A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY

TEACHERS AND TEACHER RETENTION IN LOW-INCOME SCHOOLS

by

Kaila Morris Segres

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

2024

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Abstract

This qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study aimed to understand retention for

secondary teachers at high-needs schools. Drawing upon Bandura's cognitive theory, this study

examined how self-efficacy and motivation are crucial to secondary teacher retention. Through

in-depth interviews with teachers, the research aimed to understand their perspectives and

experiences regarding the factors influencing their decision to stay or leave. The study took place

at Black River High School. It consisted of purposive sampling, which is a concise approach to

generating suitable and practical information from specific kinds of people with minimal

resources. The findings shed light on the dynamics between organizational and systemic factors

affecting teacher retention rates in low-income schools through individual interviews, direct

observations, and focus groups. After a thorough survey and review of the data, the following

themes emerged: Positive School Climate, Meaning and Purpose, and Disadvantages of Working

in Low-Income Schools. The research results revealed the importance of positive interpersonal

relationships between stakeholders in low-income schools, a deep intrinsic desire to teach and

motivate students, and effective school leadership for retaining teachers in high-need schools.

 By addressing these challenges, the research contributed perception into teachers' difficulties in

low-income schools and provided practical recommendations for tackling this significant

problem.

Keywords: retention, self-efficacy, motivation, secondary education

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Dedication

I give honor to God who is the head of my life. I dedicate this dissertation to God, who endowed me with the strength and courage to complete my dissertation.

I give honor to my parents and grandparents, who prayed for me, encouraged me, supported me, and gave me moral lessons on discipline from an earlier age.

To my dissertation committee, Dr. Lunde & Dr. Small, who was the guiding light every step of the way as I researched for this dissertation.

To my husband, Troy, who believed in my ability to pursue and obtain my doctoral degree.

To my children, Tristyn, Tailyn, and Kaleb, may you pursue knowledge throughout your lives.

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List of Abbreviations

Black River School District (BRSD)

Black River High School (BRHS)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Social Learning Theory (SLT)

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This hermeneutic phenomenological study aimed to understand the retention for secondary teachers at high-needs schools in the Black River School District. This chapter discusses the historical, social, and theoretical contextual backgrounds using the extant research surrounding the significance of teacher shortages in low-income schools. Chapter One includes the study's problem, purpose, and significance. Lastly, Chapter One contains an introduction of the research questions that were used to address the research problem, an explanation of the terms and definitions pertinent to the study, and a summary of Chapter One to summarize all the information reported.

Background

Teacher attrition refers to teachers' retention rate at schools or in the education profession. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there has been a steady increase in teachers leaving the profession or public schools from 1988 to 2009 (Keigher, 2010). Currently, teacher turnover is continuously increasing in low-income schools due to many factors like low teacher salaries, the lack of educational resources, student disciplinary issues, and the lack of administrative support, among a few elements (Carver-Thomas, 2019). As a result, students in low-income schools are disproportionately affected, adversely affecting student achievement (Carver-Thomas, 2019).

Additionally, teachers report that school leadership and principals' quality play a critical role in their decisions to leave schools or the education system (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). The social cognitive theory is prominent in education, and it effectively promotes efficacy among teachers and a positive school climate, encouraging job commitment (Bandura, 1988;

Hallinger, 2003). Bandura (1988) theorizes that the relationship between the person, the behavior, and the environment impacts an individual's behavior in society. This study will use the social cognitive theory to understand the experiences of teachers who decide to remain in low-income and high-needs schools.

Historical Context

Teacher turnover in high-needs and low-income schools has risen since the 1980s (Simon & Johnson, 2015). In high-poverty communities, the issues that stem from high teacher attrition rates are conspicuous. There are nearly four million teachers in America, and roughly 600,000 teachers leave the profession each year (Ingersol, 2001; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015). Over time, research has shown that teachers who serve in low-income schools are most likely to leave the school or the teaching profession. A study found that the two most determining factors for attrition were salary and the adverse working environments in low-income schools (Ingersol, 2001; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Consequently, high attrition rates in low-income schools make it difficult for the schools to sustain positive change. Current studies focus on the traits of students and teachers in high-needs schools rather than the institutions themselves (Ingersol, 2001; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015). It is evident that factors such as salary, professional status, and location impact teachers' decisions to maintain a career in education. However, many past reports have yet to consider the school environments of high-poverty schools where many teachers teach despite the pitfalls (Ingersol, 2001; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015). Conventional researchers focused on population characteristics of students and teachers as the portending factors of teacher career choices. These studies have frequently found that teacher attrition rates in low-income schools are a fraction higher than their wealthier counterparts, as

low-income schools lose a fifth of their staff annually (Ingersol, 2001; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Over the last decade, several researchers have cultivated their procedures for using an organizational analysis as a structure for using an organizational stance for analyzing teacher attrition (Ingersol, 2001; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015). Researchers conjecture that environmental and systematic conditions are strong indicators of teacher attrition rates in all the studies (Ingersol, 2001; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015).. Consistently, the researchers found that teachers' sagacity concerning their principals is most important in determining their decisions to remain at a school or in education, along with a positive school climate and cooperation among coworkers (Ingersol, 2001; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Social Context

High teacher turnover rates have calamitous effects on schools and students in high-needs communities. The NCES reports the demographics of teachers exiting education and the reasons why, and they also outline which students are affected the most. The study reported that attrition rates are higher in southern states where core area and special education teachers are needed in schools serving minority students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Moreover, low-income schools are affected the most by teacher attrition because the school districts frequently hire inexpert teachers or teachers that are not highly qualified (Simon & Johnson, 2015; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver, 2019). Consequently, schools are forced to increase class sizes or cut the variety of classes offered, affecting student achievement (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver, 2019). All these factors limit students in low-income schools and impair their academic success.

Current research specifies that high teacher attrition rates contribute to teacher shortages (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver, 2019). Of the teachers who are leaving education, teachers who are in the middle of their careers or novice teachers make up the majority of the attrition rates in education (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver, 2019). The NCES reports a four percent increase in teacher attrition stemming from the early 1990s to the late 2000s. Even when enough teachers meet the challenge, teacher attrition causes a disparity in the job market. Many studies confirm that teachers in low-income schools are more likely to move schools (Simon & Johnson, 2015; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver, 2019). These high rates intensify the demand for hiring teachers and sabotage high-needs schools' ability to achieve. Principals are left with the task of appealing to and hiring new teachers year after year.

Theoretical Context

Albert Bandura developed the social cognitive theory (SCT) from the social learning theory (SLT) in the 1980s. The theory postulates that a reciprocal relationship between the person, behavior, and environment influences human behavior. SCT emphasizes how individuals behave and learn and considers the social context of the environment where the behavior is performed. Moreover, human behavior is not only shaped by the environment, but individuals are also active participants in those environments. As a result, individuals self-regulate by continuously monitoring three submodalities: personal attitudes, behavior, and environment. These self-regulatory structures are at the center of catalytic processes for individuals in society.

Alzoraiki, Rahman, & Mutalib (2018) posit that idyllic influence encompasses a charismatic leader. Principals can wield idyllic influence by establishing a rapport with constituents, gaining their trust and loyalty. In addition to having charisma, a transformational

leader must display high efficacy and competency. Through this strategy, transformational principals can encourage creativity and motivate their faculty. Gibson et al. (2018) maintain that educational leaders must acquire positive leadership attributes to fulfill their role effectively. Furthermore, Yanfei, Yanliu, and Yu (2018) assert that transformational leadership is associated with motivation for members of staff. Transformational principals retain significant influence over teacher attitudes and school productivity (Laden et al., 2017; Yafei et al., 2018).

The seminal research on school leadership and attrition highlights principals' essential role in teacher retention, student achievement, and overall school performance and environment. The literature suggests that administrative support, collaboration, and strong leadership are the hallmarks of a positive school climate that reduces teacher burnout and increases teacher job satisfaction and retention. However, the literature did not highlight the experiences of the principals and their perceptions of teacher attrition, nor did the research discuss strategies that make principals influential leaders. Based on the qualities inherent in excellent school leadership, the transformational leadership model suggests a framework for strategies that school leaders can employ that will cultivate growth and commitment in educational organizations.

Problem Statement

The problem is that retention rates are low for secondary teachers in high-needs schools. Some issues that influence low retention rates among teachers at a high school in a rural, southeastern town include school climate, large workloads, over-populated classrooms, the lack of teacher input and feedback, and the need for more administrative support (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). This qualitative study will use a hermeneutic phenomenological design to investigate the abovementioned problem in a secondary high-needs school.

According to research, teachers at low-income schools face extraordinary difficulties and experiences that educators are unfamiliar with in conventional classrooms and schools (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Moreover, teacher attrition in low-income schools poses many adverse effects on student achievement, as studies reveal achievement gaps between high-needs and affluent schools. Student populations affected the most by teacher attrition are historically disadvantaged minority racial groups (Ingersoll et al., 2019). Therefore, these students need access to highly qualified teachers due to a lack of funding in high-needs schools, widening the achievement gap. Consequently, teachers who are unprepared or new teachers are hired in high-needs schools, but after gaining experience, they transfer to different school districts or leave the profession (Carver-Thomas & Hammond, 2019). Essentially, principals significantly influence retaining teachers, and principals can foster working environments that will address the issues causing the mass exodus of teachers in high-needs schools (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020). A gap in research indicates the need to study the experiences of secondary teachers and the factors that lead to teacher retention in high-need schools.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand retention for secondary teachers at high-needs schools in the Black River School District. High-need schools are public schools in low-income communities where the majority of the students are living with families below the poverty line (Grillo & Kier, 2021). At this stage in the research, retention was generally defined as *a teacher returning to teach at a high-needs school after serving at least one year in the position* (NCES, 2016).

Significance of the Study

This study sought to understand the experiences of teachers who remained in low-income schools. The findings shed light on the dynamics between organizational and systemic factors affecting teacher retention rates in low-income schools. Additionally, the study identified strategies to enhance teacher self-efficacy and motivation, which can guide targeted interventions to improve teacher retention in these schools. By addressing these challenges, this research contributed insights into teachers' difficulties in low-income schools and provide practical recommendations for tackling this significant problem. This section contains a description of the contributions that the study makes to the knowledge base or discipline from *a theoretical, empirical, and practical perspective*.

Theoretical

The theoretical significance of this study is that the results offer insights into the role that self-efficacy and motivation play in teachers' choices to remain in low-income schools. According to this theory, individuals are likelier to persist with a particular behavior if they possess a strong sense of self-efficacy or belief in their capability to succeed (Bandura, 1988). By examining teachers' confidence level in their ability to impact their students in low-income schools positively, individuals can better understand the factors that contribute to their decision to stay or depart (Ford, 2019; Weibenfels et al., 2022). Moreover, institutions can develop targeted interventions to enhance teacher retention rates in low-income schools by identifying the specific factors that influence teacher self-efficacy and motivation.

Empirical

The study's empirical significance adds to the existing literature surrounding teacher retention in low-income schools from the retained teachers' perspective and their perception of

the issue. This study relates to other qualitative and phenomenological studies on the issue of teacher attrition in low-income schools in that it will provide teachers with a voice. Similar studies highlighted the voices of the teachers who left schools and their perceptions of their schools, and most teachers agreed that positive school leadership and mental stimulation were determinants of job satisfaction (Baptiste, 2019; Rana et al., 2016). However, another facet of this research is allowing teachers to voice their understanding of teacher attrition and the factors that will efficiently and effectively encourage teacher retention (Cooper, 2019; Fu & Wenju, 2021; Han et al., 2021; Kraft & Falken, 2019; Molero et al., 2019; Sokal et al., 2020; Valente et al., 2020).

Practical

The practical significance of this study is that it offers practical solutions to the issue of teacher attrition in low-income schools. Research reveals that principals play a prominent role in creating a positive school climate and learning environment for all stakeholders (Aydin et al., 2013; Baptiste, 2019; Rana et al., 2016). The research also emphasizes the importance of a positive outlook on the principal from the teachers' perspectives. This study used a context-specific approach to reveal effective practices individuals and schools use to employ to retain teachers in low-income schools (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Farmer, 2020; Ladd, 2011). This study aimed to expand and add to the existing literature on this issue, offering solutions to combat teacher attrition in high-needs schools.

Research Questions

Teacher attrition rates have been steadily increasing since the 1980s, and it is an ongoing issue in education today (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Simon & Johnson, 2015; Sutcher et al., 2019). The central question analyzed the experiences of retained teachers in

high-need schools. Studies reveal that principals are influential in retaining teachers, and strong leadership influences teacher retention (Baptiste, 2019). For this study, it was essential to highlight the insights and experiences of teachers to understand their perceptions of teacher retention in low-income schools.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of retained secondary teachers in high-needs schools?

Sub-Question One

What are the attitudes of retained secondary teachers in high-needs schools?

Sub-Question Two

What are the educational competency beliefs of retained secondary teachers in high-needs schools?

Sub-Question Three

What are the influential abilities of retained secondary teachers in high-needs schools?

Definitions

1. *Teacher Retention*- Teacher retention will be generally defined as *a teacher returning to teach at a high-needs school after serving at least one year in the position* (NCES, 2016).

2. *Bandura's social cognitive theory*- Social cognitive theory posits that attitudes, behavior, and environment influence individual experiences (Bandura, 1986).

3. *Low-Income Schools*- Low-income schools are public schools where 50-75% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch programs (NCES, 2022).

4. *High-need Schools*- High-need schools are public schools in low-income communities where the majority of the students are living with families below the poverty line (Grillo & Kier, 2021).

Summary

Low teacher-retention rates are adversely affecting school and student achievement in high-needs communities. School climate, teacher burnout, lack of teacher input and feedback, and effective school leadership are among the issues that influence high attrition rates among teachers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). This study explored the experiences of secondary teachers and the factors that contribute to retention in high-needs schools. Furthermore, this study aimed to describe retention factors for secondary teachers at high-needs schools. Allowing teachers to voice their insights, concerns, and practices will add to the body of knowledge and practical skills that have the potential to transform and improve teacher retention in high-needs schools.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic literature review explored factors contributing to low teacher retention in high-needs schools. The social cognitive theory is discussed in the first section, followed by a review of recent literature on factors contributing to low teacher retention rates in high-needs schools. Next, the related literature section discussed the potential effectiveness of the social cognitive framework in addressing the issue of low teacher retention in high-needs schools. Finally, a gap in the literature was identified regarding the need for more research on the teachers' experiences and perceptions of low teacher retention and strategies that can be used to combat this problem in high-need schools.

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura developed the social cognitive theory (SCT) from the social learning theory (SLT) in the 1980s. The theory postulates that a reciprocal relationship between the person, behavior, and environment influences human behavior. SCT emphasizes how individuals behave and learn and considers the social context of the environment where the behavior is performed (Bandura, 1986). Moreover, human behavior is not only shaped by the environment, but individuals are also active participants in those environments. As a result, individuals self-regulate by continuously monitoring three submodalities: personal attitudes, behavior, and environment. These self-regulatory structures are at the center of catalytic processes for individuals in society (Bandura, 1988).

Behavior is predicated upon four outcomes: goals, outcomes, self-efficacy, and social systems. Goals represent the personal interests of individuals, and these desires determine the efforts that individuals make. The outcomes are the individuals' beliefs associated with the

positive or negative results of the behavior. Subsequently, self-efficacy encompasses the individuals' confidence in their ability to perform specific tasks. This study will use self-efficacy as a determinant of behavior (Bandura, 1988).

Bandura's social cognitive theory is a widely recognized concept that emphasizes the importance of observational learning in human behavior. The theory posits that individuals acquire new skills and knowledge by observing the actions of others and modeling their behavior (Bandura, 1988). This theory can be applied in the context of teacher efficacy, where teachers can benefit from positive role models and opportunities to observe effective teaching techniques in action. By witnessing successful teaching strategies in action, teachers can develop their sense of efficacy and confidence in their abilities to educate their students effectively. In this regard, providing teachers with constructive feedback and support is critical in enhancing their sense of self-efficacy. This feedback can help teachers identify areas where they excel and areas where they can improve.

Moreover, feedback can help teachers feel valued, which is essential for creating a positive and supportive learning environment. When teachers feel supported, they are more likely to take risks and try new techniques to benefit their students. Applying Bandura's social cognitive theory to teaching can help create a dynamic and engaging learning environment for teachers and students (Bandura, 1988). By providing teachers with positive role models, opportunities to observe effective teaching techniques, and constructive feedback and support, we can enhance teacher efficacy and improve the quality of education for students. This is critical in today's educational landscape, where the demands on teachers are high, and the expectations for student achievement are constantly evolving.

Subsequently, personal factors such as attitudes or cognitive skills can affect the environment. Bandura (1988) maintains that people's assumptions, beliefs, and distinct character influence their behavior. Moreover, environmental factors are any external forces that can affect an individual's behavior. These factors consist of both social factors, such as colleagues, acquaintances, or family, and physical factors, such as the weather or the accessibility of certain products etc (Bandura, 1988). Ultimately, through prudence, individuals can positively influence themselves and their environments.

Moreover, mastery experiences are among the most significant sources of teacher efficacy beliefs. These refer to a teacher's past successes and failures in the classroom, which provide them with a sense of competence and self-efficacy. When teachers experience success in their teaching practice, they are more likely to believe they can positively impact student learning outcomes, increasing their self-efficacy. Conversely, their efficacy beliefs may decrease when teachers face challenges or experience failures. Vicarious experiences are another source of teacher efficacy beliefs. These refer to observing other teachers' teaching practices and gaining inspiration from their successes (Bandura, 1988).

By observing other teachers and their successful teaching practices, teachers can learn new strategies and techniques and gain confidence in their ability to teach effectively. Social persuasion is also a significant source of teacher efficacy beliefs. This refers to feedback from others, such as colleagues or supervisors, that can influence a teacher's beliefs about their abilities. Positive feedback and encouragement can increase teachers' self-efficacy, while negative feedback and criticism can decrease them. Finally, physiological and emotional states refer to the teacher's stress, anxiety, or confidence level in the classroom. These factors can impact teacher efficacy beliefs, as stress and anxiety can decrease self-efficacy, while confidence

can increase it. In addition to the four primary sources of efficacy beliefs, personal factors such as personality traits and prior experiences can also impact teacher efficacy. For instance, teachers who are naturally more confident may have higher efficacy beliefs than those who are more anxious (Bandura, 1988).

Similarly, teachers with positive experiences may be more likely to believe in their ability to impact student learning outcomes. Understanding the role of Bandura's social cognitive theory and personal factors in teacher efficacy is crucial for educators to support and develop their teachers effectively. By providing opportunities for mastery experiences, offering positive feedback and social persuasion, and addressing teachers' physiological and emotional states, schools can help foster a culture of teacher efficacy and ultimately improve student outcomes (Bandura, 1988).

Bandura's social cognitive theory has been extensively utilized in school environments to enhance teacher efficacy, which is the belief in one's ability to accomplish a task successfully. Self-efficacy, social modeling, and self-regulation are the three key components of this theory (Bandura, 1988). By emphasizing these factors, teachers can develop their confidence and competence in the classroom, which in turn helps them manage the demands of their job better. Through training in social cognitive theory, teachers have reported feeling more capable and motivated. The impact of this theory on teacher efficacy is immense, as it has led to the creation of a more positive and productive learning environment for students. By empowering teachers to take control of their own learning and development, social cognitive theory has contributed to the overall success of educational programs and initiatives. This theory recognizes that teachers play a crucial role in the education system and that their efficacy is pivotal in creating a

successful learning environment. Therefore, it is essential to equip them with the necessary tools and techniques to enhance their skills and confidence in the classroom.

