' language at home.

A dichotomy sparked between educators and administrators in the area. Some wanted to become more inclusive, incorporate AAVE in learning materials, and even speak AAVE in class (Bell, 1976). Similar to the case of *Elementary School Children vs Ann Arbor School District* this attempt was also repulsed once the newspaper articles began soliciting that the schools were "dumbing down English, by teaching students slang" (Russo, 2021).

Ultimately, the notion of incorporating AAVE was rejected. This was an explosive moment for AAVE. The Oakland, California school district held firm that African Language Systems are genetically based and not a dialect of English (Oakland, California School Board, 1997). However, the Oakland School Board resolved to implement an educational program to help Black students' dialect shift from AAVE to ME. Although, code-switching perpetuates the cycle of a linguistic hierarchy that often diminishes the culture of an AAVE speaker (McCluney et al., 2019)

One factor that is frequently overlooked is the influence of AAVE on reading outcomes (Morgan et al., 2015). The way that a Black child articulates, pronounces, and sees the words, can be attributed to their verbal usage of AAVE. In 1979, there was a lawsuit filed by Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School children (plaintiffs) against the Ann Arbor School District Board (defendants) for failing to take the appropriate action steps to help 11 Black children overcome a language barrier that impeded their participation in instructional programs (Junior, 2005). It was argued that the Black children spoke AAVE, and the school failed to provide the instruction and resources necessary for equitable practices in learning. The plaintiffs

asserted that the teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders violated the law in various respects.

By placing students into special education programs without first determining if the learning deficiency stemmed from cultural, social, or economic deprivation (Junior, 2005). Each teacher testified during the case that they utilized standard materials for teaching reading. Evidence suggested during the case that although other factors such as attendance, emotional impairment, and learning disabilities caused barriers to reading, educators were not necessarily considering the children's usage of AAVE (Junior, 2005). For this reason, teachers were overly referring AA students to be evaluated for language services under false pretenses (P. L. Morgan et al., 2015, 2016).

Speech-Language Pathologists and AAVE

Clinicians, speech-language pathologists (SLP), and teachers are not necessarily trained to recognize AAVE as a legitimate language dialect (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021). Therefore, AA students are placed in special education programs because of misdiagnoses (Brette-Hamilton, 2020; Mills et al., 2021). Commonly, AA students are labeled with developmental issues because of their linguistic differences. Generally, the developmental issues AA students are categorized as having are language and speech sound disorders (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021). AAVE has a set of conventions and linguistic rules that differ from ME. If the linguistic rules are over-identified or under-identified, AA students are at risk of being labeled as having a communication disorder (PBS, 2005; Saad & Polovoy, 2009).

Speech-language pathology assessment tools, research evidence, and intervention programs were designed by and for middle-class White English speakers (Easton & Verdon, 2021). For that reason, linguistic bias existed among SLPs' attitudes toward dialects that were not

ME. There are specific assessments such as the Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation-Screening Test (DELV-ST), the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF-4), and techniques designed to help capture the linguistic uniqueness of AA students who are tested for communication disorders (Hendricks & Adlof, 2017; Paslawski, 2005). However, only bilingual SLPs reported taking classes and training about the diverse assessments. Conversely, monolingual SLPs only took cultural diversity and sensitivity classes as continuing education courses (Easton & Verdon, 2021).

Diehm and Hendricks (2021) found that less than 25% of SLPs held a limited understanding of AAVE and did not use any interventions or modification techniques to capture the linguistic uniqueness of the AAVE dialect. Incompetency resulted in discriminatory and racialized practices toward AAVE speakers (Easton & Verdon, 2021). Many SLPs reported that they did not work with students who spoke AAVE or changed their intervention materials when assessing the AAVE speaker (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021). 45.7% of SLPs reported administering the same assessment as they would for students who spoke ME, which contributed to linguistic bias and inaccurate clinical judgments (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Easton & Verdon, 2021). Though trained in the field, SLPs may not understand how to separate a language disorder from a language difference resulting from using AAVE (P. L. Morgan et al., 2016). According to The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA, 2017), SLPs have an ethical duty and responsibility to further their understanding of cultural differences and multiculturalism (Sheets, 2000).

SLPs who were more skilled and familiar with AAVE reported incorporating modification techniques, such as speaking with the parents and caregivers to compare their dialect with the dialect of the child being tested (Brette-Hamilton, 2020; Diehm & Hendricks,

2021; Mills et al., 2021). By doing so, the SLP correlated the language dialect spoken at home with that of the child and ultimately made a more accurate assessment regarding a language disorder and AAVE. Likewise, bilingual SLPs are more skilled in providing speech and language assessments, responding to questions regarding intervention outcomes, and dealing with challenging clinical situations than monolingual SLPs (Easton & Verdon, 2021).

ASHA (2003) encourages all SLPs to familiarize themselves with dynamic assessment procedures and nondiscriminatory testing practices. Diagnostic decisions can be difficult for SLPs because AAVE is not ME, though both dialects share similarities. Additionally, there is a universal application of scoring modifications for the DELV-ST and CELF-4, which leads to an increased number of false negatives and false positives for AA children who speak AAVE (Hendricks & Adlof, 2017). False positives produced negative socioemotional consequences, misdiagnoses, and unnecessary usage of intervention materials for the AA child. In comparison, false negatives suggest that the AA child with a speech disorder will not be supplied with the appropriate resources (Hendricks & Adlof, 2017).

ASHA (2017) noted that the need to distinguish a communication disorder from a communication difference among culturally diverse populations was vital. AA students scored lower on standardized tests than their peers simply because of a language difference and not a language disorder (Saad & Polovoy, 2009). Because SLPs use the same terminology to describe AAVE as they use it to describe a communication disorder, false diagnoses are made (Brette-Hamilton, 2020). Failure to recognize the distinct patterns in AAVE affected the SLP's diagnosis along with audiology practices. An example of this is an audiologist not hearing the "th" and hearing an 'f' in pronouncing the word "bath." The audiologist could conclude that AA students

have a hearing acuity problem; instead of completing that, their dialect interference played a role in pronunciation (ASHA, 2017; Saad & Polovoy, 2009).

Socioeconomic status, the dialect of the parents or caregivers, and the rate of dialect density are a few components to be considered when SLPs make clinical decisions. SLPs should avoid erroneously classifying children who spoke AAVE as having a language disorder (Hendricks & Adlof, 2017). However, very few SLPs were clinically trained and had enough experience to competently make clinical decisions (Parveen & Santhanam, 2021).

Brette-Hamilton (2020) suggested that all dialects are rule-governed. Unfortunately, society has categorized dialects as substandard. Therefore, even SLPs tend to stigmatize particular dialects, such as AAVE. The popular belief many SLPs had is that there was one pure form of English (Metz, 2019). However, many ways to speak English correctly (Brette-Hamilton, 2020).

Within the classroom, AA students were asked to write and read codes that they were unfamiliar with. The student becomes flustered when the AA student's oral code does not match the written code (Rogers & Mosley, 2006). The SLP's job is to help transform the AA student into a ME speaker without disregarding their natural dialect (Brette-Hamilton, 2020).

Pronunciation patterns in one dialect may translate into errors in another (Evans et al., 2018). SLPs and teachers rarely collaborated to develop and implement culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices within the classroom. Such collaboration could help AAVE speakers develop the skills necessary to speak ME while maintaining their cultural identity (Brette-Hamilton, 2020).

Thomas and Reaser (2004) reported that clinically trained and untrained listeners could typically identify whether a speaker is an AA based on phonetic cues alone. SLPs work with

diverse populations; however, as mentioned afore, bilingual SLPs showed higher multicultural competency than monolingual SLPs (Parveen & Santhanam, 2021). ASHA (2017) required all SLPs to be competent in scientific and clinical services. Unfortunately, SLPs shared that there is a need for more coursework and training when working with AAVE. Exercise in non-ME dialects can reduce inadequacies when supporting AAVE speakers (Parveen & Santhanam, 2021).

Summary

Literature shows that AAVE is not valued in America's justice system or in academic settings. Academicians tend to hold a hegemonic view concerning ME which leads to linguistic discrimination. Professionals are not equipped to support AAVE speakers, so they often unintentionally discriminate, misdiagnose, or dismiss the speaker. There are not many professional training or teacher training programs that incorporate navigating and understanding speakers of AAVE. For this reason, institutions perpetuate a cycle of linguistic injustice (Brette-Hamilton, 2020).

Teachers, instructors, and administrators are responsible for advocating for students to ensure equitable practices. Many educators uphold a hegemonic view that ME is the only acceptable and correct form of English. That view causes them to devalue other varieties of English, which results in devaluing the identity of the student. This behavior is consistent and perceived throughout non-ME communities (Tan & Preece, 2022). Both ESOL and AAVE students are overrepresented in special education programs and underrepresented in gifted programs.

Those educators who had intervention projects as preservice teachers changed their beliefs and attitudes regarding linguistic diversity within the classroom. Educators who have had

professional development in linguistics are noted to be more self-reflective than their colleagues. Self-reflection is a precursor for self-awareness that is needed for educators to honor students' linguistic backgrounds and cultures. When educators are not self-aware or properly equipped, they tend to misunderstand students (Brette-Hamilton, 2020).

Frequently, professionals place the responsibility to become bidialectal on the student as early as age four. Rarely are professionals undergoing training to become bidialectal to understand the speaker. According to Krashen's SLA theory, the teacher is responsible for both learning and supporting the language of the learner (S. Krashen, 1991). Although all dialects of English are considered correct, ME, which is affiliated with the White language, is deemed standard for academic institutions and professional settings. The belief that only ME is an acceptable practice contributes to the critical race theory, which says racism is engrained within the fabric of society.

Professionals tend to agree that there is a need for coursework and training to help educate on AAVE language dialect (Parveen & Santhanam, 2021). SLPs support the notion that there needs to be a more evolved system for evaluating speech impediments and deficiencies in speakers of AAVE. Research suggests that the current system is flawed and does not necessarily take into consideration cultural relevancy. Policies are often met with backlash when attempting to create a multicultural pedagogy to understand and work alongside speakers of AAVE (Luu, 2020).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of the proposed transcendental phenomenological study will be to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of k-12 schoolteachers working with AA students and their usage of AAVE in the State of Maryland. This chapter focuses on how the study is conducted. Below is a detailed explanation of the methods and rationale for the chosen research design. This section also includes a list of research questions to capture the participants' experiences, a comprehensive overview of the research site, and a detailed description of the participants and their qualifications for engagement in the study. My role as the researcher and positionality is recorded in this chapter to ensure complete transparency; the procedures and data collection plan are provided so this study may be replicated later. Finally, the trustworthiness of this study is outlined, and all information is provided to help the reader gain clarity.

