THE EXPERIENCES OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOL EDUCATORS IN THE MIDWEST WHO

PRACTICE CONSISTENT PRAYER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Noemi Blig

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences, especially those related to the practice of consistent prayer and their decisions to remain in the profession, of educators in Christian schools in the Midwest. The theory guiding this study was Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as it shows how all individuals have basic needs that must be met. Teachers have individual needs that influence their decision to remain in the profession. The central research question asked: What are the experiences of Christian school educators who practice consistent prayer? A qualitative research study was appropriate for this topic since it aimed to study educators' lived experiences in Christian schools. The design of this study was a qualitative hermeneutical phenomenology, with the population comprised of educators teaching in Midwest Christian schools. Three methods for data collection were used when conducting this qualitative research study: individual interviews, focus groups, and journaling. Data analysis consisted of manual transcription and coding to generate and interpret themes. Van Manen's method of data analysis was used. The results of this study indicate that there are teachers in Christian school settings who practice consistent prayer. According to the literature review, prayer is a buffer to teacher burnout. The teachers in this study used prayer to reset themselves, gain guidance, and continue as educators. These teachers have used prayer to decide to remain in their school and profession.

Keywords: teacher attrition, prayer, well-being, teacher needs

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, whose blood speaks a better word! I also dedicate it to my mother, Ligia Blig, who models Christ's unconditional love for me. May the Lord bless you for how well you love Jesus and everyone God has placed in your life. Finally, I dedicate this piece to my grandparents, Ioan and Elisabeta Blig, who have instilled in me a deep-seated faith in Christ who rules above all authorities and inspired me to live a life of character and integrity. To me, they are incredible people who reflect the epitome of selflessness. They are the role models of a life well lived, and I can only dream of carrying the servant heart of Christ just like they did. Their legacy continues to inspire generations.

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List of Abbreviations

Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)

Center on Education Policy (CEP)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS)

The Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS)

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

US Department of Education (USDE)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In the past decade, teacher attrition rates have nearly doubled in the United States, with 40% of public schools and 30-35% of private schools struggling to hire new teachers (Irwin et al., 2023). An increased awareness exists regarding the importance of intervention methods for teacher well-being in response to nationwide teacher attrition (Fox et al., 2023). This study seeks to answer the central question: What are the experiences of Christian school educators in the Midwest who practice consistent prayer? The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences, especially those related to the practice of consistent prayer and their decisions to remain in the profession, of educators in Christian schools in the Midwest. This chapter explains the historical, social, and theoretical contexts related to teacher attrition rates in the United States. The problem and purpose of this study are then presented, including my role as a researcher and the study's significance.

Background

Teacher attrition affects student academics, well-being, and school finances (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016). There are many motives behind involuntary and voluntary teacher attrition (Boe et al., 1999; Conley & You, 2009). For example, role stress has been a leading motive for voluntary teacher attrition for several decades (Conley & You, 2009). Considering the current national condition of education, it was essential to study teacher attrition motives to understand how educator well-being contributes to voluntary attrition rates and how consistent prayer contributes to educator well-being.

Historical Context

Teacher attrition rates doubled in the past decade (Irwin et al., 2023), causing numerous

negative impacts on the school system (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Schleicher, 2018). Previous studies examined the motives behind voluntary and involuntary teacher attrition in the United States and the different types of teacher attrition that exist (Aydogdu & Asikgil, 2011; Bartram et al., 2012; Beer & Beer, 1992; Boe et al., 1999; Billingsley, 2004; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Carson et al., 2010; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Chambers et al., 2019; Cheng, 2008; Conley & You, 2009). Conley & You (2009) examined several contributors to teacher attrition and identified role stress as a primary contributor. Role stress is anything regarding an individual's role in an organization that produces adverse outcomes on individual well-being (Irwin et al., 1970). Other motives for attrition included a lack of classroom autonomy and low salary rates (Ingersoll & May, 2012). Furthermore, researchers have studied the effects of teacher attrition and determined historically that turnover was highest among math and science teachers in poverty areas and high minority areas (Ingersoll & May, 2012).