Extensive research has been conducted on the efficacy of SCT in the context of secondary education. This theory aims to elucidate how individuals learn through observation of others and their behaviors (Bandura, 1988). Studies have shown that the inclusion of social cognitive theory in classrooms can significantly enhance students' motivation to learn and improve their academic performance (Ford, 2019; Weibenfels et al., 2022). To implement social cognitive theory in classrooms, educators can utilize modeling techniques to demonstrate desirable behaviors and provide positive feedback to reinforce positive conduct. Peer tutoring can also be employed to encourage social learning among students. These strategies have been found to be particularly useful in promoting academic achievement and positive social behavior among secondary school students.

In addition, integrating social cognitive theory in career education can be highly beneficial in fostering self-efficacy and career-related skills among students. By showcasing successful role models and providing opportunities for experiential learning and career exploration, students can gain a deeper understanding of their own strengths and aspirations. In conclusion, the incorporation of social cognitive theory in secondary education holds great potential for positively impacting students' academic and vocational development (Bandura, 1988). By leveraging the power of observation, feedback, and social learning, educators can help students cultivate the skills and knowledge needed to succeed both academically and professionally.

Related Literature

This study applied the social cognitive theory (SCT) to explore factors that lead to teacher retention in high-needs schools. There is a myriad of research surrounding teacher shortages in low-income schools, emphasizing that there is a critical problem that needs to be addressed. Several themes emerged in a literature review on this topic: school climate, teacher burnout, lack of teacher input and feedback, and effective school leadership. Furthermore, a literature review assisted in determining the need to investigate the extent to which teachers can influence these factors, quelling teacher low-retention rates in low-income schools.

Teacher Burnout

Teacher burnout refers to a teacher's inability to perform daily tasks effectively due to work-related stress. Researchers found that burnout leads to dissatisfaction and the consensus that teachers are underappreciated (Farmer, 2020; Hester et al., 2020; Ladd, 2011; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020). Hester et al. (2018) conducted a study that investigated burnout among 366 special education teachers in K-12 public schools. As a result of the study, 108 teachers reported that their administration was the source of their stress. The research concerning teacher burnout suggests that administrators often make demands but fail to provide teachers with the proper support or resources to meet those demands (Farmer, 2020; Hester et al., 2020; Ladd, 2011; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020). Moreover, the participants in various studies on teacher burnout stressed that their administrators had no experience or understanding of their plight as special education teachers and would make suggestions that were not viable for their classrooms (Farmer, 2020; Hester et al., 2020; Ladd, 2011; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020). Essentially, teachers have a consensus that principals and school administrators are out of touch with the people they lead (Farmer, 2020; Hester et al., 2020; Ladd, 2011; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020).

Moreover, empirical research supports the aforementioned by reiterating that a lack of solid and effective leadership contributes to high-stress work environments (Farmer, 2020; Hester et al., 2020; Ladd, 2011; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020). According to a study by Farmer (2020), principals who supported their teachers were more effective in retaining them. The study found that 50% of the participants reported that poor administration led to an increasing number of dissatisfied teachers in the school. Another study was conducted among teachers in North Carolina using a statewide survey tool to gain insight into how teachers perceive their working conditions. According to the research, the top variable influencing their departure from education was poor leadership in administration (Farmer, 2020; Hester et al., 2020; Ladd, 2011; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020).

Over the last three years, COVID-19 significantly impacted education, changing the structure of education in the 21st century. Moreover, teachers faced new obstacles regarding their roles and responsibilities as educators and their approaches to instruction (Farmer, 2020; Hester et al., 2020; Ladd, 2011; Pressley, 2021; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020). Pressley (2021) conducted a study that contributed to the new and developing discourse surrounding the impact of COVID-19 on teacher burnout. The study found that the predictors for teacher burnout were stress related to COVID-19 anxiety and fears, anxiety regarding communication with parents, and the lack of administrative support. The study's results confirm the assertions made by researchers that teachers do not have the instructional, technological, or emotional support they need (Farmer, 2020; Hester et al., 2020; Ladd, 2011; Pressley, 2021; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020). The research suggests that districts, schools, and educational leaders must support and facilitate clear communication with parents from the districts and school levels. Moreover, the research maintains that district and school leaders need to make provisions for environments that

will support the teachers' mental, emotional, and professional development from the top down (Farmer, 2020; Hester et al., 2020; Ladd, 2011; Pressley, 2021; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020).

Conversely, studies reveal that teachers who are properly supported and possess high teacher efficacy are less likely to experience burnout (Hester et al., 2020; Pressley, 2021; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020) Another study was conducted on teacher burnout across several teacher groups, student groups, and organizational levels, including teacher groups, class size, number of special needs students, teacher attitudes towards inclusion, and the support offered to educators (Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020). The study found that teachers that had high teacher efficacy were less likely to experience burnout, while teachers with lower levels of confidence in their abilities experienced burnout at higher rates. Another factor contributing to teacher burnout was the lack of positive teacher and student relationships (Hester et al., 2020; Pressley, 2021; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020). The researchers found that teachers who found ways to relate to students and build a positive rapport with their students had higher job satisfaction (Farmer, 2020; Hester et al., 2020; Ladd, 2011; Pressley, 2021; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020). The research also adds to the discourse that links lower levels of support from principals, colleagues, and parents to higher levels of burnout. Essentially, the researchers posited that understanding the factors related to teacher burnout and stress can assist in creating school environments that are conducive to greater job satisfaction and commitment for teachers, heightening the quality of education (Farmer, 2020; Hester et al., 2020; Ladd, 2011; Pressley, 2021; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020).

Research has shown that teacher confidence and competence levels are closely linked to how teachers experience burnout (Farmer, 2020; Hester et al., 2020; Ladd, 2011; Pressley, 2021; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020). When teachers feel capable and confident in their ability to impact

their students positively, they are less likely to face burnout. On the other hand, those who doubt

their abilities may become overwhelmed and stressed, leading to burnout. According to one

study (Pressley, 2021), teachers who perceive themselves as ineffective are more susceptible to

burnout. They are also less likely to stay in the teaching profession long-term. However, a

different study found that teachers who participated in development programs focused on

enhancing their effectiveness reported lower levels of burnout and higher job satisfaction

(Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020). Teacher efficacy plays a role in preventing burnout among

educators while fostering job satisfaction. Therefore, educational institutions should prioritize

development initiatives to boost teacher efficacy to support the well-being of their educators.

Ultimately, these initiatives will enhance the learning experience for students (Ford, 2019;

Weibenfels et al., 2022).

Across much of the extant research, teacher burnout can be ascribed to many

environmental or external factors, such as poor school leadership, COVID-19, class size, lack of

professional support, and lack of positive student relationships (Farmer, 2020; Ford, 2019; Hester

et al., 2020; Pakarinen, 2020; Pressley, 2021; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020; Weibenfels et al.,

2022). However, the research needs to go in detail about the disposition of the teacher and their

contribution to outcomes in these environments. This highlights the need for understanding the

personal experiences of teachers in low-income environments to recognize the extent to which

their personal attitudes or behaviors can contribute to high stress and teacher burnout in

low-income schools. There is a consensus in research that burnout in teachers results from

inadequate planning, organization, and skill in teaching (Farmer, 2020; Ford, 2019; Hester et al.,

2020; Pakarinen, 2020; Pressley, 2021; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020; Weibenfels et al., 2022).

This emphasizes the need to examine further the individual and situational limitations of teachers

in low-income schools. A universal agreement in the literature regarding the social aspects of teacher burnout posits that job satisfaction in teachers is predicated upon favorable social experiences in school environments (Farmer, 2020; Ford, 2019; Hester et al., 2020; Pakarinen, 2020; Pressley, 2021; Salovita & Pakarinen, 2020; Weibenfels et al., 2022). Consequently, the literature does not explain what job satisfaction looks like in low-income schools, advancing the purpose of this research to understand the experiences of teachers in low-income schools that lead to teacher retention.

School Climate

School climate encompasses the overall well-being of the school environment. Moreover, student achievement and learning outcomes, safety and physical environment, interpersonal relationships, and leadership correlate to school climate (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Grant et al., 2019; Thapa et al., 2013; Zakariya, 2020). When implemented correctly, each component contributes to a positive school climate. Positive school climates can improve absenteeism, sick leaves, and teacher attrition rates, creating favorable outcomes for students, teachers, and principals (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Grant et al., 2019; Thapa et al., 2013; Zakariya, 2020)..

Student behavior contributes to school climate and determines teachers who leave schools or the profession. Grant et al. (2019) maintain that students from high-poverty and minority communities contribute significantly to school climate and disciplinary issues that surface in the classrooms. In response, teachers and leaders implement restorative practices to address the negative behavioral issues that affect the school climate (Grant et al., 2019). However, the research suggests that low-income schools need more vital leadership and cooperation, allowing for an obstructive school climate (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Grant et al.,

2019; Thapa et al., 2013; Zakariya, 2020). Hypothetically, teachers in positive school climates are more likely to feel contentment and comfort, which factors into their decisions to stay at a school and the education profession (Grant et al., 2022). The research supports the work that the researcher Zakariya (2020) undertook, which found that school climate contributed to job gratification and teacher self-efficacy. If teachers do not feel productive and fulfilled, they will most likely leave the school or the profession.

Some researchers opposed other studies that attributed poor working conditions to student behavior. Poor working conditions in high-poverty communities are determinants of low teacher retention rates. A study was conducted on working environments in high-poverty schools, and the researchers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019) found that low-income schools suffer the most from the lack of certified staff. According to the report, teachers are leaving the education profession and the classroom due to several factors that affect school climate. Nearly 28% of teachers report that students come to school unprepared. Nearly 22% of teachers report that parents are having difficulty being involved in their child's education, and all of these factors result from poverty, segregation, and insufficient funding. Teachers also report that their safety is threatened in high-poverty schools, as one in five teachers report that they have been threatened or attacked in their current schools. Teachers feel they do not have much authority over their classrooms. Additionally, teachers experience work-related stress and a lack of support from fellow teachers and administrators (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Grant et al., 2019; Thapa et al., 2013; Zakariya, 2020). The results of this research highlight the role that positive working environments and professional relationships play in teacher retention, but like many studies, it does not discuss the personal attitudes or behaviors that contribute to job dissatisfaction for teachers in low-income schools (Garcia & Wise, 2019; Grant et al., 2022; Thapa et al., 2013;).

Suarez and Wright (2019) conducted a study using Schools and Staff Survey data to investigate the impact of school climate on STEM teacher attrition rates in grades 9-12. The researchers used instruments for teachers and principals from the schools and staff survey data to measure retention rates. They examined the environment of the school and factors within the environment that affected teachers and principals. The study linked teacher retention to principals with a professional STEM education background. The research did not explain why the principals who shared a professional background in STEM education were more effective in motivating teachers to remain in their schools. However, relating to other studies on the topic, the teachers indicated that they felt support from their principals, which contributed to positive experiences in the workplace (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Grant et al., 2019; Thapa et al., 2013; Zakariya, 2020). The result of this research relates to other studies that reveal that administrative support and camaraderie are determinants of teacher job satisfaction (Thapa et al., 2013; Garcia & Wise, 2019; Grant et al., 2022). Research demonstrates that teachers who feel secure and content will likely remain at their schools.

The prevailing literature on environmental factors such as positive school climate emphasizes its impact on the retention of teachers. Many researchers agree that amicable relationships among teachers and principals, teachers and their colleagues, and teachers and students encourage a greater commitment to their careers (Fu & Wenju, 2021; Molero et al., 2019; Valente et al., 2020). Kraft & Falken (2019) maintain that teachers are effectual in environments that encompass integrity, assurance, and a collaborative allegiance to sustaining the merit and beliefs of the institution. Moreover, there is a universal consensus that schools that hold students to a higher standard by promoting learning and restorative behavioral policies can also encourage student success and high efficacy in teachers (Fu & Wenju, 2021; Han et al.,

2021; Kraft & Falken, 2019; Molero et al., 2019; Valente et al., 2020). One issue that research does not elaborate on is how even the most competent teachers can have difficulty translating their skills across different school climates, highlighting the need to explore teachers' personal and behavioral attitudes and approaches to their craft.

Teacher effectiveness plays a role in shaping the school's atmosphere after conducting thorough research. The belief that teachers have in their ability to make an impact on their students' lives significantly influences their teaching methods and willingness to take risks when implementing instructional approaches (Cooper, 2019; Fu & Wenju, 2021; Han et al., 2021; Kraft & Falken, 2019; Molero et al., 2019; Sokal et al., 2020; Valente et al., 2020). When teachers possess a sense of efficacy, it leads to increased engagement and motivation, fostering a stimulating environment for students (Cooper, 2019; Fu & Wenju, 2021; Han et al., 2021; Kraft & Falken, 2019; Molero et al., 2019; Sokal et al., 2020; Valente et al., 2020). Ultimately these combined factors impact the school climate and enhance the learning experience for everyone involved.

Alternatively, teachers who lack confidence may feel overwhelmed and disengaged, which can negatively impact the atmosphere of the school (Cooper, 2019; Fu & Wenju, 2021; Han et al., 2021; Kraft & Falken, 2019; Molero et al., 2019; Sokal et al., 2020; Valente et al., 2020). This can result in a supportive learning environment as teachers may hesitate to try new teaching techniques or methods. Moreover, low teacher efficacy can affect the school climate and students' learning experiences. To establish a nurturing learning environment for all parties involved, institutions must invest in development programs that enhance teacher effectiveness (Cooper, 2019; Fu & Wenju, 2021; Han et al., 2021; Kraft & Falken, 2019; Molero et al., 2019; Sokal et al., 2020; Valente et al., 2020). By increasing their confidence and skill set through

programs, teachers are better equipped to create a supportive classroom atmosphere that positively influences the overall school ambiance and student achievement. Research suggests educational institutions should prioritize teacher efficacy in their development initiatives to foster a school environment. Teachers' hesitation to experiment with teaching techniques or methods can lead to a learning environment that's less inspiring and supportive (Cooper, 2019; Fu & Wenju, 2021; Han et al., 2021; Kraft & Falken, 2019; Molero et al., 2019; Sokal et al., 2020; Valente et al., 2020).

Effective Policies

Most researchers agree that effective school policies strengthen and create a favorable school climate for all stakeholders (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Grant et al., 2019; Thapa et al., 2013; Zakariya, 2020). However, schools must discover a way to recognize organizational deficiencies. Kraft and Falken (2019) suggest that schools conduct climate surveys with domain specific questions to garner sincere responses. The researchers do not specify what environmental factors the questions would cover, nor do they consider the behaviors and attitudes of individuals when answering questions for surveys. Thus, some researchers do not consider that surveys can be unreliable and biased. This emphasizes the need to explore different methods and approaches to creating effective policies that will enhance teacher retention in low-income schools.

When educators feel a sense of support and appreciation from their institution, they are likelier to stay in their positions for the term. This support can take forms, including offering salaries and benefits, providing opportunities for professional growth, and cultivating a positive work environment (Kraft & Falken, 2019; Liu & Liao, 2019; McGarrigle et al., 2023). Additionally, school policies that value teacher input and feedback can contribute to retention rates. When teachers perceive that their perspectives are respected and influence their work

environment, they tend to feel more invested in their profession and committed to their school community. Consequently, they are less inclined to leave their positions due to burnout or dissatisfaction. In summary, establishing and implementing school policies that prioritize support, input, and feedback for teachers play a role in boosting teacher retention rates. By valuing and investing in educators, institutions can foster a sustainable work culture that benefits teachers and students (Kraft & Falken, 2019; Liu & Liao, 2019; McGarrigle et al., 2023).

Teacher Input & Feedback

Teacher input and feedback amplify the teacher's voice. Garcia, Han, and Weiss (2022) found that a determinant of teacher retention was allowing teachers to influence change in the school environment, policies, and classrooms. The researchers also determined that supportive and positive work atmospheres, fewer school-wide issues, and high teacher efficacy were determinants of teacher retention and job satisfaction (Garcia, Han, & Weiss, 2022). Various researchers investigated the role of a teacher's voice in attracting highly qualified teachers (Cansoy, 2020; Donohoo et al., 2020; Fradkin Hayslip, 2021; Garcia, Han, & Weiss, 2022; Martin & Mulvihill, 2019). Studies were conducted due to issues raised in the media during the pandemic, teacher protests, and the growing of qualitative research on why teachers should voice their concerns and expertise in schools (Cansoy, 2020; Donohoo et al., 2020; Fradkin Hayslip, 2021; Garcia, Han, & Weiss, 2022; Martin & Mulvihill, 2019). The researchers argued that teachers' voices are often featured but hold no weight regarding organizational structures and policies. Studies emphasize the importance of illustrating how teachers perceive their voices, and their voices reflect their personal and professional experiences (Cansoy, 2020; Donohoo et al., 2020; Fradkin Hayslip, 2021; Garcia, Han, & Weiss, 2022; Martin & Mulvihill, 2019). The

results reveal that teachers will likely remain in the education profession when they influence school policies and have more autonomy and freedom in their classrooms.

Another study emphasizes the significance of teacher voices regarding professional development. Martin et al. (2019) assert that professional development is required and mandated by governments at the federal, state, and local levels; however, required professional development does not always yield positive outcomes. The researchers argue that professional development must align with the needs of the teachers and the students for them to be relevant. Federal, state, and local governments attempt to solve academic problems by mandating professional development that is implemented to address the professional transformation in the beliefs and practices of teachers (Cansoy, 2020; Donohoo et al., 2020; Fradkin Hayslip, 2021; Garcia, Han, & Weiss, 2022; Martin & Mulvihill, 2019). To further investigate this notion, the researchers examined how teachers develop professionally and how this transformation affects the school's culture. The researchers found that district professional development that considered the school's culture and constituents was most effective. Moreover, principals and educational leaders who were more successful in outcomes provided teachers with opportunities to provide input, take control, and lead professional development by responding to the school's needs (Cansoy, 2020; Donohoo et al., 2020; Fradkin Hayslip, 2021; Garcia, Han, & Weiss, 2022; Martin & Mulvihill, 2019). Thus, allowing teachers to voice their expertise can lead to student success. The researchers found that teachers were influencers of school culture. According to the empirical body of research, when teachers are a part of the decision-making process, this yields successful gains for students, increasing the intrinsic value in teachers and giving them a reason to remain in education (Cansoy, 2020; Donohoo et al., 2020; Fradkin Hayslip, 2021; Garcia, Han, & Weiss, 2022; Martin & Mulvihill, 2019).

Many studies focus on teacher shortages and teacher burnout; however, the research covering the overall welfare of teachers is sparse. Weiland (2021) examined the experiences of current teachers in addressing the stipulations associated with the profession and how this correlated with their welfare. The study involved three elementary school teachers using semi structured interviews. Prior research underscores the effect of burnout on teachers' overall health and capacity to remain in the classroom (Cansoy, 2020; Donohoo et al., 2020; Fradkin Hayslip, 2021; Garcia, Han, & Weiss, 2022; Martin & Mulvihill, 2019). The study highlights teachers' voices in the education system regarding how teachers can maintain their educational well-being. Weiland (2021) approached the research through a positive lens. Overall, the researcher findings align with similar studies that suggest emphasizing teachers' voices and allowing teachers a safe space to have positive and open communication with colleagues and school principals contributed to the positive emotional influence of teaching (Cansoy, 2020; Donohoo et al., 2020; Fradkin Hayslip, 2021; Garcia, Han, & Weiss, 2022; Martin & Mulvihill, 2019).