Research Design

Berkwits and Inui (1998) asserted that qualitative research analyzes information transmitted through language and behavior in an individual's natural setting. Qualitative research captures expressive information not captured in quantitative research regarding an individual's beliefs, feelings, and motivations that underlie their behaviors (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Quantitative research is focused on numerical values and quantifying information. It is focused on the "how." For example, 'how many, how much, and how often (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022)." This study is designed to capture the experiences and feelings of teachers serving African American students who speak African American Vernacular English; therefore, a quantitative methodology is not appropriate to frame the study, but a qualitative approach is.

There are various qualitative research designs. The ethnography design intends to identify

shared cultural patterns. An ethnographic design is completed by intensive fieldwork and immersing oneself in the culture being studied extensively (Van Manen, 1982). Ethnography aims to gain insight into the norms of a culture of people over time. For these reasons, an ethnography design does not accommodate capturing the experiences of teachers who serve African American students who speak AAVE.

Peoples (2021) contended that a case study design is designed to study a single case (process, system) or cases to develop a detailed portrait of the participant(s). A case study provides the researcher the ability for a multi-perspective research approach if needed so that quantitative and qualitative approaches are used while conducting a study (Stake, 1995). The number of participants used in a case study is relatively low (Yin, 2018). For these reasons, a case study design needs to accommodate this research study which will focus on and capture the experiences of a more significant sampling number.

Glaser and Strauss (2017) contended that the grounded theory research design is rooted in sociology. This research design focuses on gathering and observing enough data to develop a working theory about a phenomenon. This design's primary goal is to verify or develop a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). For these reasons, the grounded theory research design is inappropriate for this study. This research aims to understand and explore teachers' experiences rather than to verify or develop a working theory.

A phenomenological approach is adequate because it fully meets the requirements of focusing solely on lived experiences (Manen, 1997; Osborn & Husserl, 1932). However, a transcendental-phenomenological (TP) approach is the best design type because it is an intelligent system rooted in emotional openness. It believes that all scientific knowledge rests on the inner evidence and that there is value in the human experience of a phenomenon (Husserl,

1970). Osborn and Husserl (1932) asserted that any phenomenon was the starting point for an investigation. Both intentionality and intuition are two key components necessary for a participant to engage in a TP study.

On the other hand, the researcher must engage in the epoche process, where the researcher removes themselves from the study only to document the participants' experiences. The researcher must bracket their thoughts and biases to avoid inserting their judgments and interfering with the participants' experiences. TP seeks to establish reality not necessarily on facts but through subjective experiences to explicate meaning. In contrast, a hermeneutic phenomenological design welcomes the researcher's opinions to co-construct the meaning of an experience since the researcher will bracket opinions and judgments to welcome the unsaturated experiences of the participants.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the perceptions and lived experiences of k-12 school teachers who work with African American students who communicate using African American Vernacular English?

Sub-Question One

What are k-12 teachers' beliefs about using cultural dialects, specifically African American Vernacular English, within their classroom?

Sub-Question Two

How does k-12 teachers' understanding of dialect variation contribute to the misdiagnosing and misplacement of African American students in classrooms?

Setting and Participants

This section provides a thorough overview of the site selected for the research study and a profile of the participants involved. The criteria for the participants selected were carefully constructed. The goal was to recruit professionals closely aligned with the purpose of the study. Likewise, the research site was selected by meticulously examining an organization that provided a diverse platform of educators servicing students who speak AAVE. The site was then secured once all criteria were met.

Site

The United Teachers Union was selected (UTU) as the research site. UTU is the voice of education professionals in Baltimore County Public Schools when articulating teacher positions on curriculum and policies. UTU's goal is to achieve equity and excellence in public schools. UTU is in Baltimore County, Maryland, with over 9,000 teacher members. Under the UTU contract, 'teachers' are defined as Counselors, Deans, Facilitators, Home & Hospital, Librarians & Media Specialists, Consulting Teachers, Nurses, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Psychologists, ROTC Instructors, Social Workers, Speech/Language Pathologists, Teachers-- regular and special education (Teachers Association of Baltimore County, 2022). The organization is governed by the members who elect the Officers, Board of Directors, and Association Representatives from their ranks.

Baltimore County has 178 public schools in the region. Currently, there are 111,084 students enrolled in the Baltimore County Public Schools District (Teachers Association of Baltimore County, 2022). Of the students enrolled, 44,565 identify as African American. UTU has a platform that allows the maximum coverage of teachers who serve African American students who speak African American Vernacular English in the Baltimore County Schools and

Teacher participation. For all of these reasons, UTU was chosen as the research site.

Participants

The participants in the research are k-12 Baltimore County Public School Teachers. Only UTU members who are current and active "regular and special education teachers" are considered for this study. Retired teachers will not be surveyed. This study is open to any active teacher who has been teaching for at least three years in the BPCS school system, regardless of how long they have been members of UTU. They may identify as any age, race, sex, etc. The participants must teach a core content area and have experienced African American students speaking African American Vernacular English within their classroom at some point in their teaching career. Twelve participants will be selected for this study, and the best-qualified candidates will be selected using purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Recruitment Plan

Each participant has at least one year of teaching experience in k-12 education. The participants serve as core discipline teachers in the Baltimore County school system serving African American students who speak AAVE. A core discipline teacher refers to teachers who teach math, science, English, and social studies/geography. Special education teachers are called 'core discipline teachers (Teachers Association of Baltimore County, 2022).'

The participants are 22-75 years of age. Her, hers, his, him, and they are their preferred pronouns. The participant group consists of multiple ethnicities and races, such as White, Black, Asian, and others. Each participant has at least a bachelor's degree and lives in Baltimore County. Please see Appendix B for recruitment flyer.

<div align="center">

Researcher Positionality

</div>

My family, community, history, and culture motivated me to undergo this research.

Everything that contributes to me being who I am is the influencer for this work. In this section, I will provide a personal narrative to support my interpretive framework and philosophical assumptions that birthed my positionality for the research.

Interpretive Framework

My interpretive framework is social constructivism (SC), also known as interpretivism (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which seeks to understand the world in which I work and live. SC aims to develop subjective meanings to my experiences that are situated and formed through my social interactions, historical events, and culture (Creswell & Poth, 2018). SC is unique because it is an approach that does not involve beginning with a theory (Burr, 2015). Creswell and Poth (2018) asserted that through inquiry, SC generates a pattern of meaning. As a social constructivist, I acknowledge how interpreting data flows from my personal, historical, and cultural experiences.

I grew up in Flint, MI, attending Flint community public schools all my life. I was introduced to dialectal differences in grade 6 when my neighborhood school closed due to funding issues, which forced me to attend the "other school." My school was between two subsidized apartment complexes, but the "other school" was located across the street from the more affluent homes.

Most students were Black like me, but many did not speak my conversational language, which was AAVE. I was groomed for educational leadership in kindergarten after showing a passion for helping my teacher conduct class. Spending countless hours under the tutelage of my White teachers, I picked up their spoken language, which was ME. This produced my ability to code-switch quite early.

At home, my momma only corrected my AAVE if she deemed it absurd. For example: "ain't got no homework." She would say, "stop talking ghetto. It is 'I do not have any

homework.'" Ironically, my parents have a phonetic issue that causes them to mispronounce words by emphasizing the wrong syllables. Audibly, I became accustomed to hearing their speech patterns; and began to naturally speak phonetically incorrectly.

Philosophical Assumptions

Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that philosophical assumptions inform the interpretive framework. Both components work together to manufacture a holistic understanding of the innate beliefs of the researcher. These beliefs act as the lens that guides my research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These ideas are my foundational philosophies that mold the inquiries. The three philosophical assumptions discussed in this section are ontological, epistemological, and axiological.

Ontological Assumption

The ontological assumption deals with the nature of reality. It asserts that multiple realities are constructed through lived experiences and interactions with others (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a social constructivist, I adhere to this view. My philosophy is that although God created all man to be equal, it is juxtaposed by Him creating us uniquely and different from one another. That is why multiple realities do exist, and they are constructed and informed by lived experiences. Relating to this research study, those who can communicate in ME encounter a different reality than those who cannot effectively communicate using ME.

Though I was used to code-switching and adapted reasonably well to a new academic environment, many of my peers who transferred to the "other school" did not thrive. This was evidenced by their behavior and the decline of positive peer interactions that I witnessed them have. The other factor was middle school placement. The 6th-grade teachers recommended which institution students should attend for the middle school based on grades, behavior, and

likeliness of success.

I was placed at Southwestern Academy, a school that housed grades 7-12, where the grade point average played a role in admissions. The school was known as the best school in the community. In contrast, many of my peers from my original neighborhood school did not attend Southwestern. They attended other institutions that were not necessarily academically progressive or focused on college preparation. I graduated high school and pursued college, while many of my original peers barely completed high school.

Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption addresses what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a researcher, knowledge is constructed through social interactions. Two aspects shaping knowledge construction are culture/community and academic education (Öztok, 2016).

Two aspects shaping knowledge construction are culture/community and academic education. What is learned from those two aspects can then be exercised in broader society. If the interactions are prosperous outside of one's community, then the knowledge counts, and the claims are justified. If an individual is unsuccessful in engaging with other communities, then the knowledge does not count and is unjustified.

However, before an individual can expand their knowledge, they must first feel safe and secure in their cultural identity (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2017). For example, before students who speak AAVE can achieve bidialectism and accomplish dialect shifting, they must first feel secure with their cultural linguistics. Society has identified that language is associated with knowledge which is associated with power. Any language dialect variation that is not ME is considered less than. This message has been conveyed throughout history, through media, and in academics.

As an illustration, I joined the quiz bowl team in high school, and my encounters with dialect began to deepen. Southwestern never hosted quiz bowl tournaments at their facility. We traveled outside of the county to schools that were predominantly White to compete. It was during my first quiz bowl tournament and first interaction with the competition that revealed to me, White students conversationally spoke ME, and I was behooved!

Their language sounded completely different from my peers, whom I originally thought spoke ME. This was my first realization and distinction that my peers spoke a proper variation of AAVE. My peers used sophisticated word choices, but the syntax aligned with AAVE. In contrast, my quiz bowl competitors shared a speech pattern that was identical to the speech patterns of my White teachers.

From ninth to twelve grade, the school positioned me in advanced placement literature, where all of my work was written and orally presented in ME. Resulting in me temporarily abandoning AAVE. Individuals would go on to say to me, "you talk White." Which was a complex phenomenon because I did talk White! I felt like an impostor, but my academic journey dictated that I communicate in ME, and although I missed AAVE, I had no choice but to adhere to the social construct.

From kindergarten to twelfth grade, the social construct dictated me to perform and produce academic work in ME. Personally, the worst part about this realization was being unable to articulate this phenomenon to my friends and teachers in a way that would evoke shared frustration. Secondly, there was a fear of expressing this tiresome act and further divulging my feelings to my teachers. Lastly, being able to read, write, speak, and comprehend ME was an unchanging requirement, so my concern felt invalid. I was powerless, tired, and defeated, so I continued to conform.