In the early years of America, some children did not have equal access to education, such as those marginalized by low economic status, race, and gender (CEP, 2020). Access to education began in the 1800s when the founding fathers recognized the need for a more formalized educational system to develop exemplary citizens (CEP, 2020). The founding fathers believed that a good education was necessary to preserve democracy since it takes educated individuals to understand social issues and make wise political decisions (CEP, 2020). In 1830, Horace Mann, secretary for the board of education in Massachusetts, proposed the idea of common schools (CEP, 2020). These common schools were designed to give all students access to free education (CEP, 2020). Unfortunately, these schools soon began to segregate, excluding students of color and limiting instruction to females (CEP, 2020). Initially, American schools were a place of community where teachers would gather to run their programs, and students and

parents would attend classes, events, and activities (CEP, 2020). Unfortunately, the American school system has struggled to offer all students education since its founding (CEP, 2020).

Teacher attrition became a problem in the 1970s (Charters, 1970; Mark and Anderson, 1978; Murnane, 1981). Whitener (1965) suggested that teacher attributes (age and gender), not organizational characteristics, determined the survival rate of teachers. Charters (1970) built on Whitener's research as he studied the concept of teacher survival in Oregon school systems. His study illustrated factors that affected teacher survival rates and aimed to confirm Whitener's findings that teacher attributes instead of organizational characteristics were the primary reasons for teacher survival. Contrary to Whitener (1965), Charles (1970) found that teacher attributes were a determining factor for female teachers, while organizational characteristics were more of a determining factor for male teachers. According to Charles (1970), female teachers had a different life cycle, with females under 40 most often being of childbearing age. Murnane (1981) studied teacher mobility from 1965-1974.

Contrary to Whitener (1965) and Charles (1970), Murnane suggested that the motivations behind teacher mobility have changed. In the 1950s and 1960s, school enrollment increased significantly. However, student enrollment declined in the 1970s (Murnane, 1981). This decrease in student enrollment resulted in budget cuts and staff reductions (Murname, 1981). Teachers with experience were more likely to be retained than new, inexperienced teachers (Murname, 1981). The change in staff quality affected the labor market trends (Murname, 1981), costing the schools extra money per pupil since salaries were based on teachers' experiences (Murname, 1981). The decline in student enrollment and school governance and rules were perceived as the two motivating factors for teacher mobility (Murnane, 1981).

Social Context

Teacher attrition continues to be an ongoing problem with adverse outcomes on individual well-being in a perpetuating cycle. Teachers quit for various reasons that have changed significantly, leading to school closures and limited access to equitable education (Murname, 1981; Ingersoll and Smith, 2003). As of 2016, many students remain unschooled due to teacher attrition rates (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016). As of 2019, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) confirmed no progress in reducing the number of out-of-school children (UNESCO, 2019). It is estimated that approximately 69 million new teachers must be recruited to reach sustainable development by 2030 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016).

It is estimated that 50% of new teachers leave the field within five years of teaching (Barnes et al., 2007; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). As a result, teachers leaving the field produces another direct issue related to teacher attrition: financial instability (OECD, 2020). The costs associated with teacher attrition include separation, replacement, training, and productivity (Watlington et al., 2010). The current teacher attrition rate also significantly impacts society's health. Teacher attrition also affects students' academic progress (Madigan & Kim, 2021). According to Schleicher (2018), there is a correlation between teacher well-being and student educational issues. Responses to teacher attrition have been studied (Conley & You, 2009). For example, in response to teacher attrition, several schools implemented a four-day school week and financial incentives to help deter teacher attrition (Department for Education, 2019).

Theoretical Context

Maslow (1943) posits that human beings have unique needs. Whether or not these needs are met directly affects their effectiveness as individuals in their environments. Poulou (2020)

discussed teachers' satisfaction of needs as directly related to their well-being and indirectly to their students' well-being. Frei-Landau and Levin (2023) used Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) to underpin their study on the importance of understanding and meeting instructors' needs. Frei-Landau and Levin (2023) correlated teachers' needs satisfaction with job satisfaction and needs frustration with the associated feelings of failure. Mauluddiyah (2021) used Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) to discuss that one of the drawbacks of choosing teaching as a career was because of the prevalence of unmet needs. Mauluddiyah (2021) concluded that there is a positive relationship between understanding the hierarchy of needs and teachers who choose to pursue the vocation of education. Most of the research from the scholarly literature focused on analyzing factors associated with teacher attrition (Guthery & Bailes, 2022; Sandmeier et al., 2022; Seelig & McCabe, 2021), consequences of teacher attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Jud et al., 2023; Richards, Stroub, & Guthery, 2020), and the methods to combat teacher attrition (Marshall et al., 2022; Poulou, 2020; Schoch et al., 2021). However, additional research was needed to address the experiences of educators who practice consistent Christian prayer in relation to combating attrition rates, enhancing teacher well-being, and, therefore, increasing student access to quality education (Chirico et al., 2019).