Numerous research studies have highlighted the role of teacher input and feedback in enhancing their effectiveness. It has been observed that when teachers actively participate in decision-making processes and have a say in shaping their work environment, they feel more empowered and confident about making an impact on their students' lives (Cansoy, 2020; Donohoo et al., 2020; Fradkin Hayslip, 2021; Martin & Mulvihill, 2019). Additionally, research has indicated that teachers who receive feedback on their performance are more likely to believe in their ability to make a difference for their students and are less prone to experiencing burnout (Cansoy, 2020; Donohoo et al., 2020; Fradkin Hayslip, 2021; Martin & Mulvihill, 2019). Such feedback may encompass criticism, positive reinforcement, and suggestions for improvement. Feedback delivery should be timely and respectful for it to be effective.

Furthermore, granting teachers opportunities to contribute to curriculum development and other aspects of their profession enhances their investment in the field and job satisfaction (Cansoy, 2020; Donohoo et al., 2020; Fradkin Hayslip, 2021; Garcia, Han, & Weiss, 2022; Martin & Mulvihill, 2019).. This involvement can result in engagement and motivation that ultimately benefit students. In summary, fostering a culture of teamwork and effective communication is crucial to ensure teachers' welfare and enhance the journey for their students. According to the findings, educational establishments should prioritize offering chances for teachers to share their perspectives and receive feedback, as this encourages their confidence in teaching and ultimately elevates the standard of education (Cansoy, 2020; Donohoo et al., 2020; Fradkin Hayslip, 2021; Garcia, Han, & Weiss, 2022; Martin & Mulvihill, 2019).

Effective School Leadership

Principals play a significant role in advancing schools and creating comprehensive environments conducive to the well-being of teachers and students. According to many studies, principals have the critical responsibility of improving the school climate to encourage the retention of teachers (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Farmer, 2020; Ladd, 2011). In a study, researchers explored the relationship between teacher and principal turnover in high-poverty schools using longitudinal data spanning nearly 20 years in Texas public schools. The study found that 1 out of 5 principals leave their schools, and the rate is higher for low-income schools. The study revealed a correlation between principal and teacher turnover due to low efficacy in principals. As mentioned above, the researchers found that principals are more effective in improving school conditions by including faculty in the decision-making and climate-shaping processes (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Farmer, 2020; Garcia et al., 2022; Ladd, 2011).

Furthermore, solid principal leadership is pivotal in creating conditions that support influential teachers.

Another study by Liebowitz and Porter (2019) added that principals could improve school teaching and learning conditions. However, more is needed about the strategies and concepts principals should employ to encourage favorable outcomes effectively. According to various studies, there is a connection between student behaviors and achievements, teacher welfare, and school atmosphere (Grant et al., 2019; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Thapa, 2013; Zakariya, 2020). The researchers spotlight the importance of principal behavior and habits extending beyond instructional and management practices to improve student outcomes, teacher effectiveness, and retention. Studies posit that districts and educational organizations should invest in professional development to improve leadership amplitude (Grant et al., 2019; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Thapa, 2013; Zakariya, 2020).

A study by Grissom (2011) theorizes that effective principals significantly impact teacher retention in disadvantaged schools vulnerable to staffing issues. Studies have analyzed national data from the schools and staffing surveys using regression analysis to address distorted data (Grant et al., 2019; Grissom 2011; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Thapa, 2013; Zakariya, 2020). According to the findings, researchers highlighted that teachers leave high-needs schools with large populations of underprivileged students at higher rates (Grant et al., 2019; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Thapa, 2013; Zakariya, 2020). Additionally, teachers report that students in low-performing schools exhibit behavioral problems that contribute to a dissatisfactory experience. Teachers also leave due to the harsh and less welcoming environments of high-need schools. The research examines whether principals directly connect to teacher performance, school climate, and attrition rates. Studies reveal that though many disadvantages impact high

attrition rates in low-income schools, principal efficacy is a critical factor of teacher job satisfaction in these schools (Grant et al., 2019; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Thapa, 2013; Zakariya, 2020). Research suggests that more research is needed on what encompasses an effective school leader and that solid leadership is vital for teacher retention (Grant et al., 2019; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Thapa, 2013; Zakariya, 2020).

A study found that principal effectiveness impacted teachers' retention rate in schools and the education profession. Based on the study's results, the researchers concluded that highly effective principals should redirect their efforts to highly effective teachers since attrition in conventional schools affected teachers who had low efficacy (Grissom & Bartenen, 2018). The researchers maintained that the schools were better off without attempting to retain teachers who needed to be more competent. This research reveals a phenomenon opposite to what is happening in low-income schools. High-performing teachers have greater job satisfaction in conventional schools where leadership is vital (Grant et al., 2019; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Thapa, 2013; Zakariya, 2020). The researchers asserted that highly effective principals are purposeful in maintaining an atmosphere of excellence by eliminating faculty that do not meet the high standards of affluent schools. The study's results align with other research conducted on the topic and demonstrate that principals not only retain the authority to strengthen their student achievement and retention rates among teachers by hiring highly qualified teachers, but teacher retention is also predicated on their leadership potency (Grant et al., 2019; Grissom & Bartenen, 2018; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Thapa, 2013; Zakariya, 2020).

Research has shown that effective management in institutions can impact retaining teaching staff (Grant et al., 2019; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Thapa, 2013; Zakariya, 2020). Principals prioritize supporting their educators and creating a work environment are likelier to

maintain a teaching team. This involves providing opportunities for growth, offering compensation and benefits packages, and valuing the input and feedback of teachers. Moreover, fostering relationships between leaders and educators can promote community and encourage collaboration. By investing in their teachers and cultivating a work culture, academic leaders can contribute to teacher retention rates, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes.

Effective Leadership & Teacher Efficacy

After thoroughly examining the existing literature on school leadership and teacher effectiveness, it becomes evident that effective leadership promotes teacher efficacy and ultimately improves student outcomes. Research indicates that school leaders who provide their teachers with guidance, support, and access to resources can cultivate a sense of efficacy within the school community (Grant et al., 2019; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Thapa, 2013; Zakariya, 2020). This collective efficacy fosters increased teacher motivation, engagement, and effectiveness in the classroom, resulting in student performance. The literature emphasizes the significance of distributed leadership and collaboration between teachers and school leaders as drivers of teacher efficacy and student success (Grant et al., 2019; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Thapa, 2013; Zakariya, 2020). When teachers feel valued and supported by their school leaders, they are more inclined to be motivated to enhance their teaching practices, leading to improved student outcomes.

Collaboration among teachers and school leaders also facilitates sharing practices that can elevate the institution's teaching quality. In general, the research highlights the role that school leaders play in establishing a nurturing and encouraging school environment that empowers teachers and allows them to be successful in their profession (Grant et al., 2019; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Thapa, 2013; Zakariya, 2020). School leadership effectiveness is not

vital for enhancing teacher confidence and improving student outcomes but crucial for fostering a positive and supportive learning atmosphere that benefits everyone within the school community.

School Facilities

Besides solid school leadership, low teacher retention in high-need schools can be attributed to poor working conditions and school facilities (Buckley et al., 2004; Loeb & Myung, 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Yeo et al., 2008). Several studies reveal that the facility teachers' work environment quality is equally important as the teacher's salary (Buckley et al., 2004; Loeb & Myung, 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Yeo et al., 2008). Moreover, teachers leave their jobs because their environment and facility significantly impact their efficiency and productivity. Researchers found that teachers left schools with poor facilities, transferring to affluent schools while taking a pay cut (Buckley et al., 2004; Loeb & Myung, 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Yeo et al., 2008). Additionally, like other studies, the researchers found that many teachers preferred independence, and their job satisfaction was also linked to their beliefs in their ability to teach in specific school environments (Buckley et al., 2004; Loeb & Myung, 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Yeo et al., 2008).

In schools, more resources are needed to improve the quality of classroom instruction and contribute to overall dissatisfaction among teachers. Many educators express the need for additional resources to meet their job requirements effectively. Research has shown that teachers often choose schools based on the student population they serve, with a preference for those with achieving students from backgrounds (Buckley et al., 2004; Loeb & Myung, 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Yeo et al., 2008). The significant disparities between high-need and affluent schools play a role in teacher retention in low-income areas.

Consequently, tangible benefits such as access to quality books, technology, and professional development opportunities are factors influencing teachers' decisions to stay or leave their schools (Buckley et al., 2004; Loeb & Myung, 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Yeo et al., 2008). Furthermore, intangible benefits tied to the quality of school facilities also impact teacher satisfaction. It is essential for teachers to feel motivated and inspired in working conditions to maintain a sense of efficacy. Otherwise, they may choose to leave either the school or even the field of education. Research indicates that teachers who are situated in environments that foster a well-structured atmosphere while nurturing a growth mindset are more inclined to stay at the school (Buckley et al., 2004; Loeb & Myung, 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Yeo et al., 2008). Consequently, the surroundings and resources provided by schools can influence how teachers perceive and approach their duties.

Extensive research has shown that teachers' physical environment impacts their job satisfaction and effectiveness (Buckley et al., 2004; Loeb & Myung, 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Yeo et al., 2008). Clearly, teachers who work in poorly maintained or inadequate facilities experience stress levels, which can lead to burnout and lower efficacy. Enhancing and maintaining school facilities is essential to improve teacher retention to create a valued workplace for educators. Additionally, a maintained and safe learning environment can influence student outcomes by fostering pride and ownership and promoting a conducive atmosphere for learning. The research maintains that school leaders should prioritize maintaining and upgrading school facilities as it contributes to creating a learning environment for teachers and students. By investing in the infrastructure of schools, leaders demonstrate their dedication to the well-being and success of the entire school community (Buckley et al., 2004; Loeb & Myung, 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Yeo et al., 2008).

Teacher Experience & Efficacy

In addition to poor working conditions in dilapidated facilities, teacher shortages heighten over time, and high-need schools receive low teacher retention (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Thapa et al., 2013). Considering the issues, researchers found that teachers need more certification, training, and experience, contributing to low retention rates in low-income schools (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Moreover, high-need schools are disadvantaged when staffing highly certified teachers, with an attrition rate of 14% of teachers leaving a school or the education sector (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Several studies find that high-need schools need help finding veteran or highly qualified teachers because only a few graduate from teacher preparation programs (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Garcia & Wise, 2019; Grant et al., 2022; Thapa et al., 2013;).

Consequently, low-income schools need to hire more experienced teachers, positively impacting student achievement. Many novice teachers need classroom management skills to support specific behavioral issues in high-need schools. This study aligns with the results of another study that asserts that teachers in low-income schools are more likely to leave due to behavior issues that they cannot and are unwilling to deal with (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Garcia & Wise, 2019; Grant et al., 2022; Thapa et al., 2013). As a result, many novice teachers face low teacher efficacy due to needing more resources and skills to teach the students effectively. Teachers who need more confidence in their teaching abilities were also shown to have a higher rate of conflicts with students (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Yeo et al., 2008).

Regarding teacher experience and efficacy, another study found that experienced teachers who are highly effective flourish in affluent schools (Grissom & Bartenen, 2018). According to the research, principals who promote excellence attract experienced teachers, and low-confident teachers become intimidated and avoid affluent schools (Grissom & Bartenen,

2018). However, the academic impact of novice teachers on student achievement rates in low-income schools is minimal, but this does not negate the fact that highly qualified teachers have a substantial long-term influence on student achievement post-high school (Loeb & Myung, 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Yeo et al., 2008). Socioeconomic factors cause the need for more highly qualified teachers in low-income schools (Loeb & Myung, 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Yeo et al., 2008). Thus, low-income schools cannot pay higher salaries due to the lack of financial resources impacting the district's ability to attract and retain teachers.

After examining the literature, it becomes evident that the experience of teachers plays a crucial role in determining their effectiveness. Numerous studies have shown that experienced teachers possess levels of confidence in their abilities, excel at managing their classrooms, and are more successful in engaging students during the learning process (Ma & Marion, 2021; Kundu et al., 2020; Savolainen et al., 2022; Thornton et al., 2020; Valente et al., 2020). Conversely, novice teachers often need help in these areas. They may exhibit varying degrees of confidence in their teaching and classroom management skills. Additionally, research suggests that factors like teacher preparation and professional development can influence the relationship between teacher experience and effectiveness (Ma & Marion, 2021; Kundu et al., 2020; Savolainen et al., 2022; Thornton et al., 2020; Valente et al., 2020). Educators who receive training and support in classroom management techniques and instructional strategies are better equipped to handle the demands of the teaching of their level of experience. Therefore, continuous professional development initiatives can help bridge the gap between seasoned teachers while fostering an effective teaching workforce.

In the scheme of things, although the experience of teachers undeniably plays a role in determining how effective they are, it is essential to recognize that it is not the sole factor in this

equation. There are variables to consider, such as teacher preparation and ongoing professional development, which can also greatly influence teachers' beliefs about their competence in teaching and engaging their students in the learning process. As a result, it becomes crucial for schools and districts to invest in providing top-notch training and support to all teachers of their level of experience so that they can be well-equipped to cater to the needs of their students (Ma & Marion, 2021; Kundu et al., 2020; Savolainen et al., 2022; Thornton et al., 2020; Valente et al., 2020).

Teacher Disposition

Teachers are essential for students' pedagogical, social, and emotional growth, and it is imperative that teachers are knowledgeable of the cultural nuances and complexities of the communities they serve in low-income schools. Thus, research suggests that teachers who are more likely to remain in high-needs schools are teachers who are culturally responsive to the needs of the student population of low-income schools. According to Han and Laughter (2019), researchers argue in favor of social justice and culturally relevant pedagogy in teacher preparation programs using critical race theory's interest convergence perspective (Han & Laughter, 2019). The research suggests that teacher education programs are about social justice and change, but the actual curriculums and systemic educational practices are the opposite. Koppelman (2019) argues that educational curriculums lack diversity and focus mainly on the dominant group in society (Morris, 2022).

Furthermore, Han and Laughter (2019) assert that systemically, teachers of color are hired at lower rates than their counterparts, and students of color are subjected to curriculums and standardized tests void of cultural responsiveness (Han & Laughter, 2019). Researchers assert that one way to combat the disparities in high-poverty schools is by hiring highly qualified

teachers of color and re-examining society's extensive culture of whiteness (Brown, 2013). Trinidad (2020) posits that people often view their social status in conjunction with education, and beliefs about education stem from their family backgrounds (Trinidad, 2020). Therefore, in the case of student achievement and retention rates in high-need schools, teachers who decide to teach in high-need schools must examine their cultural mindsets and hidden biases to advocate for the success of all students (Morris, 2022; Cantrell et al., 2018).

After reviewing the literature on teacher disposition and teacher efficacy, it becomes clear that these two factors play a crucial role in the success of educators. Teacher disposition refers to teachers' attitudes and beliefs toward their students, teaching subjects, and the profession. Conversely, teacher efficacy relates to a teacher's confidence in their ability to positively impact their student's academic progress and personal growth. Several studies have discovered a connection between teacher disposition and student outcomes (Dewit, 2019; Han & Laughter, 2019; Koppelman, 2019; Morris, 2022; West et al., 2020). When teachers possess attitudes toward their students and the subjects they teach, they are more likely to create an environment that facilitates learning. This increases student engagement, higher achievement levels, and better academic performance.

Conversely, teachers who hold attitudes towards their students or subjects are more inclined to foster a classroom atmosphere that hinders learning. As a result of this environment, student motivation and performance tend to decline. Similarly, teacher efficacy serves as a predictor of student achievement. Teachers who have a belief in their ability to influence their students positively are more likely to have expectations to use effective teaching strategies and create a supportive learning atmosphere (Dewit, 2019; Han & Laughter, 2019; Koppelman, 2019;

Morris, 2022; West et al., 2020). This can result in increased student motivation, better academic performance, and a greater sense of responsibility for learning.

On the other hand, teachers who need more confidence in their ability to impact their students are less likely to set high expectations, employ effective teaching methods, or establish a supportive learning environment. Consequently, student motivation and performance may decrease (Dewit, 2019; Han & Laughter, 2019; Koppelman, 2019; Morris, 2022; West et al., 2020). Overall findings from studies indicate that the attitude and effectiveness of teachers significantly influence success. Therefore, teacher training programs and professional development opportunities must focus on developing and enhancing these skills among educators to achieve student outcomes. By doing educators can cultivate an encouraging classroom environment that promotes student learning engagement and achievement.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching can promote teacher satisfaction and retention in low-income schools, thus, uniting the teacher and student, allowing the teacher to reflect on and examine how their own beliefs and biases can affect student learning. Ashbrook (2021) maintains that teachers must understand the cultural components of students' identities, recognizing how the students make sense of the world they live in through their lived experiences (Ashbrook, 2021; Morris, 2022). Culturally responsive teaching does not merely teach pop culture but also examines the communities and settings in which students live to better understand their interests (Morris, 2022; Scherff & Spector, 2010). A review of the literature discussed in this paper posits that teachers and educators are most effective when they are cognizant of how their cultural beliefs shape their approach to teaching (Bonner & Jiang, 2018; Morris, 2022). Regardless of the factors that affect low-income schools, there are many strengths

in high-need schools that teachers can rely on to reach students and promote high teacher efficacy (Bridgeforth et al., 2021; Morris, 2022).

There has been a growing focus on the importance of responsive teaching and its impact on teacher effectiveness. Culturally responsive teaching is a method that acknowledges and values the cultural backgrounds of students, aiming to create an inclusive and fair learning environment. Research in this area suggests that educators who embrace teaching practices are more successful in engaging their students and supporting their academic progress (Ashbrook, 2021; Bonner & Jiang, 2018; Bridgeforth et al., 2021; Morris, 2022; Scherff & Spector, 2010). Moreover, responsive teaching has been associated with outcomes such as increased student motivation, greater job satisfaction for teachers, and enhanced school atmosphere (Ashbrook, 2021; Bonner & Jiang, 2018; Bridgeforth et al., 2021; Morris, 2022; Scherff & Spector, 2010). Considering these findings, it is clear that responsive teaching fosters student achievement and teacher effectiveness within today's diverse classrooms.

Benefits of Culturally Responsive Teachers in Low-Income Schools

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy allows teachers to focus on the funds of knowledge students possess, encouraging student achievement. Characteristics of low-income schools and communities change across the United States, and the research implications illustrate that most studies tend to focus on the deficits present in high need schools (Bridgeforth et al., 2021; Morris, 2022). However, the fact remains that many teachers face the challenges of overcoming social, economic, and cultural barriers to meet students' needs with the lack of resources and funding in low-income schools (Catrell et al., 2018; Morris, 2022). These findings implicate that students in low-income schools are capable of learning as much as their more fortunate peers and that culturally responsive teachers are instrumental in the academic success of students from low

socioeconomic backgrounds. When teachers focus on the funds of knowledge students possess, coupled with empathy for students' social, cultural, and economic backgrounds, the students become motivated to learn (Gay, 2013; Morris, 2022).