It was clear that ME was verified and expected, while AAVE was sub-par. ME was spoken by my teachers and competitors and is widely used in social media. I then began to wonder "if ME is spoken predominantly among the White culture and is considered the correct variation of language. What can be deduced about AAVE, and what did that mean for my Black identity?"

Axiological Assumption

Axiological assumptions are interested in the values that the researcher brings to the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, I have biases. I am a Black woman and speaker of AAVE. During my academic journey, there have been both negative and positive experiences with speaking AAVE.

The basis of this research is authenticity and integrity. I am a professional administrator at a local community college, a champion of language dialect diversity, and a member of a linguistic committee at the college aimed to reduce language discrimination and linguistic injustice. However, I am also guilty of correcting AA students' usage of AAVE. God created humans and saw that we were good, so if human behavior is not in alignment with God's intention, it is either out of the human will or a lack of knowledge and awareness that they have strayed from what God intended. Therefore, this research is designed to capture information on the experiences of k-12 teachers who serve AA students who speak using AAVE.

Researcher's Role

As the researcher, I am the human instrument in this study and will ensure complete transparency. I am not affiliated with UTU and have never been a UTU member. I do not know any UTU members, and I do not have authority over UTU's members. All research participants included in this study self-volunteered. A transcendental phenomenological was selected.

Utilizing a personal journal to record my experiences and feelings shared above, I bracketed my biases to avoid contaminating the data of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) defines epoche as clearing the mind. To ensure validity and reliability, I engaged in the process of epoche. Engaged in deep breathing techniques to help reset my thoughts and acts of mindfulness as I interviewed the participants helped to employ epoche.

Procedures

This section of the manuscript will detail the procedures of the research study. A comprehensive overview will be provided to help the reader gain clarity for possible future replication. This section notes the necessary permissions needed to conduct research, including site permissions, information about securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, soliciting participants, the data collection and analysis plans by data source, and an explanation of how the study achieves triangulation.

Recruitment Plan

An electronic invitation will be sent to UTU's administrative assistant, who then forwarded the invitation to over 9,000 UTU members. Purposive sampling will be applied, and the first 12 interested candidates who responds and meet the requirements for the study will be selected. Twelve participants will be selected using purposive sampling because this study aims to capture the depth of understanding, using candidates who are likely to yield the most appropriate and valuable information predicated on their experiences (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Saturation will be achieved once enough data has been collected to uncover critical reoccurring themes among the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each participant will receive, review, and submit an informed consent waiver. Please refer to Appendix C for a copy of the informed consent.

Data Collection Plan

This section outlines all details regarding the data collection plan. The data collection

plan is pertinent to administering the materials and situating the findings. Below there are three

different sources of evidence in the collection plan, including individual interviews, focus

groups, and letter writing. The data analysis section is also outlined to provide insight into how

the information was analyzed to construct meaning.

Individual Interviews

Structured interview questions will be asked of each participant. Refer to Appendix D for

interview questions. A total of 13 questions will be asked during a virtual Zoom interview. If

there is an emergency or a technology malfunction, the participants will be interviewed via

phone. The interview session is expected to last 45 minutes. Open-ended questions will be asked

to allow the participants to elaborate on their experiences and inquire with the researcher for

clarity of the questions (Peoples, 2021).

Individual Interview Questions

1. How do you define AAVE? CRQ

This question contributes to understanding the perceptions and lived experiences of k-12

schoolteachers who work with African American students who communicate using African

American Vernacular English.

2. What are your personal lived experiences and perceptions of AAVE? CRQ

This question contributes to understanding the perceptions and lived experiences of k-12

schoolteachers who work with African American students who communicate using African

American Vernacular English.

3. What are your professional experiences and perceptions of AAVE? CRQ

This question contributes to understanding the perceptions and lived experiences of k-12 schoolteachers who work with African American students who communicate using African American Vernacular English.

4. If applicable, how do you compartmentalize your personal and professional perceptions of AAVE when serving students in your classroom who speak AAVE? CRQ

This question contributes to understanding the perceptions and lived experiences of k-12 schoolteachers who work with African American students who communicate using African American Vernacular English.

5. What are your beliefs on students' usage of mainstream English within your classroom? SQ1

This question contributes to understanding k-12 teachers' beliefs about using cultural dialects, specifically African American Vernacular English, within their classroom.

6. What are your beliefs on students' usage of non-mainstream English dialects, specifically African American Vernacular English, within your classroom? SQ1

This question contributes to understanding k-12 teachers' beliefs about using cultural dialects, specifically African American Vernacular English, within their classroom.

7. How do you determine which dialects are acceptable for academic purposes within your classroom? SQ1

This question contributes to understanding k-12 teachers' beliefs about using cultural dialects, specifically African American Vernacular English, within their classroom.

8. What methods do you employ to help accommodate students who speak non-mainstream English dialects, specifically African American Vernacular English? SQ1

This question contributes to understanding k-12 teachers' beliefs about using cultural dialects, specifically African American Vernacular English, within their classroom.

9. How do you define "academic" and "non-academic" language? SQ2

This question helps to explore how k-12 teachers' understanding of dialect variation contributes to the misdiagnosing and misplacement of African American students in classrooms.

10. Describe your pre-service teacher teaching and how your program prepared you to serve students who speak non-mainstream English dialects, specifically African American Vernacular English. SQ2

This question helps to explore how k-12 teachers' understanding of dialect variation contributes to the misdiagnosing and misplacement of African American students in classrooms.

11. Describe your post-teacher training (professional development, conferences, etc.) and how that professional development prepared you to serve students who speak non-mainstream English dialects, specifically African American Vernacular English. SQ2

This question helps to explore how k-12 teachers' understanding of dialect variation contributes to the misdiagnosing and misplacement of African American students in classrooms.

12. As a professional, what are signs of a language deficit that would prompt you to refer your student for further psychological assessments? SQ2

This question helps to explore how k-12 teachers' understanding of dialect variation contributes to the misdiagnosing and misplacement of African American students in classrooms.

13. As a professional, how do you determine if a student has a language development issue (oral, auditory, comprehension, and written) that is not predicated by their non-mainstream English dialect? SQ2

This question helps to explore how k-12 teachers' understanding of dialect variation contributes to the misdiagnosing and misplacement of African American students in classrooms.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

The goal of transcendental phenomenology is to capture philosophical tenets noema, noesis, noeses, noetic, and epoche in a meaningful way (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, this data will be analyzed by being transcribed and then entered into thematic categories using Braun and Clarke's (2006) qualitative research data analysis plan. Braun and Clarke's thematic data analysis plan consists of six steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

First, familiarizing the data. This consists of transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, to capture the initial ideas. Second, generating initial codes. This consists of coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set and collating data relevant to each code. Third, is searching for themes. Which consists of collating codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each potential theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Fourth, is reviewing the themes. This consists of checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and then generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis. Fifth, is defining and naming the themes. This entails an ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme. Last, is producing the report. This consists of selecting vivid, compelling extract examples that relate back to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Focus Groups

The use of focus groups will help provide a greater understanding of the phenomenon (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2017). Each participant will dialogue with one another to help provide depth. Structured interview questions will be asked, please refer to Appendix E for focus group questions. A total of 4 questions will be asked during a virtual group Zoom interview. The

interview session is expected to last 45 minutes. Open-ended questions will be asked to allow the participants the freedom to elaborate on their experiences (Peoples, 2021). Additionally, focus groups are a method to help achieve triangulation by recording personal beliefs, views, and perspectives on a phenomenon (Brancati, 2018).

Focus Group Questions

1. Describe and provide examples of AAVE. CRQ

This question contributes to understanding the perceptions and lived experiences of k-12 schoolteachers who work with African American students who communicate using African American Vernacular English.

2. Describe your beliefs on AAVE speakers learning to code-switch to communicate effectively in class. RQ1

This question contributes to understanding k-12 teachers' beliefs about using cultural dialects, specifically African American Vernacular English, within their classroom.

3. Describe your beliefs on learning to communicate with students who speak AAVE effectively. RQ1

This question contributes to understanding k-12 teachers' beliefs about using cultural dialects, specifically African American Vernacular English, within their classroom.

4. What does AAVE sound like in your classroom? RQ2

This question helps to understand how k-12 teachers' understanding of dialect variation contributes to the misdiagnosing and misplacement of African American students in the classroom.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

The goal of transcendental phenomenology is to capture philosophical tenets noema, noesis, noeses, noetic, and epoche in a meaningful way (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, this data will be analyzed by being transcribed and then entered into thematic categories using Braun and Clarke's (2006) qualitative research data analysis plan. Braun and Clarke's thematic data analysis plan consists of six steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

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Letter-Writing

Letter writing is a data collection method that can enrich the participants' perspectives (Stamper, 2020). Refer to Appendix F the letter prompt. Letters provide detailed accounts of personal and delicate issues (Letherby & Zdrodowski, 1995). Each participant will be emailed the following letter prompt:

Write a letter to the state-approved teacher training (for example, college or university)
you attended and share what improvements can be made to incorporate language acquisition
and linguistic diversity to help prepare future teachers to serve individuals who speak non-
mainstream English language dialect variations, specifically AAVE. RQ2

This question helps to capture how k-12 teachers' understanding of dialect variation contributes to the misdiagnosing and misplacement of African American students in the classroom.

Letter-Writing Data Analysis Plan

The goal of transcendental phenomenology is to capture philosophical tenets noema, noesis, noeses, noetic, and epoche in a meaningful way (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, this data will be analyzed by being transcribed and then entered into thematic categories using Braun and Clarke's (2006) qualitative research data analysis plan as noted in the interviews and focus group data analysis descriptions. Braun and Clarke's thematic data analysis plan consists of six steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data Synthesis

All data will be synthesized using qualitative descriptive research which populates information that divulges 'who, what, and where events happened (Kim et al., 2017). Qualitative descriptive research is best associated with social constructivism and interpretative methods (Lincoln et al., 2017). As the researcher for the study, I am most interested in understanding each individual human experience. It is crucial that the data collected from each participant is not transformed beyond the phenomenon that is being studied.

Data analysis in qualitative descriptive research is data-driven, not using pre-existing philosophies or epistemological perspectives (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Two popular data

analyses are content and thematic analyses (Vogl, 2023). Thematic analyses are comprehensive and provide more details than content analyses (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Thematic analyses move beyond individual reports by noting thematic commonalities within the participants' narratives (Neergaard et al., 2009). Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined the thematic data analysis process as first familiarizing the data by transcribing the information and noting the initial ideas. Second, generating initial codes is done by coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.