Many studies suggested that prayer correlates positively with increased well-being (South & McDowell, 2018; Stamm et al., 2020; Wan, 2021). Research showed that when resources were limited, prayer was a coping strategy that many educators have adopted to deal with the challenges of their roles (South & McDowell, 2018; Walker, 2020). Teachers with unmet needs often experience high stress levels, resulting in teacher attrition. Prayer is linked to positive well-being as it acts as a buffer to stress (Parks-Stamm, Pollack, and Hill, 2020). This study sought to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding teacher attrition by discussing the experiences of

educators who chose to remain in their profession, worked at Christian schools in the Midwest, and practiced consistent Christian prayer. This hermeneutical phenomenology explored the lived experiences of these educators, including their needs, stressors, prayer habits, how this related to their perceived well-being, and their choice to remain in the profession.

Problem Statement

The problem is that educators leave the profession due to work-related stressors (Irwin et al., 2023). There are many reasons for teacher attrition, and the primary reason is role stress (Aydogdu & Asikgil, 2011; Bartram et al., 2012; Beer & Beer, 1992; Boe et al., 1999; Billingsley, 2004; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Carson et al., 2010; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Chambers et al., 2019; Cheng, 2008; Conley & You, 2009). Educators with unmet needs leave the profession more quickly, creating adverse outcomes for school systems and society (Hornstra et al., 2021; Poulou, 2020; Sandmeier et al., 2022). Researchers have identified the critical need for educator retention in the United States (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Diliberti & Schwartz, 2023).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences, especially those related to the practice of consistent prayer and their decisions to remain in the profession, of educators in Christian schools in the Midwest. At this research stage, teacher attrition will be generally defined as teachers remaining or leaving their positions pre-retirement (Marzano et al., 2011; Zarzycka & Krok, 2021). The theory guiding this study is the hierarchy of needs by Abraham Maslow (Maslow, 1943).

Significance of the Study

This section describes this hermeneutical phenomenology's theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. The theoretical significance of Maslow's hierarchy of needs will be discussed. Following this discussion, an explanation of how the study fits into bridging a gap in the literature will be provided. Finally, this section will discuss the practical aspects related to the key themes. This study sought to understand the lived experiences of educators in Christian schools regarding the ongoing stressors of their roles, their perceived well-being, and how they experienced the decision to remain in their profession, considering the practice of consistent prayer.

Theoretical

The theoretical underpinning of this study was Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. The hierarchy of needs suggests that all humans have basic needs that must be met before individuals can self-actualize and become their best selves (Maslow, 1943). Researchers have confirmed that all teachers have specific needs that, when unmet, result in adverse outcomes, including teacher attrition (Hornstra et al., 2021; Poulou, 2020; Sandmeier et al., 2022). Some specific reasons for teacher attrition included working conditions and excessive workload (Kirby & Grissmer, 1993), highlighting teachers' physiological and psychological needs. Kirby and Grissmer (1993) proposed a theory of teacher attrition with patterns that lead to this preretirement exodus. These patterns include human capital and life cycle factors. The hierarchy of needs explains these teachers' needs (Maslow, 1943). According to the hierarchy of needs theory, individuals begin the pursuit of self-actualization once their lower-level needs are met (Maslow, 1943). Individual needs must be considered when studying teachers and their roles. If their basic needs are mostly met, educators can pursue higher-level self-esteem and actualization needs (Maslow, 1943).

Unmet needs negatively affect teachers' well-being and motivation, leading to teacher attrition (Hornstra et al., 2021; Poulou, 2020; Sandmeier et al., 2022). This study attempted to show how consistent prayer relates to teachers' needs, well-being, and teachers' decisions to remain in their profession.

Empirical

This study's empirical significance is that teachers with unmet needs that affect their well-being are likelier to leave the profession (Sandmeier et al., 2022). Ingersoll and Tran (2023) studied teacher shortages and turnover in rural schools. They found that teachers' motives for leaving preretirement are due to their school's organizational characteristics that affect their well-being (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). Teacher attrition also impacts the labor market negatively as teachers who leave their jobs in masses prompt school closures (Richards et al., 2020). Chirico et al. (2019) studied the relationship between prayer and teacher burnout and concluded that prayer is an effective technique for remedying burnout. Donoahoo et al. (2018) also found similar results about prayer as a technique for lowering burnout. Therefore, teachers' experiences with prayer and how it relates to their well-being and decisions to remain in the profession should be added to the literature regarding teacher attrition.