After reviewing the literature on the application of responsive teaching in schools with low-income students, it has become evident that this approach can bring numerous advantages for both students and educators. By integrating students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into the curriculum, teachers can create a meaningful learning environment that fosters students' sense of belonging and pride. Consequently, this can result in improved outcomes and heightened learning motivation and engagement. Additionally, by incorporating teaching practices, we can work towards reducing cultural biases and stereotypes within classrooms, promoting fair treatment for all students (Ashbrook, 2021; Bonner & Jiang, 2018; Bridgeforth et al., 2021; Cantrell et al., 2018; Gay, 2013; Scherff & Spector, 2010; Morris, 2022).

Educators who embrace this approach also tend to develop relationships with their students, which positively influences behavior and creates a positive classroom atmosphere. While challenges are associated with implementing responsive teaching in low-income schools, such as limited resources and time constraints, the benefits of adopting this approach are clear. By adopting a teaching approach that values inclusivity and cultural sensitivity, educators have the opportunity to create an experience for every student regardless of their background or socioeconomic status (Ashbrook, 2021; Bonner & Jiang, 2018; Bridgeforth et al., 2021; Cantrell et al., 2018; Gay, 2013; Scherff & Spector, 2010; Morris, 2022). This method also fosters a sense of respect and dignity among all students, fostering an inclusive learning environment.

Low-Income Schools

After examining the literature regarding schools with low-income students, it is evident that these educational institutions encounter various difficulties. Students attending these schools often need access to resources like textbooks, technology, and necessities like food. This scarcity of resources can negatively impact their performance and overall well-being. Furthermore, low-income schools often need help attracting and retaining teachers (Andrews et al., 2020; Bottiani et al., 2019; Carver et al. et al., 2019; Josephson et al., 2021; Kwon et al., 2020). Many educators prefer to work in areas where salaries are higher, leading to a need for more experienced and effective teachers in low-income schools. Despite these challenges, there have been some strategies and interventions identified that can enhance student outcomes in low-income schools (Andrews et al., 2020; Bottiani et al., 2019; Carver et al. et al., 2019; Josephson et al., 2021; Kwon et al., 2020). For instance, providing resources such as tutoring programs and extracurricular activities can assist students in catching up and staying on the achievement path and road to graduation.

Likewise, offering pay and attractive benefits can play a role in attracting and retaining highly skilled teachers (Andrews et al., 2020; Bottiani et al., 2019; Carver et al. et al., 2019; Josephson et al., 2021; Kwon et al., 2020). In essence, addressing schools' challenges in low-income areas requires an approach. Investing in resources and providing support for educators can ensure that every student has access to a high-quality education regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Teacher Retention in Low-Income Schools

Numerous studies have highlighted the challenges faced by institutions in low-income communities when it comes to retaining their teaching staff (Andrews et al., 2020; Bottiani et al.,

2019; Carver et al. et al., 2019; Josephson et al., 2021; Kwon et al., 2020). These institutions often need help with resources and complex issues, leading to a turnover rate and burnout among experienced teachers. However, ensuring teacher retention in these communities is crucial for educating students. Effective strategies identified to address this issue include offering salaries and benefits, providing development opportunities, and creating supportive work environments that acknowledge and appreciate teachers' hard work (Andrews et al., 2020; Bottiani et al., 2019; Carver et al. et al., 2019; Josephson et al., 2021; Kwon et al., 2020). By implementing these approaches, schools in low-income areas can retain dedicated teachers who impact students' academic achievements.

Summary

Some factors can have an impact on a teacher's effectiveness. These include teacher burnout, a hostile school atmosphere, limited teacher involvement and feedback, ineffective school leadership, inadequate facilities, low teacher experience, and a pessimistic outlook by teachers. These factors can significantly affect a teacher's ability to carry out their tasks in the classroom. This can lead to feelings of frustration and a sense of losing control. Consequently, this can reduce motivation levels in teachers and hinder their capacity to create a learning environment for their students. Conversely, having a school environment with leadership, favorable facilities, and opportunities for teacher input and feedback can enhance their confidence and effectiveness. These factors empower teachers and can provide them with the support to foster a more productive and positive learning environment for students. Schools must prioritize these elements to create an atmosphere that supports and empowers teachers. Teachers and students will benefit from outcomes resulting in a successful learning experience.

The existing body of literature on retaining teachers in high-need schools emphasizes the principals' role in ensuring teacher retention, promoting student achievement, and maintaining an optimal school performance and environment. According to existing research, a positive school climate that reduces teacher burnout and increases job satisfaction and retention is characterized by support, collaboration, strong leadership, and responsive teachers. However, the literature has yet to extensively explore the experiences of teachers who choose to stay in high-needs schools or their perspectives on teacher attrition. Additionally, there is a discussion about factors contributing to teacher retention in low-income schools. Drawing from the attrition factors mentioned earlier, the social cognitive model offered a framework for understanding why teachers remain in high-needs schools. This model can further contribute to discussions and potential strategies to foster organizational growth and commitment.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand retention factors for secondary teachers in low-income schools. At this stage in the research, retention was generally defined as *a teacher returning to teach at a high-needs school after serving at least one year in the position* (NCES, 2016). Chapter Three is structured to provide a precis of the design, procedures, and analysis of this phenomenological study. A qualitative, hermeneutic, phenomenological method was implemented to examine the retention factors for secondary teachers. This chapter explored the design, procedures, and implementation of this phenomenological study.

Research Design

Qualitative research is an inquiry-based approach that allows for a deeper understanding of real-world experiences and phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Unlike quantitative research, which uses numerical data points that can be measured to learn about a population, qualitative research allows researchers to form an assumption and gain a profound understanding of quantitative data (Morris, 2022). Through qualitative research, a researcher acquires more cognizance of the practices, consciousness, and experiences of the participants in a natural setting. Furthermore, this research design is non-linear, unlike quantitative research and qualitative research is flexible, allowing for the flexibility of how and why questions are answered (Morris, 2022; Tenny et al., 2022). Phenomena that occur among participants are conceptualized through qualitative research.

A qualitative, hermeneutic, phenomenological approach was used in this study to describe the factors experienced by retained secondary teachers in high-needs schools. Martin

Heidegger formulated hermeneutic phenomenology, rooted in the ontology that focuses on the essence of being (Heidegger, 1988). Heidegger maintained that human consciousness and awareness of the experiences associated with a phenomenon are not detached from the world or their personal/historical background (Heidegger, 1988; Neubauer et al., 2019). Thus, human experiences with phenomena are shaped by their perceptions.

As a hermeneutic phenomenologist, one elucidated and contextualized the stories provided by the participants in this study as they related to each individual's personal experiences to emphasize the foundational systems of the participants' thinking and how these structures shaped the decisions made by the participants. This approach also recognized that the researcher is a human who is not separated from their own experiences, and these experiences serve as invaluable insight and references for this investigation (Heidegger, 1988; Neubauer et al., 2019). As a secondary teacher and researcher, my educational background, experiences, and knowledge led me to examine this matter. A phenomenological qualitative approach allowed me to amplify the voices of the teachers who are generally overlooked in education. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was most appropriate for this study because it allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the nuances associated with the individual experiences of secondary teachers in low-income schools, contextualizing the phenomena and allowing me to develop themes and patterns that can be appropriated for high-need schools with similar issues.

Research Questions

The central question analyzed the experiences of retained teachers in high-need schools. Studies reveal that principals are influential in retaining teachers, and strong leadership influences teacher retention (Baptiste, 2019). For this study, it was essential to highlight the

insights and experiences of teachers to understand their perceptions of teacher retention in low-income schools.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of retained secondary teachers in high-needs schools?

Sub-Question One

What are the attitudes of retained secondary teachers in high-needs schools?

Sub-Question Two

What are the educational competency beliefs of retained secondary teachers in high-needs schools?

Sub-Question Three

What are the influential abilities of retained secondary teachers in high-needs schools?

Setting and Participants

This study occurred at Black River High School (pseudonym) and consisted of 15 secondary teachers who described their experiences in high-needs schools and the factors that led to their retention. This section comprehensively describes the school's location, leadership, student population, and block scheduling to give the reader insight into the study's environment. A description of the participants was included so that readers can be introduced to and informed about the focus group of this prospective study.

Site

This study took place at a consolidated high school in the Black River School District (BRSD), a Title I school located in the Southeastern region of the United States. The school resides in one of the state's poorest counties. Title I programs aim to assist high-poverty students and schools by improving teaching and learning so that the students can meet state standards.

3000 students are enrolled in the BRSD, and nearly 95% are minorities. The state poverty level is almost 13% over the national poverty level of the United States (NCES, 2016). The median household income of this county is nearly $30,000 less than the national average median income. The abovementioned statistics illustrate that over half of the students in this county are subject to abject poverty and receive free or reduced lunch.

Black River High School (BRHS) was the site of the study, and the school currently serves nearly 800 students. The school's student population is 90% African American, 8.9% Caucasian American, and 2% Hispanic and other. The student population comprises 58% girls and 42% boys (NCES, 2023). The student-to-teacher ratio is 31:1, and the school operates on a 90-minute block schedule consisting of four class periods for the duration of the school day. The leadership structure of BRHS consists of the principal, three assistant principals, six counselors, four instructional coaches, five department chairs, and twenty-two teachers, and the BRHS receives its directives from the BRSD. BRHS and another high school in the district recently consolidated and became one school due to declining enrollment and teacher shortages in both schools. The state's Department of Education has recently relinquished control of the BRSD, and consolidating the two schools would ensure a smooth transition.

This study described the factors that led teachers to return to high-poverty schools after teaching for at least one year. This study was conducted because it is one of personal interest in a growing problem in a high-poverty school. Teacher retention is becoming a costly and growing issue in disadvantaged school districts. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was applied to this study, and one has past experiences in low-income schools. My experiences not only led to this inquiry question but were used as references and guides in this study. Given the adverse circumstances in the BRSD, such as declining enrollment, state control, low test scores, low

teacher pay, low student achievement, overpopulated classrooms, etc., BRHS has teachers who are determined to remain dedicated. This study can improve teacher retention in low-income districts by offering insight and solutions to influence teachers' decisions to stay in high-needs schools.

Participants

The study included 15 participants who are teachers, ages 24-65, of core content and electives with at least three years of teaching experience at a Title 1 school who have decided to return to a high-poverty school. Examining the participants' experiences took considerable time, and researchers recommend 5-25 individuals in a study to create and increase the possibilities of diverse experiences (Creswell et al., 2007). Therefore, 15 participants was an ideal number and allowed the time necessary to capture the experiences and insights of the participants thoroughly.

<div align="center">

Researcher Positionality

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This section of the proposal will provide an overview and explanation of one's motivation for conducting research. Furthermore, it will discuss one's interpretive framework and the three philosophical assumptions underpinning this research's findings. I must be transparent in discussing my position, as I am mindful that a researcher's position can influence the research and its outcomes.

Interpretive Framework

This qualitative, phenomenological study aligned with the constructivist worldview. According to Creswell & Creswell (2017), researchers interpret the study through personal cultural lenses and, therefore, approach the research cognizant of how their personal beliefs and perceptions can influence the outcomes. According to the constructivist worldview, researchers examine other people's interpretations and meanings of their world (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Essentially, the constructivist worldview influenced one's approach to this study as one conducted interviews and observations with a focus group to describe secondary teachers' experiences and the factors that influence them to remain at high-poverty schools. Given the adversity, this study sought to understand why teachers returned to low-income schools (Morris, 2022).

Philosophical Assumptions

Every individual holds different perspectives and outlooks on life and each person views the world differently. This same notion applies to the philosophical assumptions that many educational researchers hold. These assumptions often guide and influence our perspectives and interpretations of the research findings. Articulating one's philosophical approach and outlook in this section will provide the reader with the necessary cognizance to understand one's philosophical approach to life and to this study.

Ontological Assumption

The essence of reality and its attributes are associated with the ontological assumption. In qualitative research, the researcher must undertake diverse realities in addition to accepting the realities and experiences of the study participants. In addition to accepting the realities and experiences of the participants, researchers must divulge these varying realities (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As a researcher, I believe it is best to understand people on an individual level; however, I am also aware that people's backgrounds and their settings can also influence their choices. I sought to understand and describe the personal and external factors that contribute to teachers' decisions to return to their school to better understand the phenomenon of teacher retention in low-income schools. Therefore, this phenomenological study allowed for the experiences of secondary teachers in high-needs schools to be studied, shedding light on the

differing perspectives regarding their decisions to remain at their schools. It was imperative to understand the perceptions and perspectives of teachers who dedicated themselves to disadvantaged schools because these teachers have different reasons why they stay; moreover, teachers who work in high-poverty schools professional experiences are in stark contrast to the teachers who teach in affluent schools; Essentially, researching the experiences of teachers in high needs schools can improve retention rates for high poverty schools. (Morris, 2022).

Epistemological Assumption

Through the epistemological assumption, Creswell and Poth (2018) maintain that the researcher is close to the participants in the study and gathers firsthand information and knowledge based on the participants' individual contextual understanding of a matter. Moreover, epistemology is concerned with how people know what they know. As a researcher, I believe that qualitative research is subjective in nature because it allows participants to tell their stories through their personal experiences. Thus, one believes that knowledge is constructed through experiences and individuals' perceptions of those experiences. To understand the phenomenon of teacher retention in low-income schools, I went to the school to observe what was happening and gathered information and knowledge from the teachers who were experiencing the phenomenon firsthand. Ultimately, the knowledge gained through this phenomenological study can only be derived from secondary teachers' experiences in high-needs schools.

Axiological Assumption

The hermeneutic phenomenological approach focuses on the human experience and how it is lived but recognizes humans as actors in the world. Moreover, this approach acknowledges that individuals and their backgrounds are not separate from the world around them (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varper, 2019). I used the hermeneutic approach to study this phenomenon, and this

approach acknowledges that the researcher brings their own perspectives and experiences to the topic of inquiry. As a researcher and teacher who has taught in low-income schools, I have an awareness of factors that contribute to the advantages and disadvantages of teaching in high-poverty schools. I believe that many teachers choose to return to low-income schools because they care deeply about the students; however, other teachers may have differing values. I want to emphasize that though I have my own opinions on this topic, I went to careful lengths to highlight the perspectives and insights of the participants in this research.

Researcher's Role

This study was inspired by my career as a secondary English teacher in high-needs schools and personal teaching philosophy. As a teacher, I believe that students struggle academically due to the lack of highly qualified teachers and low teacher retention rates in high-poverty schools. I personally choose to work in low-income schools due to my background as a student and graduate of a high-needs school. I can recollect the disappointment one felt as a teenager when teachers would leave after 1-2 years of teaching. I perceived that they were leaving to go to better schools, which was a disheartening realization. Ultimately, the students in disadvantaged schools deserve better, and this study can highlight why teachers choose to stay and how schools can improve teacher retention. The site was chosen because it fits the profile of a high-needs secondary school for the nature of this study. Though these schools lack funding and resources, teachers are dedicated to connecting with their students while providing them with a high-quality education. My role at Black River High School will be to conduct research.

Regarding eliminating bias, I am not employed in the district, nor have I ever taught at the school. A hermeneutic phenomenological design was used to approach this study. As a qualitative researcher, I interviewed teachers to understand their opinions, behaviors, and lived

experiences while teaching in low-income schools. I also conducted direct observations of teachers as they interacted with the environment and students at BRHS to gain insight into factors that may lead them to return to their school.

Procedures

The procedures section outlines the steps used to conduct the study in a practical manner. This section includes necessary 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. Essentially, without following academic research protocols, the outcomes can be skewed and compromised.

Recruitment Plan

Purposive sampling is a concise approach to generating suitable and practical information from specific kinds of people with minimal resources (Campbell et al., 2020). The researchers maintain that purposive sampling may have certain criteria; however, the participants are bound to hold varying perspectives about the issue being studied, therefore rendering their insight useful for research (Campbell et al., 2020). This study was conducted with the core content and elective teachers of Black River High School. Purposive sampling was used for this study as it centers around teachers who have returned after teaching at least one year at a high-needs school. The sample pool consisted of 24 teachers, and the sample size consisted of 15 teachers. I reached out to the school's principal and explained the nature of my study and asked for permission to speak to the teachers of the school. Once permission was granted, I scheduled a day to speak with prospective participants about the nature of my research, and I also asked for their participation. On that particular day, I spoke with them, and upon their approval, I collected their

email addresses. Ultimately, each participant was informed before the research about the nature and requirements of the study, and each person voluntarily participated and consented to the study by their judgment (Manti & Licari, 2018).

Data Collection Plan

Data was collected from the individual interviews, the direct observations, and the focus group consecutively. This order of data collection was selected because the individual interviews allowed me the opportunity to create a rapport with each participant and understand each participant's story and perspective. Establishing a relationship with participants is key in ensuring they feel comfortable voicing their thoughts and experiences. Direct observations played a pivotal role in allowing me to see teachers in action firsthand while interacting with the students and environments of high-poverty schools. The focus group was conducted last and was used to collect data on teachers' reflections about their experiences in high-poverty schools and their perception of teacher retention. The focus group generated new themes and topics that were not discovered in the preceding data collection processes.

Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach

According to Bloom and Crabtree (2006), conducting interviews is a prevalent strategy for collecting qualitative data. Moreover, open-ended questions are used in semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insight into the participants and their thoughts about the research issue, and they tend to be rescheduled for a specific time and place apart from the normal business day (Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Interviews were conducted with all teachers involved in the study to gain a better understanding of the opinions, behaviors, and experiences of teachers as they relate to the research problem and question. Furthermore, individual interviews were conducted in the

school's conference room after school hours when students are dismissed. Every interview lasted

approximately one hour and were recorded and transcribed.

Table 1

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your educational background and career in your current position. CRQ

2. Describe your challenges when working in high-needs schools. CRQ

3. Describe the demographics of your classroom. CRQ

4. What is your personal teaching philosophy? SQ1

5. Describe how your philosophy ties into your rationale for returning to this school. SQ1

6. What is your perception of the school, the leadership, and the students, and how do these perceptions factor into your decision to return each year? SQ1

7. What are your perceptions of low teacher retention in your school, and why do you think this problem exists? SQ1

8. How do you perceive your preparation for teaching in this environment? SQ2

9. What skills are needed to teach in low-income schools, and what skills do you implement? SQ2

10. How do your personal and professional philosophies affect your teaching skills and practices? SQ2

11. How do you perceive opportunities for influence in your school? SQ3

12. How do you influence change in students and the classroom? SQ3

13. In what ways do you influence the school climate? SQ3

14. To what extent does your ability to influence contribute to your decision to remain at the school? SQ3

15. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences at low-income schools that we have yet to discuss? CRQ

Each interview question corresponded to the central research question and three sub-research questions formulated to address the tenets of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, the theoretical framework for this study, posits that attitudes, behavior, and environment influence individual experiences. Thus, these questions addressed the problem of low retention rates in low-income schools, and the purpose of this study was to describe the retention factors for the study participants.

Questions one, two, and three are related to the central research question, which encompassed the general experiences of secondary school teachers; the questions allowed me to gather additional information about the participants' educational backgrounds and careers to gain insight into how this information correlates with their professional efficacy as educators. Moreover, teachers' behavior predates self-efficacy (Bandura, 1988). Additionally, the questions were used to address the environmental component of SCT to examine how external factors can impact participants' behaviors. The SCT posits that behavior is also predicated upon social systems, and these questions allowed insight into what the participants' classroom experiences are like to determine if these interactions contribute to teacher retention.