Third, the searching for themes by collating codes and gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. Fourth, is the reviewing of themes completed by checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, which is used to generate a thematic map. Fifth, defining and naming the themes is achieved by ongoing analysis for refining the specifics of each theme and the overall story generating clear definitions and names for each theme. Lastly is the producing of the report, which is the final opportunity for analysis. The final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, produces a report of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of research is critical because it shows readers that the research findings are worthy of attention (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The goal is to eliminate researcher bias to ensure that the study is credible and objective. Eight procedures can be used to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, and I present three (Peoples, 2021); credibility, dependability, and transferability. Each area is achieved through careful consideration and by choosing the proper procedures (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Credibility

To ensure the credibility of this study, I will employ triangulation by using multiple sources of information, methods of data collection, and analyses (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). As the researcher, I can analyze the data with a colleague to provide depth to interpret the findings. This will help create a broader and deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Peoples, 2021). Credibility will also be achieved by checking my findings and interpretations with the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the study being generalizable so that it may be utilized in another context (Nowell et al., 2017). To ensure this research is transferable, in-depth descriptions will be provided (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Detailed descriptions are crucial to transferability for future use (Peoples, 2021). For the noted reasons, this study provides clear and concise descriptions and verbiage so that the research design may be applicable to various bodies of work**.**

Dependability

Dependability is achieved when the reader can quickly identify the research process. (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). For the noted reason, this study is logical, traceable, and documented, making it dependable (Tobin & Begley, 2004). T. Koch (1994) stated that when the research process can be audited with clearly defined sections and markers, the research is considered dependable.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the respondents shape the findings of a study and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Tobin and Begley (2004) described confirmability as accurate research interpretations derived from the collected data. Techniques for establishing confirmability include (a) confirmability audits; (b) audit trails; (c) triangulation; and (d) reflexivity. A confirmability audit ensures that the research interpretations are derived from the participant data as opposed to my beliefs as the researcher (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Audit trails highlight the evidence used to help the researcher arrive at rationales and decisions (T. Koch, 1994). To show an audit trail, information will be appropriately recorded regarding the study to show the handling of methodological issues during the study.

To achieve reflexivity, a reflexive journal will be used to monitor my internal and external dialogue during the research process (Tobin & Begley, 2004). The daily logistics of the research must also be documented as the researcher, my decisions, rationales, and reflections on personal values and self-insight (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To achieve triangulation, all sources of information, methods of data collection, and analyses will be compiled and recorded to present common responses among the participants (Kosnik et al., 1986)**.**

Ethical Considerations

There are ethical considerations in this study to protect the participants. Additionally, these ethical consideration ensures the integrity of the study. The appropriate steps were used to receive permissions and to protect the identity of the participants.

Permissions

I contacted UTU and spoke with UTU's administrative assistant, who received permission from the board and president of the organization to confirm UTU's participation. Refer to Appendix A for a copy of the UTU site approval letter. After securing organizational permission, a letter requesting to proceed will be made to the Liberty University Institutional

Review Board (LU IRB). LU IRB will approve the request for the continuation of the study.

Please refer to the Appendix for IRB approval. The study will then be submitted to the federal

Institutional Review Board and be approved for continuation and data collection.

Other Participant Protections

Information received and recorded will be stored safely. The information will be stored in

a locked file cabinet designated for this study. Additionally, the recorded videos will exist on a

password-protected flash drive which will also remain in the locked file cabinet. Pseudonyms

will be used to protect the identity of each participant (Hasan et al., 2021). I will assign pseudo

names for each participant and the institution they represent within Baltimore County. The

potential for harm will be reduced to the participant, and the risks will be reduced due to

anonymity (Cacciattolo, 2015). Each participant will receive an informed consent document to

confirm their participation in the study and so that they are aware of their rights. The participants

may withdraw from the study at any time (Cacciattolo, 2015).

Summary

The purpose of the transcendental phenomenological study is to explore the perceptions

and lived experiences of elementary schoolteachers working with AA students and their usage of

AAVE in the State of Maryland. This section covered interview questions, focus groups and

letter prompts as the three primary data collection methods. The analysis tools used for this

research come from Braun and Clarke (2006). This chapter contains explanations on the

researchers' role, the interview questions used, and the setting and participants selected for the

study. This section also detailed the data collection methods and different forms of data analyses.

The integrity of the study was highlighted by providing in-depth descriptions of the

trustworthiness and ethical considerations used to protect the participants. The next chapter will

focus on the research and the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of the proposed transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of K-12 schoolteachers working with African American students and their usage of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the State of Maryland. This chapter presents the data analysis as findings. This chapter includes participant descriptions, the data in the form of narrative themes and charts presented by theme, outlier data, and research question responses.

Participants

Twelve participants were selected for this study using purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants in this research are K-12 Baltimore County Public School (BPCS) Teachers. They are actively teaching and have taught for at least three years in the BPCS school system. The participants are 22-75 years of age and teach a core content area. Each participant experienced African American students speaking African American Vernacular English within their classroom at some point in their teaching career.

Table 1

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Age	Race	Years Taught	Grade Level	Subject Taught
Marcus	28	Black	4	8th	Social Studies
Alex	26	Black	2	12th	Math
Taylor	32	White	7	4th	English
McKenzie	35	White	5	6th	English
Lisa	39	Black	5	10th	English
Jess	33	White	4	12th	English
Ferdinand	45	White	12	9th-11th	Math
Jacob	37	White	6	3rd-5th	Science
Ericka	30	Black	6	1st-3rd	Social Studies
William	28	Black	2	4th	Math, Sciences
Lauren	40	Biracial	10	5th-6th	English
Jordan	32	Black	6	7th-8th	Geography

As shown in Table 1 all participants teach a core discipline. Six participants are men and the other six identify as women. Collectively the sample group provides academic instruction to grades 1st-12th and the average age of the participants is 34 years old. The average number of years taught is five.

Marcus

Marcus is a 28-year-old, 8th-grade social studies teacher who has taught for four years. Marcus is academically conservative. He spoke ME during his interview as well as the focus group. He believes there is a "correct and incorrect" form of English. It is his goal to teach children properly. Although he is aware of systemic barriers, he believes that there is only one form of acceptable English, and students must conform to read, write, and speak fluently to excel academically and be productive in the world.

Alex

Alex is a 26-year-old, 12th-grade math teacher who has taught for two years. Although Alex is new to the field, he has many experiences involving students who speak AAVE. He teaches at a predominantly Black school and encounters the dialect regularly. Although Alex switched throughout the individual interview and focus group, he emphatically shared that he felt it was his job to correct students when they spoke AAVE. He consistently highlighted that the students may do as they want in their community. However, as an educator who helps prepare students for college it is his role to help students speak professionally, even in his math course.

Taylor

Taylor is a 32-year-old, 4th grade English teacher who has taught for seven years. She shared that she was born in a predominantly White community with minimal exposure to other cultures. Taylor explained her background as a barrier to her teaching because she believed students should speak like her. Taylor spoke in ME during the interview and focus group. However, she often used playful language, colloquialisms, and euphemisms to highlight her level of relatability and acceptance of her student's language and background. Taylor shared that she sought resources and training to further her professional development, specifically to understand African American students who spoke AAVE.

McKenzie

McKenzie is a 35-year-old, 6th-grade English teacher who has taught for five years. McKenzie is autodidactic in terms of teaching herself to understand AAVE. McKenzie grew up in a diverse community and was exposed to many dialects in her neighborhood. However, academically, she was mainly surrounded by speakers of ME, which she attributes to attending a private school. After working in an urban setting as an educator, McKenzie noticed the

differences in speech between her students and herself. She began forming close relationships with her students to understand them holistically, translating into her accepting their language.

Lisa

Lisa is a 39-year-old, 10th-grade English teacher who has taught for five years. Lisa is a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. and presented conservatively. She spoke ME during her interview and the focus group. Her speech was poised and polished. She stated that her father taught her the importance of speaking correctly and using the "kings' language." She defined the king's language as correct English and believed that all students should know how to speak the king's language to be successful. She shared that other dialects are only acceptable in the appropriate social situations.

Jess

Jess is a 33-year-old, 12th-grade English teacher who has taught for four years. Jess is an epistemophile. She enjoys learning and gaining knowledge on different topics. She used ME during her interview but not during the focus group. She shared that she taught English in other countries and encountered a variety of dialects, which helped to shape her perspective on AAVE. Although she grew up in an upper-class neighborhood with a homogenous group, her experiences outside her childhood/teenage years reshaped her beliefs that AAVE is an acceptable dialect in academic settings. Jess is a self-proclaimed "nerd" and ally for social justice. She is self-aware and believes that being White comes with a privilege that she will use to help bring cultural awareness to spaces that are not typically accepting of differences.

Ferdinand

Ferdinand is a 45-year-old, 9th-11th grade math teacher who has taught for 12 years. Ferdinand was exceptionally quiet during the focus group. He only answered questions as asked

during his interview, with few antidotes and narratives surrounding his answers. Ferdinand looked studious and highlighted that although his students only completed a few writing assignments in his course, he heard his students speak AAVE regularly.

Jacob

Jacob is a 37-year-old, 3rd-5th grade science teacher who has taught for six years. Jacob was exuberant during his interview and focus group session. He had an upbeat attitude that made him personable and inviting. Jacob shared that he began to focus on language differences between his students once he noticed a pattern among his African American students. Jacob allows his students to speak freely in his course because he does not believe in policing their speech.

Ericka

Ericka is a 30-year-old, 1st-3rd grade social studies teacher who has taught for six years. Ericka is outspoken and is protective of her students as a mother is with a child. Ericka presented very calmly and thoughtfully during her individual interviews and focus groups. She took her time and answered each question thoroughly. She often asked clarifying questions to help guide her response. She believes each child is special and unique in their light, and their language should be understood and appreciated.

William

William is a 28-year-old, 4th-grade math and science teacher who has taught for two years. William was welcoming. He welcomed each question and different perspectives than his own during the focus group session. He spoke in AAVE and often code-switched to affirm that he could. He was transparent during his interview. He admitted that he never thought of AAVE

as a legitimate dialect. He did not mind his students speaking AAVE in his course and attested that he felt connected to his students because he also spoke in AAVE code.

Lauren

Lauren is a 40-year-old, 5th-6th grade English teacher who has taught for ten years. She presented conservatively during the interview and spoke using ME. She shared that although she is Biracial and speaks ME, she does have family members who speak AAVE regularly. Lauren stated that her upbringing with her dad differed from life with her mom. Her dad's side of the family spoke ME, and she naturally gravitated towards the culture of her dad because she was a "daddy's girl." She made a distinction early in life between her parents' cultural differences and stated that her beliefs followed her into her profession. She

Jordan

Jordan is a 32-year-old, 7th-8th grade geography teacher who has taught for six years. Jordan was studious and provided much feedback to participants during the group interview. He code-meshed and used playful language during his interview. He championed the idea of teaching his students the importance of code-switching. He was among the few participants who stated that speaking and writing in AAVE code are two different phenomena. He corrects the writing of his students more than their speech dialect. Although he encourages students to use standard English, he leads by example with code-meshing.

Results

This section is supported by appropriate narratives, raw data, and participant quotes to findings. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) qualitative descriptive research data analysis plan, the data is structured into categories and sub-categories. This section will present the findings in the

following order: individual interviews, focus group, and a letter prompt. Using Braun and

Clarke's (2006) thematic data analysis process, the findings were situated into themes.