Questions four, five, six, and seven relate to sub-question one, which examined the personal attitudes of the retained secondary teachers. Examining the participants' teaching philosophy provided perspective on the participants' attitudes toward teaching, students, instruction, and education in general. The participant's personal beliefs and values about teaching can factor into their choice to remain in low-income schools. Analyzing the extent to which the participants' personal beliefs and values factor into their decision to stay at their school provided

insight into teachers' approaches toward their work. Ultimately, the questions provided answers and can aid administrators and policymakers in creating environments that foster support and encourage teacher retention in low-income schools. An overall climate of value and appreciation contributes to a positive school culture, encouraging teacher job satisfaction. Examining the teachers' perceptions of the school, leadership, and students enabled me to understand the school's social climate and how the teachers function within the school climate. Moreover, how the teachers perceive adverse circumstances in the school that contribute to teacher attrition gave further insight into why teachers remain in low-income schools. The questions acquired insight into how the school leadership and policymakers address the issue of teacher attrition in low-income schools. It was essential to explore these questions because the collaboration between teachers and school leaders is vital for positive change in schools.

Questions eight, nine, and ten relate to sub-question two, which examined teachers' beliefs about their professional competency. When teachers are equipped with the proper knowledge and skills, this increases their job satisfaction. Additionally, when teachers are prepared, they are more effective in the classroom. The questions provided insight into how teachers prepared to teach in low-income schools. Teachers must possess competence, adaptability, patience, and a strong work ethic to work in low-income schools. The questions are significant to the research because they provided insight into how teachers can create supportive, productive, and safe environments for their students under adverse circumstances. More specifically, a teacher's personal and professional beliefs impact how the teacher implements the curriculum in the classroom and interacts with students. Understanding the participants' personal and professional philosophies can provide insight for educational leaders to work collaboratively with teachers to create successful learning and safe environments for high-needs students.

Questions eleven, twelve, thirteen, and fourteen relate to sub-question three, which examined the influential abilities of teachers in schools. Moreover, these questions assisted in clarifying how teachers can create change in the culture of their schools to encourage greater job satisfaction in low-income schools. The answers provided perception into practical strategies and practices in low-income schools that can encourage policy and curriculum changes that will positively impact all stakeholders. Teachers significantly impact students in low-income schools where students face many adversities. Understanding how teachers use their abilities to create positive change and opportunities for low-income students can provide other educational institutions with information that can make education more effective and equitable for low-income students. Teachers play a vital role in creating and shaping positive educational environments. Educators with high efficacy are role models, and when they model positive behaviors before students, this will create a positive and welcoming school environment. In addition, positive role models in education can lower high absentee rates, bullying, and other adverse behaviors that can negatively impact the school climate. Understanding how teachers influence their school climates can assist educational institutions in recognizing and developing effective policies and practices that will encourage positive school culture. Examining how teachers can influence their schools can inform interventions and new policies that target teacher retention in low-income schools. Moreover, it is essential to sub-question three because teacher retention is a prominent issue in low-income schools. Teachers who have decided to remain in low-income schools can have valuable insight that will contribute to favorable learning outcomes for their students.

Question fifteen allowed the participants to divulge any information pertinent to this study. Additionally, teachers reflected on what they shared during the interview and concluded

with any insightful learning experiences they gleaned from being an educator in high-need schools.

Focus Groups Data Collection Approach

Focus groups are used to explore diverse attitudes, opinions, and characteristics of the research issue while generating new theories (Richard et al., 2021). Furthermore, the focus group included the teachers participating in this study. The focus group session occurred as the last data collection approach for this study, following the individual interviews and observations. The purpose of the focus group was to reflect on the study questions and participants' experiences throughout the research process. The goal of this approach was to understand the experiences of the teachers as a collective and to discover information that may not have been illuminated through individual interviews and observations. After individual interviews, I sent participants emails containing the date and time of the focus group session. Upon the approval of a date and time specified by all participants, the focus group lasted approximately one hour.

Table 2

Focus Group Questions

1. Describe how your philosophy ties into your rationale for returning to this school. SQ1

2. What are your perceptions of low teacher retention in your school, and why do you think this problem exists? SQ1

3. How do you perceive your preparation for teaching in this environment? SQ2

4. What skills are needed to teach in low-income schools, and what skills do you implement? SQ2

5. In what ways do you influence change in students and the classroom? SQ3

6. In what ways do you influence the school climate? SQ3

7. To what extent does your ability to influence contribute to your decision to remain at the school? SQ3

8. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences at low-income schools that we have not discussed? CRQ

Questions relating to the study participants posed to the group will also be noted in this section. The questions l used for the focus group are the same as those from the interview questions. I wanted to see how participants interacted with each other as a collective while answering the questions. I sought to gain insight or discover new perspectives as they emerged from the focus group discussion.

Questions one and two relate to sub-question one, which examined the personal attitudes of the retained secondary teachers. A teacher's personal and professional beliefs impact how the teacher implements the curriculum in the classroom and interacts with students. Understanding the participants' personal and professional philosophies can provide insight for educational leaders to work collaboratively with teachers to create successful learning and safe environments for high-needs students. Moreover, how the teachers perceive adverse circumstances in the school that contribute to teacher attrition will give further insight into why teachers remain in low-income schools. The questions acquired insight into how the school leadership and policymakers address the issue of teacher attrition in low-income schools. It is essential to explore this question because the collaboration between teachers and school leaders is vital for positive change in schools.

Questions three and four relate to sub-question two, which examined teachers' beliefs about their professional competency. When teachers are equipped with the proper knowledge and skills, this increases their job satisfaction. Additionally, when teachers are prepared, they are

more effective in the classroom. These questions provided insight into how teachers prepare to teach in low-income schools. The questions are significant to the research because they provided insight into how teachers can create supportive, productive, and safe environments for their students under adverse circumstances.

Questions five, six, and seven relate to sub-question three, which examined the influential abilities of teachers in schools. Teachers significantly impact students in low-income schools where students face many adversities. Understanding how teachers use their abilities to create positive change and opportunities for low-income students can provide other educational institutions with information that can make education more effective and equitable for low-income students. Teachers play a vital role in creating and shaping positive educational environments. Teachers with high efficacy are role models, and when they model positive behaviors before students, this will create a positive and welcoming school environment. In addition, positive role models in education can lower high absentee rates, bullying, and other adverse behaviors that can negatively impact the school climate. Understanding how teachers influence their school climates can assist educational institutions in recognizing and developing effective policies and practices that will encourage positive school culture. Examining how teachers can influence their schools can inform interventions and new policies that target teacher retention in low-income schools. Teachers who have decided to remain in low-income schools can have valuable insight that will contribute to favorable learning outcomes for their students.

Question eight allowed the participants to divulge any information pertinent to this study. Additionally, teachers reflected on what they shared during the interview and concluded with insightful learning experiences they gleaned from being an educator in high-need schools.

Observation Data Collection Approach

Mulhall (2003) posits that observation data collection entails capturing the social environment where the participants function. Moreover, the researcher maintains that observation is an evolving task contextualizing the research process (Mulhall, 2003). Direct observations and written records were taken of the teachers as they interacted with the students and environments of BRHS. The goal of the observations were to observe the attitudes, behaviors, and environments of teachers in high-needs schools to gain insight into the factors that lead to teacher retention. The observations were scheduled, and as a researcher, I was a non-participant observer. The duration of the observations took place for 30 to 45 minutes of the 90-minute class period. I conducted two observations daily for two teachers until all teachers were observed.

Data Analysis

Data was synthesized using the thematic analysis synthesis. This synthesis approach encompassed identifying recurring themes in the study. The findings of this study were organized and abridged under several thematic headings. The information was arranged according to the most significant recurring themes to the least in the research (Flick et al., 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

According to Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003), the researcher must know the data collected. Next, one focused on understanding and assessing the data by identifying a question or topic from the research. The researchers can also focus their data assessment around the case, individuals, or group. Following the data assessment, one organized the data into categories based on themes or motifs or logical categories that summarized the interpretation of the text. After organizing the data into categories, one recognized patterns and the interdependence of

ideas between the categories. To end the data analysis, I interpreted the data (Renner &

Taylor-Powell, 2003).

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

According to Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003), the researcher must know the data

collected. Next, I focused on understanding and assessing the data by identifying a question or

topic from the research; I also focused my assessment of the data around the case, individuals, or

group (Renner & Taylor-Powell, 2003). Following the assessment of the data, one organized the

data into categories based on themes or motifs or logical categories that summarized the

interpretation of the text (Renner & Taylor-Powell, 2003). After organizing the data into

categories, one recognized patterns and the interdependence of ideas between the categories

(Renner & Taylor-Powell, 2003). To end the data analysis, one interpreted the data (Renner &

Taylor-Powell, 2003).

Observations Data Analysis Plan

Observational data was collected and gathered while observing the classes of the

participants of this study. The first part of this analysis plan encompassed organizing the notes

from my observations and any supplementary documents. This ensured that all the material was

sorted and arranged in the order it was collected, and it ensured that materials did not go missing.

Next, I examined and surveyed the data collected to consume and comprehend what the data was

saying. While surveying my observations, I made additional notes of any thoughts, questions, or

concepts that were derived from my examination of the notes. Thirdly, I created the primary

codes to categorize the observational notes. I used my marginal notes and highlighters to connect

the concepts presented through the observations. In order to begin the coding process, I looked

for keywords and phrases and made marginal notes to organize the data. Moreover, I reviewed

the information that was coded and comprised the organized material into recurring themes, opinions, speech, and philosophies. The final part of analyzing my observations was to report my findings coherently, by focusing on the audience, the aim of the study, and the content that was essential to understanding the experiences of the participants (Flick et al., 2014).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness plays an essential role in the meticulousness of the research conducted (Connelly, 2016). Creswell and Poth (2018) posited that ethical issues in research encompass three principles, with the first one requiring respect for participants by ensuring that all information is disclosed to the participants so they can provide informed consent. This is to avoid deception with any misleading or withholding of information. The second principle is concerned with the welfare of the participants, minimizing harm and ensuring that the stakeholders' identities are protected and anonymous. The third one is concerned with justice and guaranteeing that participants are treated fairly, and that the information collected and shared is the truth. All of these measures ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the accuracy and integrity of the study. Furthermore, credibility is the difference between how the participants perceive social experiences and how researchers report the participants' perspectives (Collier-Reed, Ingerman, & Bergland, 2009). The concept of credibility in qualitative questions whether the research was conducted authentically, according to its phenomenological design (Connelly, 2016). To ensure the study's credibility as phenomenology, I conducted extensive research through diligent observations daily. I also regularly used the data to discover new trends or themes and compare results to similar studies. Lastly, I checked in with participants regularly to ensure that the data is not being misconstrued.

Transferability

The transferability of a study encompasses the applicability of the research findings to similar environments and populations (Collier-Reed, Ingerman, & Bergland, 2009). The transferability of the study relies on the accuracy and feasibility of the research design and its findings and the ability of the aspirant to apply those findings to their situations (Collier-Reed, Ingerman, & Bergland, 2009). To increase the transferability of this study, I sought to thoroughly contextualize this study through my observational notes by providing vivid descriptions of the environment, the participants, and any situation relevant to this study. I also provided enough information and evidence from the study so that other high-needs schools can use any practical outcomes derived from the data.

Dependability

In qualitative research, dependability refers to the consistency of the data over time and place (Connelly, 2016). The participants' experiences in a phenomenological study will vary based on the subjective nature of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To increase the dependability of this study, I started with how I collected and coded data and provided contextualization and analysis for all of the data presented. I also anticipated outcomes associated with this particular phenomenon and search for phenomenological studies of the same nature to support my assumptions (Collier-Reed, Ingerman, & Bergland, 2009).

Confirmability

The confirmability of qualitative research refers to the degree of equilibrium and objectivity of the findings (Connelly, 2016). I kept a detailed account of all the decisions and analyses made while conducting research. Furthermore, to increase the confirmability of this

study, participants were allowed to check and confirm the accuracy of the data collected and disseminated in this study during different phases of the data collection process to ensure that their intentions and words are not being misinterpreted (Collier-Reed, Ingerman, & Bergland, 2009). Lastly, if necessary, I would have an experienced qualitative researcher debrief my findings with me throughout the research to ensure that my findings are free from bias (Connelly, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical concerns of anonymity and confidentiality may be an issue being that research will be conducted research in a rural community. Pseudonyms were used to replace any confidential information that may breach the anonymity and confidentiality of the study participants. Additionally, ethical concerns about the communication of the results may occur. To ensure the accuracy and truthfulness of the information disseminated, participants reviewed and confirmed the information reported to increase the confirmability of the study. Every measure was taken to ensure this study's trustworthiness and its participants' confidentiality (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Permissions

An initial part of this research requires permission from the International Review Board (IRB) for Liberty University (see Appendix A). Once the IRB approved this study, I obtained written permission to conduct the study at BRHS the school's principal. Subsequently, letters explaining the nature of the research and consent forms were sent to the participants' emails. Teachers' names were pseudonyms, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the duration of the study.

Other Participant Protections

Participants received a letter via email concerning the nature of this study. The participants knew in advance that their participation was strictly voluntary, and they reserved the right to withdraw at any point throughout the process. In addition, I informed participants that minimal risks are involved with this study, which are equal to risks they may encounter in everyday life. As a mandatory reporter, participants were informed in advance that if they divulge information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm themselves or others, I am required to report this information to the appropriate authorities. All records were kept private and stored securely, and I will only have access to the records. All participant responses were kept anonymous, and their names were changed to pseudonyms for the purpose of research. Interviews were conducted in discrete locations where individuals' abilities to hear the conversation were minimized; however, confidentiality could not be guaranteed in a focus group setting, although it was encouraged. The data collected was stored on a password-locked computer. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted, and hard copies shredded. Recordings will also be deleted after five years. Members of the dissertation committee may have access to data; however, participants' identities will remain anonymous.

Summary

A phenomenological approach was used to assess the lived experiences of rural, secondary English teachers and retention in low-income schools. Data was collected through individual interviews, direct observations, and focus groups. The data collected was studied and categorized into recurrent themes. The findings from the research was summarized under each thematic category according to their significance.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study aimed to understand the experiences related to retention for secondary teachers at a high-needs school in the Black River School District, located in the rural Southeastern region of the United States. Chapter Four presents the results of the data analysis as findings. This chapter will include descriptions of the participants, the data presented by theme, narrative themes, tables, outlier data, and research question responses. Through in-depth and meticulous data collection and analysis, the following themes emerged: Positive School Climate, Meaning & Purpose, and Disadvantages of Working in Low-Income Schools. Two subthemes were derived from each theme.

Participants

This phenomenological study involved 15 secondary teachers from a high school in the Pee Dee region of South Carolina. The school is considered a low-income public school where 50-75% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch programs (NCES, 2022). There were 11 female and four male participants, aged 25-72. Every teacher involved in the study is considered highly qualified and holds professional licensure. The minimum and maximum teaching experience among participants in this study ranged from three to 40 years. The data collected in this study is invaluable as most participants are experienced, veteran teachers who have been in education for more than 15 years. A conglomeration of teachers from various subject areas, such as Math, English, Science, Social Studies, and Computer Science, participated in this study. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the confidentiality of participants and locations. Table 1 illustrates the demographics of the participants in this research process.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Teacher Participant	# of Years Teaching	Content Area	Degree Earned	Reason for remaining in the BRHS
Jane	31	English	Master's +30	Love for the students
Lisa	37	Social Studies	Master's + 30	Love for students
Kyra	12	English	Master's	School culture
Joe	8	Math	Bachelor's	Love for the students
Jessica	22	Social Studies	Master's +30	Community and culture
Lucille	28	Computer Science	Doctorate	Community and culture
Claudia	36	Math	Master's	Love for the students
Lenore	36	English	Master's	Love for the students
Adrian	21	Computer Science	Master's +30	Community and culture
Harley	5	Science	Master's	Love for the students
Gabrielle	9	Social Studies	Master's	Community and culture
Maggie	40	English	Master's +30	wants to make a difference
Ryan	32	English	Master's	Love for the students
Hunter	3	English	Bachelor's	wants to make a difference
Teagan	16	Math	Master's	Love for the students

Jane

Jane began her teaching career 31 years ago in Michigan after receiving her master's

degree in education from a university in Michigan. Jane taught at a charter school serving gifted

students in a high-needs area for eight years until she returned to her hometown. Reflecting on her upbringing and connection to her community, she felt a call to return to the high school from which she graduated. After 23 years of teaching at Black River High, Jane attributes her desire to remain at the school to her love for the students. Jane asserts, "I take pride in being a teacher; I never desired to do anything other than teach… In the classroom, I can push students to their full potential through the lessons I create, which are centered around topics in popular culture. I love being able to meet students where they are, giving them autonomy in learning… Seeing them actively engaged and creating community in my classroom keeps me motivated as a teacher."

Lisa

Lisa began her teaching career 37 years ago in another small town adjacent to the Black River community. After retiring nearly five years ago due to her husband's illness, Lisa returned to the classroom in 2023. Lisa recalls growing up in a large family in poverty, and this experience caused her to feel a connection to the students of Black River High. Moreover, she attributes her decision to remain in a low-income school to the students. Lisa maintained, "I come back each year for the students. It's nothing more or less than that. I have created a community in my classroom that trumps everything else. Throughout my career at this school, the leadership has been poor and we tend to get people who are not experienced or people who treat staff as the students, but it is the fact that my students love seeing me and I want to see them grow and flourish. This is what keeps me coming back."

Kyra

Kyra started as a historian for museums and national parks until her mother became ill, and she had to assist with caretaking and the family business. She applied for a teaching position with Black River High School because her college coursework qualified her for the position.

Kyra has been in education for twelve years and states, "Teaching found me." She attributes her decision to remain at the school to its culture. Kyra maintained a strong sense of community in the school, as she grew up in the area and is acquainted with many families. Despite the leadership, which she feels fails to connect with the community and culture of the school, Kyra feels that there is a strong familial connection among the students, staff, and community.

Joe

Joe started as a psychology major and worked in the corporate sector for a few years before attending graduate school. He ruminated on the route he wanted to take in his career and decided to pursue a master's degree in education and teaching licensure. Joe has been in education for eight years and attributes his decision to remain at the school to his love for the students. Joe asserted, "I enjoy connecting with my students in the classroom, and I connect with them through culturally responsive teaching. My students are more engaged when they see themselves in the learning environment. Growing up in poverty and graduating from a high school with a similar demographic has inspired me to support the students at my school. I can see myself in them, and I aim to remind them that where they are now isn't where they have to be in the future. I am a living example of this."

Jessica

Jessica began her career as a teacher 22 years ago as a teacher's assistant before she decided to go back to college to acquire her Master's and licensure. She is now serving as a social studies teacher, and she decided to teach at Black River High because she graduated from the school and has a solid connection to the community. Jessica expounded on her decision to stay at the school, maintaining, "I graduated from college and I never thought that I would end up back at the school I graduated. After getting married and working as a teacher's aide at the

school, I started to make relationships with the students and their families. I was inspired to get my teacher's certification to make more of an impact on the students. We are all from the same community, and every day I go to school hoping to inspire my students and have a positive impact on the community as a whole."