The data was first transcribed into initial ideas. The data generated was then examined for

interesting features across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code. After

reviewing all data relevant to each potential theme, a thematic map was generated.

The themes were then defined and named by an ongoing analysis to select extracts, relating the

analysis to the research question, literature, to produce a report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After analyzing the data using Braun and Clark's thematic data analysis, three themes were

identified during individual interviews, the focus group discussions, and letter writing prompts.

Each theme was generated by collating the findings by thoroughly examining the transcribed

data. Each theme is unique and addresses the phenomena.

Themes

There are four themes revealed from the data. They are professional and academic

language, the White Savior complex, being inadequately prepared to serve speakers of AAVE,

and the importance of relationships and communicating with the student. Each theme appeared

several times throughout the data and are expounded upon in his section (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Sub-Themes
Professional and Accepted Academic Language	African American Vernacular English Sounds like Cool Slang Non-Professional and Disrespectful Language African American Vernacular Sounds Undesirable in Class
White Savior Complex	Teaching the Curriculum

	White English
Relationship and Communicating with Students	Understanding the Students Accepting the Students Code-Switching is Necessary Recognizing African American Vernacular English as a Legitimate Dialect
Unprepared to Serve Students who Speak Non-Mainstream English	Urge to Understand the Student Teacher Preparation Programs Could Benefit from Including Language Acquisition to Curriculum

Professional and Accepted Academic Language

In the U.S. K-12 education, many school districts have adopted academic content standards called to use academic language, which is designed to help prepare students for college. Those who do not speak ME have more significant challenges mastering the imposed academic language (Park, 2019; Wolf et al., 2023). All participants provided a narrative supporting the idea that acceptable and unacceptable academic language exists. The participants synonymously referred to the acceptable form of academic language as "professional language" and "white English." In comparison, noting that other dialects were not viewed as professional and therefore was unacceptable in society.

For example, Alex stated "African American Vernacular English isn't professional. It is required that my students speak professionally when in my class." Marcus declared "Mainstream English is polished and expected from students because they are being prepared for the real world where they need to know how to speak, ya know." Lisa shared "…Yeah, my father always said it was necessary to know the king's language. African American Vernacular English is

acceptable in a certain space and when working on assignments that allow my students to express themselves, but they must know when to put away the slang and use the king's language."

African American Vernacular English Sounds like Cool Slang

A subtheme emerging from focus group was African American English likened to slang. Slang is often crafted from AAVE, but they are not the same (McLaren, 2009; Pullum, 1999). The group had many opinions regarding the sound of African American Vernacular English. Each opinion situated itself into describing African American Vernacular English as slang. Lisa stated, "It sounds really cool! Ya know? Like, the language the rappers use and people on social media."

William added, "I think it is most definitely a way to sound more hip, like slang words." Taylor added, "Black English has a rhythm to me, like a certain cadence when spoken, and I do agree that it sounds cool slang in a community, and as a white person, I do feel cooler and more accepted by the Black community when I can speak like that." The redundancy and agreement that AAVE sounded cool, was common in the focus group transcript.

Non-Professional and Disrespectful Language

After investigating the data, a subtheme of non-professional and disrespectful language emerged. The ideology of bad grammar dates to the eighteenth century (Luu, 2020). Many participants recalled experiences of encountering AAVE as a feeling of "disrespect." There was an identifiable experience among several participants noting that AAVE was harsh. According to Taylor, "one student said to me "you be trippin' Ms. Jones," and I felt disrespected." In conjunction with popular responses of AAVE being non-professional.

Several participants made comments about the students using slang which is non-professional speech. Contrastingly, J. Roth-Gordon (2021), stated that AAVE is not slang, although slang is often created from the dialect (McLaren, 2009; Pullum, 1999). However, the perception that AAVE was slang was acknowledged in comments such as "It is unacceptable to say "yo dummy, what are we doing today" to any teacher and that kind of slang should not be used because we are helping students become professionals," Lisa shared. Alex also stated, "African American Vernacular English isn't professional. It is required that my students speak professionally when in my class." The redundancy of declaring that AAVE was slang and unprofessional reoccurred in each individual transcript.

African American Vernacular Sounds Undesirable in Class

This subtheme was the catalyst for the participants to discuss the sound of African American Vernacular English within their classrooms. Many teachers believed that AAVE should only be used in the students' home and community (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Wolf et al., 2023). Jess said, "When I first began teaching, African American Vernacular English sounded like bad English. It sounded all wrong…my opinion has changed since then, thank God!"

Mckenzie stated, "My first encounter with the dialect was a complete culture shock. One of my students told me, "I will be doing the most," and I felt disrespected. To piggyback on what was said earlier, after years of teaching in an urban community school, I learned that "I be" is just something that my students say, and many times when I felt disrespected was just the students trynna regulate emotionally with words, to describe what was happening internally." The redundancy and shared agreement that AAVE sounded undesirable in academic spaces was present throughout the focus group transcript.

White Savior Complex

Another theme that emerged from the data is the White Savior Complex. According to Straubhaar (2015), the White Savior Complex refers to reinforcing revolutionary struggles by the oppressors. It is where White people insist on their leadership, and implementation of their ideas onto the oppressed, because of their mistrust and beliefs concerning the capabilities and suitability of the oppressed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Straubhaar, 2015).

Participants shared the notion of "rescuing the child" and teaching them correct English. "As a white woman entering the field, Um, I thought I was gonna save the world, ya know? My goal was to teach the kids the correct way of thinking and speaking," said Taylor." Jess had similar experiences and shared "First hearing Black English as a teacher made me think that there was a deficiency in their speech because it did not sound like mine. As their teacher, it was my goal to save them and teach them the correct way of communicating, right?" The redundancy of declaring the need to rescue and teach correct English reoccurred in individual transcripts.

Teaching Curriculum and White English

The subtheme that emerged from this data was also the notion of having to reinforce ME because it is curriculum requirements. According to Easton and Verdon assessment tools, research evidence, and intervention programs are designed by and for middle-class White English speakers (Easton & Verdon, 2021; Hendricks & Adlof, 2017). Marcus shared, "I know this is a comfortable way for them to speak, but I am obligated to show them the correct way of speaking. My students must be able to speak like white people to succeed."

According to Lisa, "I am a Black woman, so trust me, I get it! But unfortunately, my students must know how to talk "the talk." We are the minority in America. So, it really only makes sense that we know how to speak the right way so that we can be accepted by the

majority." Taylor shared thoughts such as "Many times Black students' pronunciation of words sounds different. Some syllables are not pronounced in certain words, and even though I am aware of this being a style of dialect, I have to make sure they are pronouncing things in "White English" so that I can grade them…" The redundancy of declaring the duty to teach the curriculum reoccurred in individual transcripts.

Relationship and Communicating with Students

This theme revealed in the data was the importance of communicating and having a relationship with students. According to McHugh, students in urban secondary schools are underprepared, and they drop out at alarming rates. However, they know their relationships with teachers affect their learning (McHugh et al., 2013; Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017).

Most of the candidates stated they were aware of the language dialect hierarchy. "I know that white is viewed as desirable in our country with everything. It is systemic, of course. I make sure to build a relationship and rapport with my students prior to correcting their speech. It is important that my students trust me enough to allow me to help them if that makes sense," shared Lisa.

Understanding the Students

A subtheme emerged from the data concerning understanding the students. Teachers must understand their students to motivate them to achieve learning outcomes (Pennings et al., 2018; Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017). Lauren highlighted, "once I understood that my students were different from me and that did not mean that they had "bad language." I was stuck in my world and the way that I was taught. But being around my students challenged me and showed me that I was not prepared to teach students who were not white."

Lauren continued by saying "I thought that I was prepared to teach all students. I knew that I was not a racist and loved everyone regardless of their color and race; after all, I am mixed! But my first year of teaching highlighted the biases I was unaware of. I did not understand my students." Other participants shared that they did understand their students. For example, Alex stated "AAVE is our community language. I use it, and I find it okay for my students to use it when in conversation. I understand them, and they understand me."

Accepting the Students

A subtheme emerged from the data concerning accepting students. Positive teacher-student interactions aid in accepting the students (Pennings et al., 2018; Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017)." I accept my students for who they are and the dialect they use. The only way to introduce them to code-switching is to have a strong bond. It's funny because I actually have one female student who refuses to talk white, and she tells me that" stated Jess. According to McKenzie, "Once I learned my students on a cultural level and built personal relationships, I was able to understand them and accept their language as not being "wrong" or a deficiency. It's just how they speak!"

Code-Switching is Necessary

This subtheme was identified among the data collected during the focus group was the importance of knowing how to code-switch. Many teachers prefer that student's code-switched to fulfill academic responsibility and to maintain their dialect (L. M. Koch et al., 2001; Kolano & King, 2015). Lisa shared a personal narrative concerning speaking the king's language with the group. "I'm a Black woman if it isn't obvious (giggles). But I know personally and professionally the importance of being able to code switch. I tell my students all of the time that they are the minority and must learn how to speak proper English to have opportunities in

employment, college, and in their futures. To be seen as equals to their white peers. It's unfortunate but necessary."

Marcus also added "simply to pass my class, my students must write in standard English. They can't write the way they speak…" The redundancy and shared agreement that code-switching is a necessary skill was present throughout the focus group transcript.

Recognizing African American Vernacular English as a Legitimate Dialect

Some participants shared that they viewed African American Vernacular English as a legitimate dialect. According to Brette-Hamilton, AAVE is a legitimate dialect with specific conventions, grammatical rules, and syntax (Brette-Hamilton, 2020; Labov, 1968). Jess stated, "I learned that I was the dumb one! I judged these poor students because I couldn't understand their language. Their dialect is theirs! It's their culture and I had to learn it if I wanted to effective as a teacher."

Mckenzie shared, "Again, it took me about a year or so to learn that this dialect was a community language. Because I wasn't a member of the community, I did not know it. I did my own research and really focused on my own internal biases, that's how I learned that it was a legitimate dialect. Even though I accept it, the educational system is filled with barriers for Black students, so I do not know if it is accepted by other teachers at my school." The redundancy that recognizing AAVE as a legitimate dialect was present throughout the focus group transcript.

Unprepared to Serve Students Who Speak Non-Mainstream English

A theme identified in the letter-writing prompt was the participants' feeling unprepared to serve students who speak non-mainstream English. If a teacher is unprepared with limited linguistic knowledge, they can create negative attitudes that produce misunderstandings of other dialects (Kim et al., 2017; Tan & Preece, 2022; Tang & Hu, 2022). Each participant recounted

their experiences and provided a brief narrative of feeling unprepared linguistically to serve

students who spoke African American Vernacular English. According to McKenzie "… this

program did not prepare me to work with students who were not white and middle class."

Many participants highlighted that their training included an overview of cultural

diversity and sensitivity. However, they needed to receive more education, exposure, or training

on dialect sensitivity and the importance that it would have in their teaching careers. Ferdinand

shared "…your school was great! Nevertheless, regarding linguistic differences, the college can

offer practical experience working with students who speak non-standard English dialects."

Urge to Understand the Student

A subtheme that emerged from the letter prompt was the urge to understand the student.

Understanding and accepting the students can lead to academically higher success rates

(Pennings et al., 2018; Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017). The participants shared the theme of

wanting to understand the students and their dialectal differences. As stated by William, "It will

be beneficial to bring in linguistic experts to present. Someone who specializes in the study of

AAVE or even speakers of AAVE to speak to teacher education classes can help teachers better

understand the language and its significance to the communities who use it."

Teacher Preparation Programs Could Benefit from Including Language Acquisition
to Curriculum

While not discussed during the interviews or focus group discussion, a theme that

emerged letter prompt was the constant highlight of teacher preparation programs possibly

benefiting from including language acquisition in their curriculum. Language is both acquired

and learned (Higgs & Krashen, 1983; S. Krashen, 1991). According to the responses, several

pieces of feedback were shared on how programs can better prepare future teachers to serve

African American students who speak African American Vernacular English. For example, Jacob shared, "I believe that by incorporating change to the teacher education programs future teachers can be better equipped to serve individuals who speak non-mainstream English language dialect variations especially AAVE. Perhaps, have more courses on language development and the importance it has in the classroom." The redundancy of teacher preparation programs benefitting from including language acquisition to curriculum was emphasized by various participants.

Outlier Data and Findings

There are two outlier findings in this study. The outlier findings in this study consists of noting different cultural differences to be considered and the sound of AAVE. These unexpected findings did not align with the general themes.

Cultural Differences

One participant referred to other underserved populations having a distinct dialect—for example, the homeless population and Vietnamese students in Vietnam who are learning English. According to Jess, "when I first started working with youth of all different racial backgrounds, I was in college and my initial introduction to student youth in general was working with a group of about 100 to 200 youth that were homeless, living on the streets of Seattle, and in that I was introduced to a lot of cultural backgrounds and dialects that I had never had the experience to interact with before. It was a complete culture shock, and I did not believe that these people were smart."

Sound of Dialect

The outlier data among the group interviews was the mention of African American Vernacular English sounding very slow in pace. Jess contrasted the dialect to Spanish, which is

spoken in Colombia. "The dialect sounds really relaxed to me. It's like a slow pace, ya know? Has anyone ever visited Colombia or know a Colombian? They speak Spanish incredibly faster than how it is spoken in Mexico. Well, in my opinion."

Research Question Responses

This section answers the research questions with participant narratives. There are three research questions designed to divulge and explore the phenomenon. The research questions revealed possible misconceptions teachers may hold regarding AAVE and their beliefs on teaching dialect shifting to ME (Hallett, 2020; Mills et al., 2021; Rickford et al., 2000). The research questions will explore the perceptions and lived experiences of K-12 schoolteachers working with AA students and their usage of AAVE in the State of Maryland.

Central Research Question

What are the perceptions and lived experiences of K-12 schoolteachers who work with African American students who communicate using African American Vernacular English? The participants believe that AAVE is socially accepted (J. Roth-Gordon, 2021; J. Roth-Gordon et al., 2020). According to Jess during her individual interview, "the only experiences I've had with AAVE was from the media. Up until I began teaching! At that point, I had a bias against the dialect because I only ever heard it in music. I grew up in a pretty wealthy area where everyone spoke proper English."

During the focus group, Taylor added, "Black English has a rhythm to me, like a certain cadence when spoken, and I do agree that it sounds like cool slang in a community." The dialect is creative and often informs slang. This finding supports the literature in that AAVE is perceived as a community language and not an academic language (Russo, 2021; Shah, 2019; Sidtis et al., 2021). According to Lisa, "African American Vernacular English is acceptable in a

certain space and when working on assignments that allow my students to express themselves,"

aligning with the idea that the dialect is often viewed as informal (Godley et al., 2007;

Thomason, 2022).

Sub-Question One

What are K-12 teachers' beliefs about using cultural dialects, specifically African

American Vernacular English, within their classroom? The participants believe that African

American Vernacular English is accepted informally (Bowie & Bond, 1994; Godley et al., 2007).

However, students must know how to speak mainstream English in the classroom (Labov, 1972).

According to Lisa, "…they must know when to put away the slang and use the king's language*."*

Ferdinand shared during his individual interview "there is a correct way to speak, and I do

correct my students to use Standard English."

The findings align with the existing literature, which suggests that the participants believe

that they are responsible for correcting African American students who communicate using

African American Vernacular English (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Elbow, 1999). All

participants regarded the dialect as being academically illogical, but the Black participants were

more accepting of the dialect within the classroom as a social language compared to their White

peers. Research showed that negative beliefs about a cultural dialect negatively impact the

student, and the participants in this study held an unfavorable view of AAVE in their classroom

(G. McClendon & Valenciano, 2018; Penrod et al., 1959).

Sub-Question Two

How does K-12 teachers' understanding of dialect variation contribute to the

misdiagnosing and misplacement of African American students in classrooms? According to

Taylor, "I'm ashamed to say this. Gosh, I can't believe I am saying this aloud, but I do not know

how to spot the difference between a speech impairment and African American English. Verbally, I cannot really listen and differentiate. I do better when I can read the writings of my students and assess comprehension. That reveals if I should refer a student for psychological assessment. If that makes sense?"

According to Jacob, who shared in his letter prompt, "…also, teaching how to best work with students who do not speak mainstream English is a skill I have not mastered, but I only became aware of it through working with students from different backgrounds. Training in this area would help immensely." For this reason, it is paramount that teachers are mindful that background is a factor in language development. Positive student outcomes are associated with culturally relevant education (Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

Jess shared during the focus group, "I do not believe that any of my students have a speech impediment. I view them all as just communicating differently. Yeah, I don't believe that there is an issue." These findings align with the research that suggested schoolteachers are overly referring AA students to be evaluated for special educational services because of their usage of AAVE and, as a result, schools are misdiagnosing and misplacing AA students in special educational programs (Brette-Hamilton, 2020; Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Hallett, 2020; Mills et al., 2021). A professional's lack of pedagogical content and skills surrounding AAVE contributes to the problem (Brette-Hamilton, 2020; Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Hallett, 2020; Mills et al., 2021). Teachers are responsible for being knowledgeable about linguistic differences (Fogel & Ehri, 2000). Being unaware places teachers at a disadvantage for teaching ineffectively.

Summary

This chapter presented the data analysis as findings using Braun and Clarke's (2006) qualitative descriptive research data analysis plan. Collectively, there were four major themes

identified across all data collection methods. The four themes are professional and academic language, the White Savior complex, being inadequately prepared to serve speakers of AAVE, and the importance of relationships and communicating with the student. Each theme appeared several times throughout the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Two significant findings in this chapter are the responsibility of teachers to correct African American Vernacular English for academic purposes and the importance of building a relationship with students to understand who they are before correcting their dialect (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Elbow, 1999; McHugh et al., 2013). The next chapter will provide detailed discussions concerning the findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of the proposed transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of K-12 schoolteachers working with African American students and their usage of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the State of Maryland. This chapter is unique in providing interpretations and ideas to refine the findings of this study. This chapter consists of five discussion subsections: (a) interpretation of findings, (b) implications for policy and practice, (c) theoretical and methodological implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, and (e) recommendations for future research.

Discussion

This section presents the study's findings considering the developed themes. Each subsection is supported with theoretical, empirical, and data from the research study. This discussion follows the order: (a) Interpretation of Findings; (b) Implications for Policy or Practice; (c) Theoretical and Empirical Implications; (d) Limitations and Delimitations; and (e) Recommendations for Future Research.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Teachers agreed that at the beginning of their teaching journey, they did not consider AAVE as a professional or accepted academic language (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021). For example, Alex stated, "African American Vernacular English isn't professional" in her individual interview. While collecting data in the focus group, Jess shared, "When I first began teaching, African American Vernacular English sounded like bad English. Existing literature shows there is a negative connotation surrounding slang, which is often interchanged with AAVE (Godley et

al., 2007; Thomason, 2022). Frequently, teachers confuse AAVE as ME with plenty of mistakes (Elbow, 1999).

All teachers shared their perspective on their level of preparedness for serving speakers AAVE as being relatively low. The participants stated that they did not learn much about language acquisition and would employ their former teacher preparation program to include courses on language equity and development (Higgs & Krashen, 1983; Krashen, 1991). Marcus highlighted, "incorporate language acquisition and linguistic diversity to help prepare future teachers to serve individuals who speak non-mainstream English language dialect variations (AAVE)." Alex concurred in the letter prompt by providing the following ways to improve the teacher education program: Introduce linguistics courses, including linguistics courses, can help teachers understand the linguistic diversity of their future classrooms. Existing literature encouraged educators to seek continued professional development within linguistic diversity and language acquisition (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Krashen, 2003).

Most of the White participants contested to feel obligated to save the students from their incorrect way of speaking (Straubhaar, 2015). However, many of the Black participants contested that they were obligated to also change the student's language for academic purposes. Lisa stated during the focus group that "African American Vernacular English is acceptable in a certain space and when working on assignments that allow my students to express themselves, but they must know when to put away the slang and use the king's language." According to Taylor during her individual interview "my goal was to teach the kids the correct way of thinking and speaking," Existing literature showed that educators deem AAVE acceptable during narrative stories or to fulfill other expressive academic assignments (Bucholtz, 2011; Cooper, 2003). Research shows that teachers prefer code-switching from AAVE to ME as best practice,

or else a student's dialect could be eradicated in efforts to teach them ME for academic purposes (Daniels, 2018; Gallagher, 2020).

Lastly, all teachers addressed the importance of building rapport with their students to foster positive outcomes and high academic achievement (Pennings et al., 2018). As stated by William in his letter prompt, "It will be beneficial to bring in linguistic experts to present. Someone who specializes in the study of AAVE or even speakers of AAVE to speak to teacher education classes can help teachers better understand the language and its significance to the communities who use it." McKenzie shared in the focus group "once I understood that my student was using this language to describe what was happening internally." During the individual interviews, Lisa shared, "I make sure to build a relationship and rapport with my students prior to correcting their speech." The existing literature shows that trust and a strong rapport leads to higher academic achievement and success rates among students of color (McHugh et al., 2013; Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017).

Interpretations of Findings

There is a total of four collective themes found and documented in Chapter 4. Each theme is unique and lends itself to a wealth of knowledge. The four themes are professional and academic language, the White Savior complex, unprepared to serve speakers of AAVE, and the importance of relationships and communicating with the student. Each theme is categorized into four succinct and thorough data interpretation discussions.

The Role of Preconceived Beliefs

Some preconceived and prior beliefs affect how teachers serve African American (AA) students (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). There is an expectation in community school districts that mainstream English (ME) is taught. Teachers must be adequately trained to teach students who

speak non-mainstream English, especially African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Elbow, 1999).