Lucille

Lucy has been in education for 28 years and holds a Doctoral degree in Education. For the latter part of the 28 years, Lucy served as an assistant principal and then retired early. She decided to return to education and serve in the classroom. Her desire to remain in the school is attributed to her love of the community and her connections with her students. Lucy maintained, "With the students, there is no politics. I can be myself with them, and I created a space for them to be themselves. Working in administration was rewarding but it was also highly stressful, and I learned that I could make more of a difference in the classroom. Many students in our community need love, and when we show them love, they will move mountains for us."

Claudia

Claudia has been in education for 36 years and has been teaching at Black River High for the last 15 years. Surrounded by educators in her family, Claudia felt it was her calling to continue her family's legacy in education. The Black River area is also her home, and she decided to teach at the Black River High School to guide the young people in her community and shape them for the future to make a difference. Claudia ascribes her decision to remain in the Black River High School to her love for the students. Claudia asserted, "I come back because I want to be here for my children. They love to know that someone is in their corner. At this school, we have veteran teachers who are dedicated because we have a dedication to our community and the children… but the children have seen their fair share of new teachers who

come and go, and it can be really hard for them to process. I try to be the teacher that they can count on to be there the next time they return to school."

Lenore

Lenore has been in education for 36 years and has taught at Black River High for 21 of those years. She expounded that the first 15 years of her career were spent in California, because her husband was in the military. It was after her husband retired that they returned to their hometown and she began her career at Black River High. Lenore ascribes her decision to remain at Black River High School to her love for the students. Lenore maintained, "I don't really think about leadership; If I had to stay at the school for them, I would be gone… I've been in education long enough to know that leadership comes and goes, but I've been in it for so long because of my students. It is amazing to see them from middle school up until graduation and I am happy to see their transformation. That is what keeps me here. I love supporting my children."

Adrian

Adrian has been in education for 21 years and was hired at BRHS for a coaching position. For eight years and counting, he has been the coach and one of the computer science teachers at the school. Adrian is beloved in the school and among the students, and the relationship is reciprocal. He ascribed his decision to remain in the school to the relationships he has established with the community, the students, and the school's culture. Adrian asserted, "My love for coaching brought me here initially, and starting out, I didn't know how long I would be here. Offers have been made to me, but I feel such a strong connection to the community. At the games, I am able to meet many families and people in the community. Many doors have been opened in my life because I decided to stay here and make a difference. I also like that even

though we are such a small school, we are like one big family. I don't see myself moving any time soon."

Harley

Harley began her career at BRHS five years ago, and she disclosed that she is currently invested for the long haul. Harley expressed that she graduated from BRHS, and veteran teachers like Claudia and Lucille encouraged her to pursue a career in education. She grew up in the community, and after years of observing high turnover rates in the school and low student achievement, Harley decided to return to her home school in hopes of pursuing a future career in Educational Leadership to make a change in the district. Harley asserted, "It is mainly my love for my students that keeps me driven. I have been where they are; I grew up in this town and when this is all you are surrounded by, the future prospects can look bleak. When I was in high school, it was teachers like Ms. Lucille and Ms. Claudia who treated me like I was their child and made me feel like I could do anything. I reflect on those experiences, and I endeavor to be there for my students in the way that I was supported by those veteran teachers when I was a teen."

Gabrielle

Gabrielle has been in education and at BRHS for nine years and endeavors to remain at the school for years to come. She relocated from New York to the Black River area to live with relatives after college. Gabrielle loves the school and community culture, asserting, "I love being a part of the high school and the Black River community because everybody supports one another. I have decided to remain at the school because even though we don't have a lot of resources and money, we have a community of love. This is a close-knit community, and everybody knows each other. Outside of school, I can see students and parents anywhere, and I

love that I am able to influence wherever I am. Over the years, I have gained much respect just from being out in the community."

Maggie

Maggie is the oldest participant in the study and has been in education for 40 years. She is also one of the only teachers at the school for over 30 years. Throughout her career, Maggie has served in many different educational capacities, such as assistant principal, instructional coach, cheerleading coach, senior class advisor, and student government advisor, among many other roles. Many of the students revere Maggie, and they hold her in high regard. When asked what factors led to her retention at BRHS, she stated, "I just wanted to make a difference. I didn't start off as a teacher. I worked for our town's government before deciding to go to school for education. I saw that our young people needed guidance in this community, and many of them were being led astray. I felt led to work in the school. I believe that teachers have a lot of influence over the young people. We have the ability to empower them, and I have seen this blossom throughout my career. So many young people have graduated from Black River High School, from this small town, and they are doing great things. Just recently, a young man who graduated several years ago made it to the NFL. Our children are just as capable as anyone else, and I am here to push them to be the best they can be."

Ryan

Ryan has been in education for 32 years and has been employed at the Black River High School for over 20 years. He holds a master's in education and is licensed in English and school leadership. Ryan was a principal for nearly ten years before returning to the classroom. He is currently a pastor and decided that his role as pastor conflicted with his school leadership position, leading to his decision to go back to classroom teaching; however, Ryan does serve as a

behavior interventionist in addition to his role as a teacher. Ryan ascribed his decision to remain at the BRHS to his position as a pastor in the community and his love for the students. Ryan maintained, "As a pastor and teacher, there is a duality to my role in the students' lives. Many of the students are members of my church or have relatives, and most of the children have been to my church. I don't take my job lightly. I try to exemplify the behavior I want the children to exemplify. The school leadership and district do not factor into my decision to stay. I stay because the kids need adults like me who are not only Godly but adults who can give them sound guidance that will help them in life."

Hunter

Hunter has been teaching and employed at the BRHS for three years and counting. Hunter aspires to become a school leader in the future. As a relatively new teacher, Hunter said that BRHS is shaping him and equipping him with everything he needs as a teacher. When asked what factors led to his retention at the school, Hunter asserted that "If you can teach or work at BRHS, you can teach anywhere. We don't have all of the resources in the world, but I can relate to the students here. We have a lot of fun in addition to learning. I can also have those deep conversations with them that I would not be able to have elsewhere because the majority of the students look like me. Every day, I am inspired to make a difference in the students' lives. Many students are inspired by how I carry myself being a young teacher, but I dress well every day so that they can see what it looks like to take pride in one's appearance. Appearance is not the only thing in life but it is also your attitude. I try to teach my students life lessons that they will need to make it in life. Just being able to have an impact inspires me to keep pushing them."

Teaghan

Teaghan has been in education for 16 years. She spent the last nine years of her career at BRHS. Teaghan moved to the area after several life changes, but she found her place at Black River High School. Teaghan attributes her desire to remain at the school to her love for the students. Teaghan maintained, "I am not a fan of the leadership we have had at Black River High for the past four years, but outside of that, it feels like family here, and I especially love my students. Sometimes, the school leaders are out of touch with the school's culture and forget they are dealing with professionals and adults. What keeps me going is what I am able to do in my classroom. I am all about the social and emotional learning of students. Our students must know who they are and trust us before they are open to learning, so I try to create a culture of relationships and collaboration before we learn. I wake up every morning and go to work to be there for my kids."

Results

This section discusses the three prevalent themes that emerged from the research. Sub-themes were derived from each theme. Through in-depth interviews, anecdotal notes taken from observations, and the focus group, the coding process revealed the primary data for this study. Direct quotations from the study participants will illustrate the perceptions and experiences of teachers retained in low-income schools. Table two categorizes and illustrates the themes, subthemes, and related research questions.

Table 4

Themes, Subthemes, and Research Questions

Themes	Subthemes	Related Research Questions
Positive School Climate		CRQ, SQ1, SQ2, SQ3
	Classroom Communities	CRQ, SQ1, SQ2
	Interpersonal relationships	CRQ, SQ1, SQ2
Meaning and Purpose		CRQ, SQ1, SQ2, SQ3
	Making an Impact	CRQ, SQ2, SQ3
	Culturally Responsive Teaching	CRQ, SQ2, SQ3
Disadvantages of working in Low-income schools		CRQ, SQ1, SQ2, SQ3
	Poor Leadership	CRQ, SQ2, SQ3
	Lack of Resources	CRQ, SQ2, SQ3

Positive School Climate

A positive school climate partly contributes to the job satisfaction teacher participants experience at Black River High. When asked about their perception of the school, the leadership, and the students, the participants remarked how the general feeling of community and the longstanding relationships established between them and their colleagues or between them and the students or their families play a vital role in their desire to remain at the school. The individual interviews, anecdotal observation notes, and focus groups illustrate that classroom communities and interpersonal relationships are significant factors in the participants' decision to remain at BRHS. Each participant discussed how they influence change in the school through their strong classroom communities. They also discussed the role of other teachers, the

relationships with the students, the relationships in the communities, and how they create a sense of belonging at BRHS. Table 3 reveals the theme, the subthemes, the number of times coded, and the number of participants.

Table 5

Theme One Data

Theme	Subtheme	Number of times Coded	Number of Participants
Positive School Climate		67	15
	Classroom Communities	22	12
	Interpersonal Relationships	47	13

All participants made positive remarks about the positive school climate. Because the surrounding community of the school of research is such a close-knit community, one found that the participants are interconnected in many ways that extend beyond the school. Moreover, this familiarity creates a familial atmosphere in the school. When asked about their perceptions of the school, the leadership, the students, and their ability to influence the school climate, each participant referenced how vital relationships are to their retention. Maggie asserted:

> I have been at this school for 40 years, and I have seen people come and go, including
>
> principals and leadership, but the relationships I have with my students are what keeps
>
> me here. I have stayed all these years for my children. I have had the privilege of
>
> teaching my former students' children and grandchildren from the time I have been here.
>
> These are generations of family members that I was able to help through my career. This

is what is important to me. In order to teach and do your job effectively, you must get to

know people.

A positive school climate can create greater job satisfaction, giving stakeholders the feeling of

belonging. During the focus group, Adrian, Teaghan, and Lenore expressed that as outsiders in

the community, they felt an immediate sense of acceptance and warmth from their colleagues,

the students, and the surrounding community, contributing to their connection to the school and

retention. Adrian expounded:

> I didn't know how long I was going to stay at this school, but here I am 8 years later at
>
> Black River High School. From the time I was employed here, people welcomed me with
>
> open arms. It didn't matter where I went: the grocery store, the post office, or the church,
>
> someone would walk up to me and tell me that they were happy that I was here making a
>
> difference with my boys in the team. People never realize how much their words of
>
> kindness and encouragement can motivate someone. Over the years, I became invested in
>
> making a difference in the lives of my students and my boys because they need people
>
> like us to be there for them. These kids have so much to offer and they need us to push
>
> them to their full potential. One of my boys just got drafted in the NFL last year. Do you
>
> know what that means for me? It just makes me want to push them even harder. A
>
> forgotten rural community like this can produce greatness.

> The theme of a positive school climate is evident in one's anecdotal notes. According to

the notes, the data reveals how friendly the stakeholders are in the school. One observed how

colleagues referred to each other on a first-name basis, and there was an incident in the

classroom where the participant called out a student's parent's phone number, which indicated

that the teacher and the student's parents were well acquainted. Essentially, one senses the closeness of the stakeholders in the school.

Classroom Communities

When asked about the opportunities for influence in the school environment, most teacher participants explained that they start in their classrooms, building a sense of community among their students. Kyra maintained, "It is almost impossible to teach students without getting to know them first. Before I get to talking about rules or curriculum, it is a must to establish community in my classroom at the beginning of the year." Another participant elaborated, "We spend the first 15 minutes of class talking about life… My students enjoy talking about their experiences and they especially appreciate the fact that I am interested in hearing from them before we do anything," Adrian expounded. This influence over the students plays a pivotal role in the participants' desire to remain in the school, and it keeps the participants invested in seeing the outcome of student achievement through the positive relationships they have built with them. Claudia explained that her ability to influence her students far exceed any desire to influence in the school as a whole because the relationships she have established goes beyond the classroom. "I have been teaching for 36 years, and most of the children that I have taught are doing great things in our community and in their lives. I can see many of the students I taught over the years out in the community, and they never tell me that they remember a top tier lesson I taught…It is those life lessons and learning moments that we had in class that touch their lives." A *classroom community* can be defined as a learning community where students can lead and share their input or concerns regarding decisions made in the classroom. A classroom community promotes collaboration and establishes trust between students and teachers. It creates a sense of belonging for the students. During an interview, Lisa explained that:

One of the pitfalls of being in low-income schools is that turnover among teachers and

school administrators is inevitable. With that being said, we often get the leaders who are

not as effective and the ones who don't have good leadership skills. They don't allow the

teachers to have a voice. They ignore the fact that many of us have been here for years

and can really improve their relations with our community. Many of them have agendas

for the school that don't go as planned because they did not establish a relationship with

the students and staff. What we try to do as teachers in this situation is establish those

bonds in our classrooms. This is how I have been able to influence the culture of the

school. Our school's culture is based on relationships. As you can see, we know each

other in one way or another outside of the school.

Interpersonal Relationships

Strong interpersonal relationships have been established among the teachers, the students,

and the community. As mentioned above, the relationships have determined why most

participants are still at Black River High School. In most low-income schools, the teachers are at

a disadvantage because they are unable to establish relationships with students and their families

due to the adverse circumstances that are often associated with students living in poverty;

however, at the Black River High School, the parents and community are involved with their

student's academic and overall well-being—one observed parent-volunteers in the classrooms as

well as at after school extracurricular activities or events. One also found that many teachers are

related to each other or students in the school, attend the same church, or run in the same social

circles outside school. Solid interpersonal relationships are the foundation of BRHS. During the

focus group, Ryan stated:

As a pastor in the community, I have had the opportunity to see many of my students and

their families outside of the school. I have baptized some of these kids, I have eulogized some of their loved ones, as well as married some of their loved ones, I have counseled many families and individuals in the community, so I feel a strong bond and responsibility to the students of Black River High. These relationships outside of the classroom enables me to be influential in my job here at the school.

Interpersonal relationships at BRHS play a vital role in the school's culture, enabling teachers to build a rapport with students and families in the community, build social and emotional skills with students, and create a professional community of collaboration in the school. When asked how they influenced change in students and the classroom, Claudia explained:

Before you can teach a child anything, they must trust you. Relationships with students are important for a teacher. I've been in the classroom for a long time and trust me, they will not listen to you if they don't know who you are and if they don't trust you. At this point in my career, I have mastered relationship building strategies, and in my classroom, we are family. My students know that they can talk to me about anything. I have been at Black River for so long to be a support to my children. I see them not as my students but they are like my very own children. Parents are sending us their best, and I try to build on what they bring to my classroom to make them better by the time they leave.

During the focus groups, most participants spoke about how their ability to collaborate with other teachers and establish long-standing relationships have also factored into their decision to remain at Black River High. Claudia and Lenore have been at BRHS for 36 years, and they disclosed that they made a pact that they would follow each other wherever they went, but they decided to remain at BRHS because of the school's familial culture.

Meaning & Purpose

The teachers have come to the consensus that they have been called to teach to shape the lives of their students. They see the importance of their role in aiding the development of soft skills and knowledge their students need to succeed in life. When asked about the extent to which their ability to influence contributes to their decision to remain in the school, most teachers attributed this influence to their purpose in being a teacher. That purpose is influencing positive change in the lives of their students. Seeing their students grow and achieve from middle school to high school to adulthood brings satisfaction knowing that they played a role in making that happen. From the interviews, focus group, and direct observations, two sub themes developed: Making and Impact and Culturally Responsive Teaching. Table 4 reveals the theme, the subthemes, the number of times coded, and the number of participants.

Table 6

Theme Two Data

Theme	Subtheme	Number of times Coded	Number of Participants
Meaning and Purpose		102	15
	Making an Impact	25	11
	Culturally Responsive Teaching	16	9

During the focus group, most participants perceived it as their duty to come back to their hometown to make a difference. Gabrielle, Kyra, Teaghan, and Adrian discussed how many people leave and never look back at where they come from, but they see the importance of bringing those skills that they learn and develop in college back to the community to make it better. Jane explained:

I am a product of this community, and after living out of state, I felt called to come back

home to make a difference in my community. This is one of the poorest counties in the
state, and oftentimes, these rural towns are overlooked. I am proud to say that we produce
some of the greatest citizens of all time. We have produced doctors, lawyers,
engineers…we even have an architect who is doing his thing and living abroad. We have
had a student win Sunday's Best… We had one who made it to the NFL. I am proud to
say that I taught these kids, and I played a role in shaping who they are today.

In addition, several teachers in the focus group said that they want to give back to their
community in hopes of creating a better future for future generations. Lucy stated, "With all of
the success stories we have in this community, we need to plan a community summit with
workshops led by the people who have made it to inspire our students that they have the ability
to be great despite where they are."

Making an Impact

Each participant agreed that they want to make an impact in their community and in the
lives of the students. Jane explained, "Most of us are not just here to make a living as a teacher at
this school, most of us are residents of this community and graduates of this school. We see it as
our responsibility to have a positive influence on the youth of our community because our lives
depend on it. If we want to see this community flourish, we have to inspire the children to get out
and be the best they can be for the wellbeing our community." As mentioned above, positive
relationships are vital for most participants and their students. Creating opportunities in the
classroom to develop soft skills like critical thinking and problem-solving skills is vital for most
teachers in the study. Ryan explained, "School is not all about learning reading, math, science,
and history. Some of these kids don't have the guidance they need at home, and many of them
are lacking life skills that are needed to function in society. As a teacher and spiritual leader, I

have to stand in the gap. Many of our kids are being raised by their cell phones and they are

missing out on life. We have to prepare them for life, because life is real and serious." Most

importantly, being a positive role model is essential for teachers who want to make an impact. In

an interview, Hunter explained:

> I grew up in the town next door and I never thought I would be teaching at my rival
>
> school; It's no big deal because I have family in this area and can relate to the students a
>
> lot. I am a young teacher and I decided to teach because our schools need more African
>
> American male role models. I make it my mission to be the best me I can be. I show up
>
> everyday dressed with a shirt and tie and some dress slacks… sometimes I throw on the
>
> suit jacket, but I do it because I want them to see that they can be cool and dress for
>
> success. I started the Gentlemen in Bow-ties group on our campus, and we designate
>
> Thursdays for the boys to wear their dress shirts, bow-ties, and dress slacks. Many
>
> teachers have expressed the changes they are seeing in some of the student's behavior as
>
> a result of the program. This reassures me that I am on the right path.

Teachers agreed that modeling professionalism, ethics, and lifelong learning inspires students to

develop the same behaviors.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Most teachers agree that culturally responsive teaching methods have been advantageous

in their classrooms. Culturally responsive teaching methods are strategies that recognize the

students' experiences, values, cultures, and perspectives. In one's observations, the classrooms

were all warm and welcoming with pictures of students on the walls, or posters with their

favorite celebrities and inspirational quotes. Other teachers began their class periods with

bell-ringers that allowed students to respond to self-reflective prompts, and they were

encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings. Another teacher ended the class with TikTok video of the day, and the video would somehow tie into the essence of the lesson that day. Essentially, these techniques had students engaged and invested in their learning from one's observations. Moreover, most of the teachers agreed that these teaching strategies gave their lessons more purpose, creating job satisfaction and feelings of empowerment. During the focus group Harley explained:

> When I began teaching in the district, I was pleased to see that social justice learning and culturally relevant pedagogy was being pushed here. Many students are disenfranchised and learning opportunities are missed because of the teacher's failure to incorporate strategies that promote understanding of the diversity of their students. This is how relationships are established. My students are excited to know that someone cares what they think and what they have to say. They are excited about sharing their personal experiences as they relate to topics we discuss in class. I use the knowledge they bring to the table and my goal is to cultivate and increase their understanding by the end of class. I love working at this school because we have had the flexibility to try different approaches and strategies in the classroom without pushback.