The data showed that nearly all participants held their own ideas concerning AAVE before serving as teachers (J. Roth-Gordon, 2021; J. Roth-Gordon et al., 2020). Concisely, White participants alluded to teaching the students ME as their job. Not in a way that would allow the students to effectively code-switch between AAVE and ME, but in a way that replaces their AAVE (Elbow, 1999; Straubhaar, 2015). The responses provided in Chapter 4 highlighted that the White participants intentionally sought to fix their students' usage of AAVE because it did not sound professional and was deemed incorrect English. The belief that AAVE was academically unacceptable and unwarranted in education was often preconceived (Daniels, 2018; Gallagher, 2020).

AAVE as a Tool for Success

Next, the data showed that the Black participants felt that AAVE was unacceptable unless the student could speak both ME and AAVE (Daniels, 2018; Suh et al., 2021). The data revealed that the Black participants were more aware of the dialect, and some were avid AAVE speakers. However, the participants unequivocally believed their students needed to know how to speak ME for academic purposes (Greene & Walker, 2004; Gumperz, 1982).

The importance of speaking ME and knowing how to effectively code-switch for these participants situated itself in earning a passing grade for curriculum purposes, attending college, and receiving employment. The Black participants viewed ME as a tool for success that their African American students needed to have. They did not view AAVE as a deficit if it was accompanied by knowing how to code-switch and write in ME coding correctly (Daniels, 2018; Greene & Walker, 2004; Gumperz, 1982; Suh et al., 2021).

Ill-Equipped Teacher Preparation Programs

Lastly, the data shows that all participants did not receive any preparation before becoming teachers in dialect and linguistics. Many participants stated that their teacher preparation program did offer some form of multicultural and diversity course (Kim et al., 2017; Tan & Preece, 2022; Tang & Hu, 2022). Other participants shared that they were introduced very minimally to the concept of working with English Learners.

However, there were no courses on dialect. According to the data, participants depended on prior knowledge and personal beliefs as their informational guide when serving AA students who speak AAVE (Tan & Preece, 2022; Tang & Hu, 2022). They used their subjective experiences to help educate themselves in identifying what their AA students needed.

Understanding the Student

Many participants had new subjective experiences concerning AAVE after their first year of teaching. Specifically, the White participants alluded to the fact that they found that AAVE was a community language they never understood simply because they were not in the community (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; PBS, 2005). They were enlightened once they recognized that it was a standard dialect for AA students. So much so that they formally began to educate themselves on AAVE and used that to connect best and build rapport with the students (McHugh et al., 2013; Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017). This relationship led the White participants to examine their biases and effectively introduce the students to ME and code-switching without replacing their community language and changing their dialect identity (Pennings et al., 2018; Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017; Suh et al., 2021).

Implications for Policy or Practice

The data reveals that there are implications for practice. Some functional changes can be implemented to create a more inclusive learning environment. Stakeholders, such as teachers,

can begin employing specific strategies to help foster a diverse environment for students who speak non-ME, specifically AAVE (Giambo, 2018; G. McClendon & Valenciano, 2018).

Implications for Practice

One recommendation that can be employed is professional development addressing dialectal differences. These professional developments should be offered to all teachers regardless of grade and subject taught (Peele-Eady & Foster, 2018; Shin, 2018). All teachers could benefit from learning how to create a safe space for linguistic differences. Professional development should focus on educating teachers on developing another dialect (Douglas et al., 2008; S. D. Krashen, 2003). As mentioned, the participants shared that they did not receive appropriate training in their pre-teacher programs, so they must receive equitable post-training in their careers.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

There are both theoretical and empirical implications found within this study. The empirical implications highlight why this study is important and the professional practices that contribute to the phenomenon. The theoretical implications highlight the relationship between the results and theories applied to this study.

Empirical Implications

Nearly all participants shared a similar experience in their teacher training program. The experience needed more substantial exposure to a functional understanding of their role as agents, helping students acquire another dialect without feelings of judgment and unrealistic expectations in language acquisition. The findings from this study can catalyze the expansion of SLA to include dialect acquisition, as research shows that Black students often struggle with

becoming bidialectal due to academic pressures and teachers not understanding or building a relationship with the student to aid in the process (S. Krashen, 1991).

Theoretical Implications

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) posits that racism is systematic and embedded into the fabric of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Racism is perpetuated by the reinforcement of legal systems that favor whites. According to this study, the data shows a relationship between CRT and K-12 student teachers' perceptions concerning AAVE. The study highlighted that White teachers believed they had to replace AAVE with ME. Specifically, the idea of the White participants being "saviors."

That view of the participants reinforced the perpetuated standard of a country functioning in a system that promotes and favors whiteness and that alike. Historically, CRT has focused on explaining legal systems in America (Rogers & Mosley, 2006). The findings of this study reveal that CRT is applicable in education, specifically around curriculum development as it relates to dialect. This study highlighted that White teachers' approach teaching with a preconceived notion that their language is correct.

The Second Language Acquisition Theory (SLA) posits that language is acquired and not learned (Higgs & Krashen, 1983; S. Krashen, 1991). The teacher is responsible for meeting the student where the student is regarding learning. This theory is traditionally applied to students who speak a different language, but the same tenets apply to developing a second language dialect. According to the findings in this study, many participants need to be educated on the importance of developing dialect and understanding dialectical differences.

Limitations and Delimitations

There were limitations and delimitations in this study. Limitation refers to the potential weaknesses of the study and things that were beyond your control in the conduct of your study (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). A delimitation is the limitations placed on the study to limit the scope of information received, including access, location, and requirements (Peoples, 2021).

Limitations

As the researcher, I was only granted access to a small population of teachers within Baltimore County. This affected the sample population. Due to Baltimore County legislation and internal institutional review board stipulations, I could not access professional emails. To function within guidelines and exercise integrity, I could only advertise and recruit through an external organization of teachers within Baltimore County. This limited the number of schools that candidates worked in, lending itself to being a more homogenous group of teachers representing the same schools.

This transcendental phenomenological qualitative study was limited because it depended on the participant's understanding. The data captured expresses each participant's experiences and interpretations of interview questions, and the journal prompt could be different despite the attempts of the researcher to present the information to each participant in a neutral manner. Another area for improvement of this design is the data analysis. The data analysis is also limited because an overwhelming amount of data had to be thoroughly reviewed and precisely situated. Although biases and personal feelings were shelved using the journaling technique, there is a margin of error available from simply being human while interpreting the data provided.

Delimitations

The following delimitation was using only teachers. Many administrators, such as counselors and social workers, inquired about participating and sharing experiences that could

benefit the research. Many teachers who still need to meet the requirements also inquired to participate. Specifically, teacher aids retired teachers and teachers who do not live in Baltimore County. The rationale for setting the recruitment parameters was to receive a quality sample population to extract data. Active teachers in Baltimore County who teach core disciplines have many attributable experiences to share and, therefore, are the desired population.

Recommendations for Future Research

The field of education could benefit from future research that expounds on this topic. Future research should collect data from American Colleges and Universities with teacher preparation programs. This quantitative study can examine the curricula to identify if linguistic courses are offered as a part of the training. This data can help deliver a more prominent suggestion to American colleges and universities to help diversify the curriculum to educate better and support teachers to serve all students.

A second recommendation for future research is a qualitative study that examines AAVE following the same procedures and steps in this research. However, instead of capturing teachers' experiences, speech-language pathologists and other administrators should be interviewed. The research should highlight the experiences of speech-language pathologists who diagnose AA students with language disorders.

Unfolding their thoughts and lived experiences with AAVE and aligning them with their professional role as clinical experts. The results from this study may highlight a need for speech-language pathology programs in American Colleges and Universities to have diverse curricula to help situate multiculturalism so that future speech-language pathologists are effective in serving individuals with non-mainstream dialects, specifically AAVE. This, too, may inform America's

educational system and close the achievement gap by combating the number of misdiagnoses for AA students being overly placed in special education courses.

Conclusion

The problem of the proposed research study is that k-12 schoolteachers are overly referring AA students to be evaluated for special educational services because of their usage of AAVE and, as a result, schools are misdiagnosing and misplacing AA students in special educational programs (Brette-Hamilton, 2020; Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Hallett, 2020; Mills et al., 2021). The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of k-12 schoolteachers working with AA students and their usage of AAVE in the State of Maryland. The research included collecting data using qualitative methods such as individual interviews, focus groups and letter prompts. Each question was designed to capture the essence of the phenomenon and the questions revealed possible misconceptions teachers held regarding AAVE and their beliefs on teaching dialect shifting to ME (Rickford et al., 2000).

Research showed that k-12 schoolteachers in the state of Maryland often overly refer AA students to be evaluated for special educational services because of their usage of AAVE (Brette-Hamilton, 2020; Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Hallett, 2020; Mills et al., 2021). The data expressed that a lack of pedagogical content and skills surrounding AAVE contributed to the misunderstanding of AAVE (Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Saad & Polovoy, 2009). The participants in this study viewed AAVE as a community dialect that was informal and unacceptable in their classrooms.

An important theoretical implication of this study is that cultural awareness and linguistic training can offer tremendous support to help teachers understand Krashen's SLA theory and

CRT, which will help promote linguistic dexterity, language diversity, language dialect development, and language equity within classrooms (Hallett, 2020; Palinkas et al., 2015). CRT posited that systems were inherently racist, promoting White privilege systemically (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). SLA posited that language development is acquired and learned, but the teacher must understand the student (S. Krashen, 1991).

The findings of this research align with Byrd and Brown (2021), who suggested that original approaches for engaging AAVE at the K-12 level were racist and classist and suggested that teachers did not consider AAVE a legitimate language and, therefore, retaught language to AA students (PBS, 2005; Shah, 2019). Existing literature is consistent with the findings of this study, highlighting the need for educators to seek continued professional development within the work of Krashen and CRT regarding language acquisition and sociolinguistics to strengthen their approaches when serving AA students who speak AAVE (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; S. D. Krashen, 2003; Ray, 2019).

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APPENDIX A

Permission Response

11/2/22

Kayla Davies
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University
1971 University Blvd
Lynchburg, VA 24515

Dear Kayla Davies:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled 'A qualitative study on teachers who serve African American students who speak African American English.' We have decided to grant you permission to access our membership list/contact our faculty/staff/other and invite them to participate in your study.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

☐ We will provide our membership list to Kayla Davies, and Kayla Davies may use the list to contact our members to invite them to participate in her research study.

☐ We grant permission for Kayla Davies to contact members of the Teachers Association of Baltimore County to invite them to participate in her research study.

☑ We will not provide potential participant information to Kayla Davies, but we agree to provide her study information to members of the Teachers Association of Baltimore County on her behalf.

☑ We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely

Ben Forstenzer
Executive Director
Teacher's Association of Baltimore County
1220 East Joppa Road, Building C, Suite 514
Towson, MD 21286

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Flyer

Tell Your Story:

Research Participants Wanted!

#1 You are invited to share your story!

Research is being conducted to capture The Lived Experiences of Teachers who serve African American Students who speak African American Vernacular English. If you meet the requirements listed below and would like to further the advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion in support of linguistic justice, please register today!

#2 Participation Requirements

- ✓ Are you between 22-75 years of age?
- ✓ Have you taught a minimum of 1 year?
- ✓ Are you actively teaching (not retired)?
- ✓ Do you serve African American Students who speak African American Vernacular English?
- ✓ Do you teach a core discipline?
  - ○ Example: Math, Science, English, Social Studies/Geography, or Special Education

#3 Participation Information

- ✓ **When: Throughout May 2023**
  - ○ *Scheduled based on your availability.*
- ✓ **Where: Virtual via Zoom**
  - ○ *Scheduled based on the group's availability.*
- ✓ **What:**
  - ○ **Private Interview (45 mins)**
  - ○ **Group Discussion (45 mins)**
  - ○ **Writing Prompt (1-4 paragraphs)**

Note: All meetings are virtual and will be held to accommodate your availability/the groups availability. Further instructions will be provided once your registration is confirmed.

#4 Interested & Qualified?!

Register: Contact the researcher -Kayla Davies at ███████████

Looking forward to hearing your story!

APPENDIX C

Consent

Title of the Project: Exploring the Lived Experiences of K-12 School Teachers Who Serve African American Students Who Speak Using African American Vernacular English
Principal Investigator: Kayla Davies, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 22-75 years of age, have taught a minimum of 1 year, are actively teaching (not retired), serve African American Students who speak African American Vernacular English and teach a core discipline (example: Math, Science, English, Social Studies/Geography, or Special Education).

Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the proposed transcendental phenomenological study will be to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of k-12 schoolteachers working with AA students and their usage of AAVE in the State of Maryland.

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:
1. Participate in a virtual in-person interview that will be recorded and take no more than 45 minutes.
2. Participate in a virtual group interview that will be recorded and take no more than 45 minutes.
3. Participate in writing a letter to your former college/teacher training program that is between 1-4 paragraphs long.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

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

Benefits to the field of education include advancing diversity, equity and inclusion efforts in the form of linguistic justice for stigmatized dialects spoken by a historically oppressed group of students. Additional benefits include helping to close the academic achievement gap between

Students of Color and their White peers by helping to properly train and educate future teachers on the importance of linguistic justice and language acquisition.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating 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.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer in a locked drawer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

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 The Teachers Association of Baltimore County.

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 apart from focus group data will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Kayla Davies. 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. Sharon Michael-Chadwell, 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 IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree 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 of 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 video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

1. How do you define AAVE?

2. What are your personal lived experiences and/or perceptions of AAVE?

3. What are your professional experiences and/or perceptions of AAVE?

4. If applicable, how do you compartmentalize your personal and professional perceptions of AAVE, when serving students in your classroom who speak AAVE?

5. What are your beliefs on students' usage of mainstream English within your classroom?

6. What are your beliefs on students' usage of non-mainstream English dialects, specifically African American Vernacular English within your classroom?

7. How do you determine which dialects are acceptable for academic purposes within your classroom?

8. What methods do you employ to help accommodate students who speak non-mainstream English dialects, specifically African American Vernacular English?

9. How do you define "academic" and "non-academic" language?

10. Describe your pre-service teacher training and how your program prepared you to serve students who speak non-mainstream English dialects, specifically African American Vernacular English.

11. Describe your post-teacher training (professional developments, conferences, etc.) and how that professional development prepared you to serve students who speak non-mainstream English dialects, specifically African American Vernacular English.

12. As a professional, what are signs of a language deficit that would prompt you to refer your student for further psychological assessments?

13. As a professional, how do you determine if a student has a language development issue (oral, auditory, comprehension, and/or written) that is not predicated by their non-mainstream English dialect?

APPENDIX E

Focus Group Questions

1. Describe and provide examples of AAVE.

2. Describe your beliefs on AAVE speakers learning to code-switch to communicate effectively in class.

3. Describe your beliefs on learning to communicate with students who speak AAVE effectively.

4. What does AAVE sound like in your classroom?

APPENDIX F

Letter Prompt

Write a letter to the state-approved teacher training (for example, college or university) you attended and share what improvements can be made to incorporate language acquisition and linguistic diversity to help prepare future teachers to serve individuals who speak non-mainstream English language dialect variations, specifically AAVE.

APPENDIX G

Table 1 *Participants*

Teacher Participant	Age	Race	Years Taught	Grade Level	Subject Taught
Marcus	28	Black	4	8th	Social Studies
Alex	26	Black	2	12th	Math
Taylor	32	White	7	4th	English
McKenzie	35	White	5	6th	English
Lisa	39	Black	5	10th	English
Jess	33	White	4	12th	English
Ferdinand	45	White	12	9th-11th	Math
Jacob	37	White	6	3rd-5th	Science
Ericka	30	Black	6	1st-3rd	Social Studies
William	28	Black	2	4th	Math, Sciences
Lauren	40	Biracial	10	5th-6th	English
Jordan	32	Black	6	7th-8th	Geography

APPENDIX H

Sample Transcript- Letter Prompts

Each participant wrote a letter responding to the prompt: *Write a letter to the state-approved teacher training (for example, college or university) you attended and share what improvements can be made to incorporate language acquisition and linguistic diversity to help prepare future teachers to serve individuals who speak non-mainstream English language dialect variations, specifically AAVE.*

Participant 1: Marcus

Dear University A,

I am writing to share what improvements can be made to incorporate language acquisition and linguistic diversity to help prepare future teachers to serve individuals who speak non-mainstream English language dialect variations (AAVE). I will start by listing out some key points:

1. Recognize that students understand more than they can say. Create a safe environment

2. Allow students a period of silence, encourage them, do not force speech, use repetition

3. Use non-verbal (gestures, visuals, drawings, pointing, and models) to teach meaning to new vocabulary.

4. Plan to create experiences that help students notice features of the language.

5. Adjust teacher talk

6. Give students time and space to practice useful phrases and formulaic expressions

7. Support the student in continuing literacy development in the first language

8. Provide a rich linguistic environment

Participant 2: Alex

Dear University B,

Here are a few possible ways to improve teacher education programs in order to prepare future teachers to serve individuals who speak non-mainstream English dialect variations, such as AAVE: Introduce linguistics courses, including linguistics courses, can help teachers understand the linguistic diversity of their future classrooms. This can include courses on sociolinguistics which can help teachers learn about language variations, language attitudes and ideologies, and language and identity. Teachers can learn how to recognize different dialects and thus avoid the sociolinguistic biases they may hold.

Participant 3: Taylor

Dear University C,

In my first year of teaching, I was upset with my upbringing and your teacher prep program. I needed to be adequately prepared to teach all students. I had to become the advocate that I am. I ultimately went into advocacy and policy for my Master's degree to better understand cultural differences and systemic racism. Understanding my biases is essential, and I have been working on addressing my negative biases concerning linguistic differences and cultural behavior within the educational environment. Please reconstruct your teacher prep program, so your current students will feel adequately prepared when they enter the field.

Participant 4: McKenzie

Dear University D,

The program was incredible. In terms of pedagogy and content, I felt equipped. However, this program did not prepare me to work with students who were not white and middle class. Specifically, there was no learning or highlighting the importance of understanding linguistic differences, and I needed to prepare to teach. I needed to be more adequately ready to teach

students different from me. Outside of highlighting ESOL and a general cultural diversity course,

I was not prepared to teach African American students or groomed to expect their language.

Participant 5: Lisa

Dear University E,

You can provide resources on AAVE, such as books, videos, and articles. The institution

can help future teachers become more familiar with the language. This can also include

resources for their future classroom, such as books featuring AAVE speakers or materials

incorporating AAVE. I believe this will be a great addition to the program.

Participant 6: Jess

Dear University F,

What exactly is meant by academic language? Since graduating from the institution, I

have created definitions based on my experiences. I have worked with homeless students,

Vietnamese students, and Black students, to name a few. All who identified as a different culture

than myself and I was not prepared. I have taught English to Vietnamese students in Vietnam,

and they have this idea that to speak English, they must abandon their culture and who they are.

Please, I urge you-it is critical that you better prepare teachers who will come after me to serve

all students and understand that there is no "standard English" or "academic language." Please

build a greater understanding amongst the students. Invite different dialects of English and other

literal languages into the learning space because it is vital for anyone who will serve students.

Participant 7: Ferdinand

Dear University G,

Your school was great! Nevertheless, regarding linguistic differences, the college can

offer practical experience working with students who speak non-standard English dialects. There

was a clinical element in the program when I attended. One idea is to have your students complete the clinical hours in community schools that are more linguistically diverse so that the students have a learning experience. Student-teachers can work with diverse students and observe the learning processes and communication strategies. Field experiences and student teaching programs can provide practical experience working with language-diverse students.

Participant 8: Jacob

Dear University H,

By incorporating change into the teacher education programs, future teachers can be better equipped to serve individuals who speak non-mainstream English language dialect variations, especially AAVE. I suggest having more courses on language development and its importance in the classroom. Also, teaching how to best work with students who do not speak mainstream English is a skill I have not mastered, but I only became aware of it through working with students from different backgrounds. Training in this area would help immensely, and future students in your program will be more prepared and benefit significantly from the program if it adds this element.

Participant 9: Ericka

Dear University I,

Emphasize cultural sensitivity and awareness: Teachers can benefit from an education that helps them understand the cultural differences of their students. This includes recognizing the importance and value of language diversity and the role of AAVE in communities. Teachers aware of AAVE's cultural significance are better equipped to work with students who use this dialect.

Participant 10: William

Dear University J,

During my academic journey, I recall many presentations and listening to experts. It will be beneficial to bring in linguistic experts to present. Someone who specializes in the study of AAVE or even speakers of AAVE to speak to teacher education classes can help teachers better understand the language and its significance to their communities. It can teach them about the differences between AAVE and Standard American English and help them understand how dialectical differences can impact learning and educational equity.

Participant 11: Lauren

Dear University K,

Thank you for helping me grow professionally as a teacher. I am trying to remember any specific courses in linguistics that prepared me to serve students who do not speak Standard English, but there was a diversity course that helped me reflect on my biases. I mainly focused on treating all students with respect regardless of their background, which I was also taught as a child. You guys did touch a bit on ESOL, but there needed to be a substantial amount of attention to language or dialect differences. Adding a course on the philosophy of language and different dialects in the school system could be helpful.

Participant 12: Jordan

Dear University L,

This program prepared me to expect cultural differences. But there was no exposure to different dialects and understanding of how those cultural differences influence dialect. To better equip the future teachers in your program, please include more learning on African American Vernacular English. Generally, public schools consist of a diverse population, so future teachers

must be ready to understand and work with African American English speakers. This learning

could be offered as an elective course within the program or a required credit. That will help

prepare future teachers.