Most of the teachers agree that culturally responsive teaching methods are essential for influencing change in students and the classroom. Maggie reiterated, "All children can learn, despite where they are from. We may not have many resources, but we have skills that can get them where they need to be." This is evidenced by their approaches in the classroom as outlined above.

Disadvantages of Working in Low-income Schools

There are many pitfalls associated with working in low-income schools. As teacher

participants highlighted earlier, teacher and school leader turnover rates are high yearly. The school buildings, books, and other resources may also need to be updated. Teachers are faced with overcrowded classrooms, in addition to many other issues. The issues are evident in one's observations, anecdotal notes, interviews, and focus group responses. When asked to describe the challenges of working in high-need schools, poor school leadership and the lack of resources were the recurring subthemes that emerged as one conducted research. Table 5 reveals the theme, the subthemes, the number of times coded, and the number of participants.

Table 7

Theme Three Data

Theme	Subtheme	Number of times Coded	Number of Participants
Disadvantages of Working in Low-income Schools		113	15
	Poor School Leadership	61	13
	Lack of Resources	84	15

Poor School Leadership

School leadership plays a vital role in low-income schools. Effective school leaders can influence positive school climates, provide resources, and support teachers and student achievement. Consequently, poor school leadership can contribute to high teacher absenteeism and turn-over rates through their lack of support for teachers, causing low student achievement in the school. When asked about their perceptions of leadership in low-income schools, most participants recounted negative experiences. The main complaint among the majority of the teachers were the lack of support. Maggie explained:

I have seen many principals come and go. In my experience, the longest time I've seen a principal stay here is 7 years. Since that particular time, they will stay here on average for 3-4 years, but we have to ask ourselves why they can't stay here. I can tell you why… A lot of them come here thinking that they can come in and change things without forming relationships with the staff and the community. Many principals have been condescending and have shown a lack of respect for the traditions that were special to our school. One principal removed the hall of fame we had in front of the old gym that displayed achievements made by the school and replaced it with a wall and mural with the school's mascot. She did not consult the community nor staff members about this decision. Needless to say, she did not stay here long because people did not respect her. What I'm saying is that you have show respect for people in order to receive respect from people.

Another participant recounted when a student threatened her, and the administrator failed to remove the student from her class. Jessica explained:

A student not only threatened to put their hands on me, but they caused a huge disruption in my class with rambunctious behavior. I reported this to an assistant principal. I was told that the most they could do was give the student 3 to 5 days of out of school suspension. This was unacceptable so I had to go to the district office to report the incident. I used some of my sick days because I told them that I refused to teach a student who threatened to put their hands on me. The student was also bragging about what they had done and nothing was being done about it. A few days later, the student was suspended and were facing a board hearing, and they placed that student in Alternative School, but the assistant principal was upset that I went above her. She started targeting

my class and micromanaging everything I did to retaliate against me. I ended up

documenting and reporting this to human resources.

Another teacher spoke about how the principal would use their instructional coaches as spies in

the classroom. Joe explained that he was at the school for two years around this time,

She would keep sending the instructional coach in my class. I'm talking about every class

period, every day, the coach would come in to observe me. They always told me what I

was doing wrong, but never offered any practical feedback that I could use to improve

my instruction. Later on, the principal would call me in for any incident the coach

reported to her. I felt like I was being harassed.

Essentially, the teachers disclosed that the lack of support and the school leadership's inability to

relate to or connect with stakeholders in the school and community hinder progress in

low-income communities.

Lack of Resources

Another challenge in low-income schools that the teachers expounded on was the need

for more resources. The lack of resources is palpable in low-income schools and can encompass

many things, like a lack of learning materials such as books or technology, teachers and staff, or

funding. Moreover, low-income schools may need more funding to offer extracurricular

activities that can supplement students' academic, social, and emotional needs. As a result,

students in low-income schools are achieving at a lower rate than their affluent counterparts. The

lack of resources can adversely affect the teachers, and many participants recounted how they

were affected. Joe expounded:

When I completed my program, I was used to being at schools that were 1:1 and students

having access to individual Chrome books. When I arrived at BRHS, I felt like I stepped

into a time capsule because my classroom did not have a smartboard, and the only way I

could project my lesson was with a projector that I had to prop on top of books so

students could see. Before COVID-19, we had to share the Chrome book carts, and we

would have to sign up to use them. It was not guaranteed that the class would have access

to them, so most of the student work was done on paper prior to us receiving funding

back in 2020.

Some participants also spoke at length about spending their personal money to support student

learning or extracurricular activities. Lenore recounted the time she and some other teachers

funded the middle school prom years prior. Lenore explained:

We started the middle school proms around 2005, and there was never an issue funding

the proms until this particular school year. The principal at the time told us that there was

no money in the budget that year to have the prom, so I went into the community and got

donations from local businesses and parents. We also had a local event decorator to

donate decorations for the prom. I asked a relative who has a photography business if he

would be interested in rendering his services and he was happy to help me. Some of the

other teachers and myself got together and we purchased the refreshments for the prom.

Everything came together, but it's very telling of the circumstances we face daily.

Jane, Lisa, and Claudia spoke on how outdated books and technology can contribute to job

dissatisfaction, making it challenging to use differentiation strategies in their classrooms.

Ultimately, teachers need more resources to provide the quality of instruction they desire;

Otherwise, a continuation of dissatisfaction can contribute to teacher burnout.

Research Question Responses

This section offers answers to the research questions that framed this study. This section

will provide short and direct narrative answers to each research question using the themes developed in the previous section. The answers are directly derived from the interviews and focus groups with participants.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of retained teachers in high-need schools? The participants believe that working in high-needs schools can be rewarding and challenging. During the focus group, several teachers discussed how they fell in love with the school's culture and climate. Harley explained, "I haven't been teaching that long and this is my very first school, but what connected me to this school was the culture. I love how friendly everyone is and how they make you feel like family here. I love how I can grow as a new teacher because I am free to explore curriculum options as a teacher. Most importantly, I love how this school does homecoming…To see all of the alumni, the tailgating, the cars lined up along the sides of the streets, the grills going, the band, the parade, Oh my God… it reminds me of a mini HBCU, but I love to see it and look forward to it each year." Some teachers discussed the pitfalls of working in low-income schools and disclosed how the lack of support of school leaders and the lack of resources can be discouraging. Lenore explained, "Even though the culture of our school is top tier…We have had our share of bad principals and leaders in the district as a whole. Most of the principals who come here just see a small rural school, and I hate to say this, but they tend to look down on the people in rural towns and they think we are ignorant and unlearned. So, many of them come here and they make decisions that go against the values of the people of the community, and it never turns out good for them or anyone…" Despite the unique challenges they face, the teachers have a deep sense of commitment to the students due to the positive relationships that have been established and the meaning and purpose the participants receive from pouring into their

students. When asked to expound on their experiences in a low-income school, Kyra stated, "The main issues of working here stems from insufficient resources, but over the years I have learned how to find ways to engage my students with the resources I have… sometimes I use my personal resources. The point I'm making is, my students are worth it. I may not have much control over what happens outside of my classroom, but we are like family in my classroom. The students have a great level of respect for me and even beyond the school and outside of the classroom….I know that I have impacted them in some way because they remind me every time they see me." Ultimately, the reward of working at BRHS stems from the positive school climate and relationships that have been established, and these interactions enhance meaning and purpose for the teachers who have dedicated their lives to the school.

Sub-Question One

What are the attitudes of retained secondary teachers in high-need schools? Eleven out of the 15 participants have been teaching at BRHS for over a decade. Three of the 15 participants have been at BRHS for over two decades. As one of the participants who have been at BRHS for over 20 years, Lisa explained, "What keeps me here are my students. I don't worry about what goes on outside of my classroom. As long as the students within my classroom understand my rules and expectations and as long as we have an understanding, I know I can be effective. Many of these children look at us as parents and I show up for them each day because I know they need me. Every year, they try to get me to teach the honors classes due to my seniority, but I turn them down because every kid can learn, and it gives me an opportunity to teach kids up to a standard so that they can grow by the time they leave my classroom." Within the context of this study, all of the participants have a positive perspective of their school due to the familial relationships established among stakeholders in the school and the community. Claudia and Lenore made a

pact that they would follow each other wherever they went in their teaching career. Claudia

elaborated, "Me and Lenore started the same year, and in addition to the love we feel in the

school, we became good friends and throughout the years, we have always been supportive of

one another. We have been through so many ups and downs and have seen so many things

happen within not only our lives, but this school and community and we experienced these things

together. Having a friend who understands where I am coming from has helped me overcome so

much in my career, in addition to the support we have from our community for being some of the

oldest teachers at the school." They also believe the students can achieve much like their affluent

peers with guidance and support. During the focus group session, Teaghan explained that the

bond and friendships she has established in the community and school are what encouraged her

to remain at BRHS. Teaghan explained, "Our school culture here is like no other. Yes, we are in a

rural community, but when you think about all of the successful people that have passed through

this school… Man… It makes me proud." Joe proudly exclaimed, "One of my boys made it to

the NFL!" Maggie asserted, "We are a proud community, and people should never despise

humble beginnings because we are inspiring greatness here. Many of our students have gone on

to become very successful, and not just in the sports arena. This is why we are here. If all of the

teachers are going to the bigger more affluent schools, who are going to teach our children?"

Ultimately, the teachers are retained at their school to impact their students positively,

contributing to the meaning and purpose derived from their interactions with students and

stakeholders in the community.

Sub-Question Two

What are the educational competency beliefs of retained secondary teachers in

high-needs schools? Most participants feel highly confident in teaching and engaging students at

BRHS. Moreover, the participants believe that the skills they have developed at a low-income school have trained them to teach and succeed in any school. Hunter explained, "I'll say this, if you can teach at BRHS, you can teach anywhere. I feel like as a new teacher, I'm getting exposure and experience that I know I would not get at a larger school. I am on my third year of teaching and they made me a senior advisor and the coordinator of the homecoming and tailgating committee. One of the things I love about working here is the opportunities for professional growth. Many people see the lack of resources as limitations, but they don't realize that these experiences are molding us for greater opportunities. I can see myself as a principal down the road because of the experience I am getting here at BRHS and I know if I had been somewhere else, I would not have these opportunities." Ryan explained, "All students can learn; this is the attitude I have when I am thinking about teaching my students. All of us have been prepared in some of the best teacher programs around, so content knowledge is not an issue… You can have all of the content knowledge in the world, but if you don't know how to reach students heart first, they are not going to listen to you." Adrian, Maggie, Claudia, and Jessica agreed with Ryan's sentiment, and the participants maintained that competency encompasses content knowledge and interpersonal skills that are of great significance in low-income schools. Jessica asserted, "A common misconception is that teachers that remain at low-income schools may not have the confidence or skills to teach in the more affluent areas and that is not the case. I have many certifications and my classes tend to have high passing rates for standardized tests, but for a lot of us, teaching is much more than test scores and everything else, it's about our sense of dignity. I feel privileged to be a part of this community and school family because despite the odds that are against us, we have so many people who are doing extraordinary things from this community and I am a part of that positivity." Moreover, the participants reiterated that

though there are pitfalls of working at a low-income school, they use the skills and qualifications they have to enhance learning opportunities for students and growth in the community,

Sub-Question Three

What are the influential abilities of retained secondary teachers in high-needs schools? The participants agree that their ability to influence is derived from fostering caring relationships with the students and the community. Joe maintained, "What I like about this school and community is that the kids and the people here have a lot of respect and love for the teachers. I am a coach so maybe I may have some favoritism, but one thing I observe among the students for the most part is the respect and admiration they have for many teachers in the school." Consequently, most of the teachers feel that they need more influence or voice in decision-making for the school as a whole due to leadership not being open and receptive to feedback and collaboration from the teachers and other stakeholders in the school. Maggie asserted, "Over the years, I have seen school leaders come and go. Their biggest downfall is underestimating the power of our relationships in this school and the community. We are not here to push leaders out, but we look for leaders to be supportive and to take an interest in the community they are serving." Ultimately, the bond teachers have established with students and community members is a driving force behind their ability to influence the school community. Lucy explains that "the biggest impact I can have is the success of my students. As a member of this community, it is my responsibility to see that students can get the best education possible. We are not concerned with leadership who ignore us because we have a community that stands behind us. Our influence lies in our ability to make a difference in the lives of our kids." During the focus group, Ryan, Lenore, Maggie, Gabrielle, and Lisa discussed how seeing the results of the impact they have on students motivates them to show up each day. Gabrielle expounded, "we

are a unique community because it seems that life's lottery has chosen this community. We have already discussed the many success stories that came about from this community, but I know that for example, the student who won Sunday's Best, it was myself and another teacher who isn't a part of this study who convinced him to compete. We put on a fundraiser so that he could have the money to get to his audition, and he won the whole show. This is when I realized that woah… we have something special is this community and as teachers and leaders, it is our job to cultivate the talent and potential we have here for the greater good of our community." Essentially, the participants discuss how they have gained unique skills as a result of working in a low-income school that has allowed them to make a significant impact on their students.

Summary

The themes from the data provide insight into teachers' experiences retained in low-income schools, aligning with the research questions. The central research question required participants to recount their experiences at a low-income school, and the themes derived from the research were Positive School Climate, Meaning and Purpose, and Disadvantages of Working in Low-income Schools. Two sub-themes emerged from the responses about Positive School climate: classroom communities and interpersonal relationships. The subthemes, Making an Impact and Culturally Responsive Teaching, were derived from the theme, Meaning and Purpose. Under the last theme, Disadvantages of Working in Low-Income Schools, two additional subthemes emerged: Poor School Leadership and the Lack of Resources. Essentially, the research results reveal the importance of positive interpersonal relationships between stakeholders in low-income schools, a deep intrinsic desire to teach and motivate students, and effective school leadership for retaining teachers in high-need schools.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study aimed to understand the experiences related to retention for secondary teachers at a high-needs school in the Black River School District, located in the rural Southeastern region of the United States. Chapter five will encompass the interpretations of the findings, including the insights collected from teachers who have established a system of invaluable relationships in the school and community and teachers who are determined to impact the lives of their students despite adverse circumstances. This chapter will elaborate on the implications for policy and practices, theoretical and methodological implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research. Chapter five will culminate with recommendations for future research and the study's conclusion.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of teachers who are retained in low-income schools. There are many studies related to teacher attrition in low-income schools. However, research needs to be more extensive regarding the experiences of teachers who choose to remain in high-need schools. Extant research on low-income schools highlights the challenges and limitations of working in low-income schools, and there are a range of issues, from the lack of support from school administrators and funding to student behavior, among many other factors. Many teachers have found coping mechanisms to help them navigate the complexities they face daily. This study offers unique insights and perspectives from the teachers who remain at low-income schools and thrive despite adversities. Teacher retention for low-income communities is vital because the educational system fuels the community and opens the

prospects for industries to develop and invest in those areas. The findings of this study can inform policy and practice, increasing student achievement and the overall quality of life for the students of high-need schools all over the country.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Qualitative research allows for a deeper understanding of real-world experience and phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2016); However, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to describe the experiences of teachers of BRHS. Heidegger formulated hermeneutic phenomenology, rooted in the ontology that focuses on the essence of being (Heidegger, 1988). Thus, human experiences with phenomena are shaped by their perceptions and their perceptions are shaped by their person and historical backgrounds. As a hermeneutic phenomenologist, one elucidated and contextualized the stories provided by the participants in this study as they relate to each individual's personal experiences and emphasized the foundational systems of the participants' thinking and how these structures shaped the decisions made by the participants. This section will explain the interpretation of data analysis derived from the interviews, observations, and focus groups.

Interpretation of Findings

This section relays the interpretation of the data analysis gleaned from the interviews, observations, and focus group of 15 participants and a shared phenomenon. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach contextualizes and highlights the unique experiences shaped by their personal backgrounds. Heidegger maintained that human consciousness and awareness of the experiences associated with a phenomenon are not detached from the world or their personal/historical background (Heidegger, 1988; Neubauer et al., 2019). Using this framework, one will explain the three interpretations that were acquired from investigating the phenomenon

of teachers choosing to remain at Black River High School.

The Necessity of Personal Interest & Community Pride

In the first interpretation, one found that personal interest and community pride contribute to teacher retention in low-income schools. Seelig and McCabe (2021) maintain that school districts in low-income communities tend to serve a "dual role" in society, being centers of education, culture, and other social aspects. Moreover, while conducting research at the school, one perceived how society centered around the school and youth in the community. All of the participants in this study have a personal interest or investment in the community and possess a sense of pride. Nine of the fifteen teachers graduated from Black River High School and are from the community. The teachers expressed their obligation as community members to ensure that they contribute to the progress of the community by positively impacting the youth.

One also found that the majority of participants either live in the community, have family ties to the community, or play a vital role in the community. In the study, one found that a system of support and interconnectedness characterizes the community surrounding the school, and this system transfers into the school community. Several participants are either related or familiar on a personal level, attend the same church, or are affiliated with social clubs and groups outside of the school. One participant expressed that he is a pastor, another expressed that she is married to one of the town's magistrates, and another expressed that she returned home to help with the family business. This duality of the teachers' roles in the community influences their decision to remain at the BRHS. Maggie explained, "As the oldest participant here and a graduate and member of my community, I am proud to do what I do. As a teacher, my duty to my community is to ensure that the children receive the best support and education possible."

Relationships are Vital

In the second interpretation, one found that the solid interpersonal relationships fostered among teachers, students, and members of the community play a pivotal role in the retention of teachers at Black River High. K.A. Allen et al. (2021) asserted that teachers must prioritize students' social and emotional well-being to feel like they belong in a school. The teachers expressed that relationships preceded educating students and maintained that students were more receptive to teachers who first established a rapport with them. One found that the interpersonal relationships teachers established with students in the classroom contributed to their job satisfaction at BRHS. Most participants conveyed that a comfortable and safe environment is vital for a learning environment, and the students who feel safe with the teacher are open to learning. Lucy explained, "Once a relationship is established, my students participate more in class, and they respect me so much. This makes me want to teach and go even harder for them." Moreover, relationships are essential for an interactive and engaging classroom, which will, in turn, increase job satisfaction and productivity.

In addition to the positive relationships between teachers and students at BRHS, one found that these relationships extended beyond the classroom. The people in the community surrounding the school are closely interconnected, and the relationships are evident in the school. Many teachers discussed the long-term benefits of maintaining positive relationships with students and how this allowed them to reach the community. Jessica maintained that "when we are short on resources, we can always reach out to the community and count on them to give us a helping hand." The teachers expressed how they could rely on the community to advocate for them when faced with difficult situations, especially in board meetings. Having such strong support from the community for most participants contributes to their job satisfaction and desire

to remain at the school. One found the community is fully committed to ensuring that the youth are represented, supported, and accounted for despite the economic disparities they face. The familial bond allows the teachers to feel a sense of belonging, which makes them feel a sense of duty to the students of BRHS.

A Determination to Beat the Odds

In the third interpretation, one found that teachers had the intrinsic desire to educate their students because they believed it was their purpose. Furthermore, this sense of purpose among participants contributed to their desire to remain at BRHS, increasing their satisfaction in their role. Alexander et al. (2020) posited that teachers in high-need schools who were inherently invested in and fond of their careers were most likely inspired by humanitarian efforts to be of service to the youth and society in general. These findings apply to the teachers at BRHS who conveyed that they desire to remain at the school because they are dedicated to the students and want to see them succeed, but contributing to the overall well-being increases their intention and purpose for teaching at the school.

One found that this intrinsic motivation led the participants to desire to improve and master their teaching skills. One participant expressed that low-income schools give teachers a professional and unique strength that cannot be found in teachers who are not subjected to this unique experience. Hunter explained, "If you can teach at this school, you can teach anywhere." The participants did not see their adversities as a deficit but used these problematic experiences to improve their professional flexibility and creativity. They also found that in low-income schools, teachers tend to have more autonomy in the classroom, which motivates them to craft effective instructional strategies and lessons. Observing the results of their work motivates them to work even harder, contributing to their efficacy as teachers. Essentially, one found that

purpose and a deep intrinsic motivation contributed to job satisfaction for teachers at BRHS and influenced their decision to remain at the school.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Students and teachers in low-income schools face extraordinary circumstances that can adversely affect their professional and academic success if they are not adequately prepared. The implications for policy and practice are perceivable through the results of data analysis and discourse with the participants of this study. The implications of this hermeneutic phenomenological study can provide insight into the factors that heighten teacher satisfaction, enhancing and influencing policies and practices that will encourage teacher retention in low-income schools. This section will convey the implications of this study for various stakeholders in low-income schools and provide possible solutions to the issue of teacher attrition in high-need schools.

Implications for Policy

During the study, teachers discussed the importance of using culturally responsive teaching techniques to relate to their students. Ashbrook (2021) maintains that teachers must understand the cultural components of students' identities, recognizing how they make sense of the world they live in through their experiences (Ashbrook, 2021; Morris, 2022). Culturally responsive teaching does not merely teach pop culture but also examines the communities and settings in which students live to understand their interests better (Morris, 2022; Scherff & Spector, 2010). Therefore, districts can implement required professional development for teachers to acquire the skills necessary to relate to the students of the community they are serving. From the results of this study, establishing commonalities and relationships with

students is of maximal importance. Thus, culturally responsive teaching can increase job satisfaction and promote a positive school climate.

Student achievement and learning outcomes, safety and physical environment, interpersonal relationships, and leadership correlate to school climate (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Grant et al., 2019; Thapa et al., 2013; Zakariya, 2020). When implemented correctly, each component contributes to a positive school climate. Districts can implement policies that will encourage a positive school culture for teachers. This study found that creating a positive school culture significantly impacts teachers' outlook on their work environment and contributes to their desire to remain at the school. Districts and schools can hire and encourage effective and supportive school leadership, implement consistent disciplinary practices, and encourage open communication, collaboration, and teacher feedback. Most of the teachers in the study divulged that their influence comes from their ability to create change in the classroom, but schools and districts can administer policies that will increase and value the voices of the teachers.

Valuing and investing in educators, institutions can foster a sustainable work culture that benefits teachers and students (Kraft & Falken, 2019; Liu & Liao, 2019; McGarrigle et al., 2023). Moreover, the participants in this study expounded on how they need access to more resources. Fortunately, the teachers are surrounded by a supportive community that will rally together to raise funds and provide resources to the youth of their community. Districts can partner with local businesses and churches in the community and solicit their assistance to supplement any scarcities that do not address the needs of the stakeholders. Teachers must acquire the resources necessary to provide students with a high-quality education.

Implications for Practice

The implications of practice for this study entail several practices that can contribute to job satisfaction and teacher retention for teachers in low-income communities. According to the study's findings, teachers in low-income schools need to feel a sense of belonging. Interpersonal relationships are of maximum importance, and this indicates that low-income schools can capitalize on implementing positive relationships among all stakeholders in the school. Positive interpersonal relationships can commence with school leadership and teachers. A study by Grissom (2011) theorizes that effective principals significantly impact teacher retention in disadvantaged schools vulnerable to staffing issues. Moreover, this study suggests that school leaders can encourage teacher retention in low-income schools by effectively supporting and allowing open communication channels.

Another implication of practice suggests that an increase in funding for low-income schools can improve the effectiveness of teachers in low-income schools. According to the findings of this study, participants expressed discouragement and discomfort when using personal resources and funds to supplement their instruction. They also expressed that they felt they needed to be adequately supported financially by school or district leadership. This indicates that low-income schools can implement ways to increase funding by applying for grants, partnering with local businesses and community organizations, organizing fundraisers, soliciting donations, and or advocating for increased state and federal funding. Increasing the resources teachers can access will improve job satisfaction and teacher retention and increase student achievement.

The last implication of practice suggests that a positive relationship between the school and stakeholders in the community is critically significant for the success of a low-income school

and teacher retention. Participants in this study maintained that they could reach out to the

community when they needed resources or advocacy. This suggests positive interpersonal

relationships between teachers and students will translate into the community. In terms of

practice, schools can cultivate impactful, positive relationships with the community by

partnering with local businesses and organizations. These businesses can provide material and

financial resources and expertise on various topics that can benefit all stakeholders. Schools can

host community events or offer community service projects to bridge the communication gap

between the school and the community. These components can increase teacher retention in

low-income communities by increasing appreciation for teachers from the community, including

mentoring and coaching opportunities, as well as resources and advocacy.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

This section addresses the theoretical and empirical implications of the study. The social

cognitive theory was applied to this study, and the theoretical implications were derived from the

perspective of SCT. The implications were comprehensible through the investigation of the

findings, the amalgamation of data collection, and the collation of theoretical and empirical

information from previous chapters. The empirical implications of the study were derived

through the shared experiences of resilient teachers who served in low-income schools.

Empirical Implications

This study relates to other qualitative and phenomenological studies on the issue of

teacher attrition in low-income schools in that it will provide teachers with a voice. Similar

studies highlighted the voices of the teachers who left schools and their perceptions of their

schools, and most teachers agreed that positive school leadership and mental stimulation were

determinants of job satisfaction (Baptiste, 2019; Rana et al., 2016). However, another facet of

this research is allowing teachers to voice their understanding of teacher attrition and the factors that will efficiently and effectively encourage teacher retention (Cooper, 2019; Fu & Wenju, 2021; Han et al., 2021; Kraft & Falken, 2019; Molero et al., 2019; Sokal et al., 2020; Valente et al., 2020). The study's empirical significance adds a unique perspective of teachers retained for over ten years in a low-income school. It will add to the existing literature surrounding teacher retention in low-income schools from the retained teachers' perspective and their perception of the issue.

The findings of this study can help shape policy and practices in low-income school districts geared toward retaining teachers and increasing job satisfaction. The findings suggest that low-income schools and districts can implement positive and restorative practices between teachers and leadership, such as leadership not only providing substantive and productive feedback to teachers in and out of the classroom but also accepting and acknowledging the constructive feedback and input teachers give for the wellbeing of the school. The findings also suggest that low-income schools can support teachers by fostering relationships with stakeholders in the community to supplement the lack of resources the school cannot provide to aid the teachers. In addition to the findings, one found that positive community relationships inspired advocacy for teachers from the community, which made teachers feel supported. One found that participants are more likely to remain at a school due to personal investment in the community. Most of the participants live in the community or have familial or business ties to the community, and this suggests that low-income communities increase the living conditions that will attract and encourage individuals to live in those communities. Ultimately, the findings of this study indicate that teachers in low-income communities are inspired to remain in school through personal investment, positive interpersonal relationships, and adequate support from

school leadership.

Theoretical Implications

This study was framed through the social cognitive theory (SCT) lens. Albert Bandura developed the social cognitive theory (SCT) from the social learning theory (SLT) in the 1980s. The theory postulates that a reciprocal relationship between the person, behavior, and environment influences human behavior. SCT emphasizes how individuals behave and learn and considers the social context of the environment where the behavior is performed (Bandura, 1986). Moreover, the environment shapes human behavior, and individuals are active participants in those environments. As a result, individuals self-regulate by continuously monitoring three sub modalities: personal attitudes, behavior, and environment. These self-regulatory structures are at the center of catalytic processes for individuals in society (Bandura, 1988).

Behavior is predicated upon four outcomes: goals, outcomes, self-efficacy, and social systems. Subsequently, self-efficacy encompasses the individuals' confidence in their ability to perform specific tasks. This study applied self-efficacy as a determinant of behavior (Bandura, 1988). Participants in this study displayed high confidence in their ability to teach the students at BRHS. The teachers perceived the adversities in their schools as opportunities for growth and development. Moreover, one participant expounded that teaching at the more affluent schools was far more accessible because they are more organized and have more access to resources; however, she ascribed her teaching skills and self-efficacy to the experience she gained at BRHS.

Subsequently, personal factors such as attitudes or cognitive skills can affect the environment. Bandura (1988) maintains that people's assumptions, beliefs, and distinct character influence their behavior. Moreover, environmental factors are any external forces that can affect

an individual's behavior. According to the study's findings, the participants conveyed that

positive interpersonal relationships, personal investments, and involvement in the community

influenced their decision to remain at BRHS. Lenore explained that the friendships she has

established in the school with colleagues, students, and community members play a huge role in

her job satisfaction. Most of the participants have positive attitudes towards the climate of the

school and community as a whole, and the familial atmosphere makes them feel like they belong.

The feeling of belonging inspires a sense of duty in the participants to remain at the school for

the overall well-being of the community and the youth.

　　　　According to SCT, the environment refers to the external factors that influence an

individual's behavior. These external factors could be the physical environment, societal

expectations, or social norms. The SCT posits that environmental factors combined with beliefs

and attitudes can shape people's behavior in society. One can see from the study's findings that

the teachers and community members are proud of where they come from, and to overcome

adversities, they practice unity. This positivity significantly impacts the attitudes and behaviors

of the teachers and the school's culture, and it increases job satisfaction, retaining the participants

who have been retained for more than ten years.

　　　　Conclusively, one can see from the study results that a combination of SCT's behavior,

personal factors, and environment plays a pivotal role in retaining teachers at BRHS. The

environment has the most significant impact on the participants' behaviors and personal factors.

According to the participants, their desire to remain at BRHS has everything to do with their

beliefs that all students can learn and that the community's children deserve a quality education.

These beliefs, coupled with the societal expectation of duty to contribute to the success of the

youth in the community and the overall atmosphere of love and support, are what keep the

teachers at BRHS, despite some of the issues they face.

Limitations and Delimitations

One will explore the limitations and delimitations of the hermeneutic phenomenological study at hand. Limitations are those factors that may pose potential weaknesses to the study and are beyond the researcher's control. Whereas delimitations are the deliberate decisions made by the researcher to define and limit the boundaries of the study. Additionally, the section will delve into the reasoning behind the choices made to narrow down the scope and focus of this study.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the generalizability of the study due to the subjective nature of the experiences of the participants in this study. The geographical location of this study plays a vital role in the shared results. This study was about the experiences of teachers retained in low-income schools; However, those experiences will not relate to teachers in more extensive and urban settings, as this study was conducted in a Southeastern, rural community in the United States. One of the contributing factors to the participant's retention can be attributed to the support and relationships they have established with the community. Louis and Kruse (2021) discussed the complexities of building community in large, urban low-income schools. Therefore, while some of the implications of this study can apply to any low-income school in America, it is imperative to note that context matters.

Another limitation of this study is that the interpretation of the data is also subjective. One factor that influenced this study was one's experiences working at a rural low-income school. The hermeneutic, phenomenological approach acknowledges that researchers bring perceptions and experiences of their own to the study. Moreover, one acknowledges that the insights associated with one's interpretation of the data can also be gleaned from observations in

both the dual capacities of student and teacher in low-income schools. Therefore, with more objective modes of measurement for the data analysis, the results and conclusion of the study could differ.

Delimitations

One delimitation of the study was choosing participants and the sampling method. For the time and nature of this study, purposive sampling was used to get valuable information from participants in a low-income school who had knowledge and experience surrounding this phenomenon. Purposive sampling can lead to homogenous findings as all participants were African American, including eleven female and four male participants. All participants were from the same school, and most were native to the community. Gill (2020) maintains that while qualitative research can highlight and convey meaning in the experiences of individuals for specific phenomena, it can lead to a potential for bias or the lack of generalizability. Moreover, careful consideration went into disclosing the limitations of conducting this study. The age range for participants was lowered to 18 years old, and this decision was made to increase the number of eligible participants. Fortunately, most participants were veteran teachers who had been in education for over ten years.

Recommendations for Future Research

A recommendation for research would be to study the experiences of school leadership, students, and parents for diverse data and perspectives. Many studies emphasize the importance of effective leadership for teacher retention. Moreover, the research emphasizes the significance of distributed leadership and collaboration between teachers and school leaders as drivers of teacher efficacy and student success (Grant et al., 2019; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). To gain a more comprehensive understanding of teacher retention, school leaders must convey their

experience of the phenomenon. Additionally, high teacher turnover rates adversely affect student achievement in low-income schools, and a study that elucidates the experiences from the student's perspective would be of maximum benefit to schools and districts. Parents are also key stakeholders, and they can bring a unique perspective on how teacher attrition impacts the quality of their student's education. Essentially, to get a diverse range of data, conducting research with all of the stakeholders can offer a broader range of solutions that can not only bridge the student achievement gap but also foster collaboration with the school and the community, promoting student achievement and teacher retention.

Subsequently, another critical recommendation would be for more studies to examine how attrition affects low-income students in rural communities. Many studies are centered around low-income students and schools in large metropolitan areas; however, the research concerning high-need schools in rural communities needs to be more extensive. Studies reveal that rural schools need to be more adequately funded, presenting a unique set of challenges for all stakeholders (Azano et al., 2020). In turn, teachers in rural areas may feel disconnected from their colleagues in more affluent schools. Therefore, a study could highlight the voices of teachers in rural communities, getting to the root of the issues affecting low-income schools and teacher retention in low-income communities.

Conclusion

This qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study aimed to understand retention for secondary teachers at a high-needs Black River School District school. For research, the study defined high-need schools as public schools in low-income communities where most students live with families below the poverty line (Grillo & Kier, 2021). The issue impacting many low-income schools is low teacher retention rates. This hermeneutic phenomenological study

was framed through the social cognitive theory (SCT) lens. The theory postulates that a reciprocal relationship between the person, behavior, and environment influences human behavior. Through in-depth interviews, observations, and focus groups, the study sought to answer the following central research question: What are the experiences of retained secondary teachers in high-needs schools? As a result of data collection and analysis, the implications of the research suggest that positive interpersonal relationships between teachers and stakeholders in the school and community encourage retention. Another implication suggested that low-income schools must collaborate and foster positive relationships with the community to supplement the lack of resources and to gain support and advocacy for teachers and students. Most importantly, teachers in low-income communities face many challenges, and their voices must be heard; Through positive encouragement, schools can amplify the voices of teachers by allowing them the autonomy to create change in their schools and communities.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 9, 2024

Kaila Morris
Rebecca Lunde

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-1136 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE
EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY TEACHERS AND TEACHER RETENTION IN
LOW-INCOME SCHOOLS

Dear Kaila Morris, Rebecca Lunde,

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

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

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

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your
Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study
details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the
bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study
documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any
modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of

continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

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

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

Dear Potential Participant,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree to understand a phenomenon better. The purpose of my research is to understand teachers' experiences and teacher retention in high-needs schools, and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and be a secondary teacher of any subject with at least 1 year of experience in a low-income school.. Participants will be asked to participate in a one-on-one, audio-recorded, in-person interview. In addition, I will observe one class session of the participants for approximately 45 minutes to gain deeper insight into the subject matter. Participants will also be asked to participate in a focus group with other participants. It should take approximately 3 hours to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

To participate, please contact me at k*****@liberty.edu or (555) 555-5555 to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research.

If you choose to participate, you must sign the consent document and email it to me before the interview.

Participants will receive a $10 Visa gift card as a token of appreciation for participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Kaila Morris-Segres
Doctoral Candidate
k*******@liberty.edu

Appendix C

Participant Consent Form

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study on the Experiences of Secondary Teachers and Teacher Retention in Low-Income Schools
Principal Investigator: Kaila Morris-Segres, 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 18 years of age or older and be a secondary teacher of any subject with at least 1 year of experience in a low-income school. 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 this qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study is to understand factors that encourage retention for secondary teachers at high-needs schools.

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. First procedure: Participate in an in-person, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. Second procedure: Allow the researcher to observe the classes of the participants while jotting down notes of the dynamics of the teacher in the classroom as they pertain to the topic of research.
3. Third procedure: Participate in an in-person focus group session that will take no longer than 1 hour. The focus group will be audio-recorded.

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 society include practical solutions to encourage teacher retention and greater job satisfaction for teachers in low-income schools.

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.

I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

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 collected from you may be shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and hard copy data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for five years and then deleted. The researcher will have access to these recordings.

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

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. At the conclusion of the focus group, participants will receive a $ 10 Visa gift card. Any participant who chooses to withdraw from the study after beginning but before completing all study procedures will not receive a gift card.

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 Black River High School. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and not 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 Kaila Morris-Segres. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at (555) 555-5555 and/or k********@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Rebecca Lunde, at r******@liberty.edu.

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

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the 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 are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

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

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix D

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of retained secondary teachers in high-needs schools?

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences of retained secondary teachers in high-needs schools?

Sub-Question Two

What are the educational competency beliefs of retained secondary teachers in

high-needs schools?

Sub-Question Three

What are the influential abilities of retained secondary teachers in high-needs schools?

Appendix E

Interview Questions

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position.

    CRQ

2. Describe your challenges when working in high-needs schools. CRQ

3. Describe the demographics of your classroom. CRQ

4. What is your personal teaching philosophy? SQ1

5. Describe how your philosophy ties into your rationale for returning to this school. SQ1

6. What is your perception of the school, the leadership, and the students, and how do these

    perceptions factor into your decision to return each year? SQ1

7. What are your perceptions of low teacher retention in your school, and why do you think

    this problem exists? SQ1

8. How do you perceive your preparation for teaching in this environment? SQ2

9. What skills are needed to teach in low-income schools, and what skills do you

    implement? SQ2

10. How do your personal and professional philosophies affect your teaching skills and

    practices? SQ2

11. How do you perceive opportunities for influence in your school? SQ3

12. How do you influence change in students and the classroom? SQ3

13. In what ways do you influence the school climate? SQ3

14. To what extent does your ability to influence contribute to your decision to remain at the

    school? SQ3

15. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences at low-income

schools that we have yet to discuss? CRQ

Appendix F

Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. Describe how your philosophy ties into your rationale for returning to this school. SQ1

   What are your perceptions of low teacher retention in your school, and why do you think

   this problem exists? SQ1

2. How do you perceive your preparation for teaching in this environment? SQ2

3. What skills are needed to teach in low-income schools, and what skills do you

   implement? SQ2

4. In what ways do you influence change in students and the classroom? SQ3

5. In what ways do you influence the school climate? SQ3

6. To what extent does your ability to influence contribute to your decision to remain at the

   school? SQ3

7. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences at low-income

   schools that we have not discussed? CRQ