Practical

The practical significance of this study is related to the experiences of teachers in Christian schools in the Midwest who pray consistently. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) studied teacher turnover and how it affects students and schools. They found that teacher attrition affects student well-being and creates educational inequity, with higher rates among low-income families and students of color (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Teacher attrition also affects student outcomes (Fox et al., 2023; Madigan and Kim, 2021).

Poulou (2020) studied the role of teachers' needs satisfaction and its relationship to student well-being. She found that teachers' unmet needs for autonomy was associated with students' emotional and behavioral difficulties (Poulou, 2020). Many educators who practiced consistent prayer expressed that they experienced a sense of peace (Froese & Uecker, 2022; Moreno-Casado et al., 2022; South & McDowell, 2018), they were less worried about how to make ends meet for their school, they were not as concerned with the future and were able to focus in on the present, they were more available to their families and did not take the burdens of their work home with them each day (Hosseini et al., 2022; Moreno-Casado et al., 2022). Prayer was linked to positive well-being as it acted as a buffer to stress (Parks-Stamm, Pollack, and Hill, 2020). Therefore, this study attempted to add to the literature regarding teacher needs, well-being, prayer, and its relationship to teacher attrition rates.

Research Questions

To conduct the research, a central research question and two sub-questions were established. The central research question focused on classroom teachers who practiced consistent prayer, and the sub-questions concentrated on teachers' experiences in the classroom and their needs.

Central Research Question

What are the classroom experiences of teachers at Christian schools in the Midwest who practice consistent prayer?

Sub-Question One

How do teachers describe their experiences with how consistent prayer relates to their emotional and physical needs as educators?

Sub-Question Two

What job factors do teachers perceive as relating to their needs and well-being?

Definitions

1. *Consistent Prayer* - The biblical admonition for a believer to pray continually, in every circumstance, for everything (*King James Bible,* 2017, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

2. *Learning* - A cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral interaction with content (Learner Engagement, 2019).

3. *Pedagogical knowledge* - Skills related to learning and teaching processes (Grenon et al., 2019).

4. *Role stress* - Anything regarding a role in an organization that produces adverse outcomes (Irwin et al., 1970).

5. *Teacher attrition* - Refers to the act of teachers who leave the profession (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

6. *Title I schools* - Schools that receive federal funds and have more than 50% of students eligible for free or reduced lunch (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2019).

Summary

Educators with unmet needs leave the profession more quickly, creating adverse outcomes for school systems and society (Hornstra et al., 2021; Poulou, 2020; Sandmeier et al., 2022). Researchers have identified the critical need for educator retention in the United States (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Diliberti & Schwartz, 2023). This hermeneutical phenomenological study sought to describe the experiences, especially those related to the practice of consistent prayer and their decisions to remain in the profession, of educators in Christian schools in the Midwest. This chapter explained the historical, social, and theoretical

contexts related to teacher attrition rates in Christian schools and prayer. The problem and purpose of this research were presented, including my role and the study's significance. The motivating problem behind this study was that educators in the United States leave their profession at alarming rates, which creates school-wide consequences (Irwin et al., 2023). The study's empirical significance was the gap in the literature regarding how educators who practiced consistent prayer experience well-being and the relation to their decision to remain in the profession. The study's theoretical significance was the hierarchy of needs in Maslow's theory of human motivation. The practical significance was how understanding teachers' experience with consistent prayer related to their needs, well-being, and attrition rates. This study aimed to address these three perspectives in light of the gap in literature by addressing the research questions.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter offers a literature review to study the experiences of educators who work at Christian schools in the Midwest, practice consistent prayer, and choose to remain in their professions. This chapter reviews the current peer-reviewed scholarly research on teacher attrition and prayer in light of the theoretical framework of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). The theoretical framework is discussed in the first section, followed by a review of current literature on the current condition of education, teacher attrition, teacher well-being, teacher needs, and prayer. Finally, a gap in the literature is identified regarding the need for more research on teachers' experiences in Christian educational settings in the Midwest who practice consistent prayer and choose to remain in their profession.

Theoretical Framework

The hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) served as the theoretical framework for this study. The prominent theorist is American psychologist Abraham Maslow (Maslow, 1943). The hierarchy of needs underpins this study because it defines individual human needs and their influence on an individual's choices (Maslow, 1943). The current problem is teacher attrition, an individual's choice, which hinges on educators' well-being and stems from unmet needs (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). Since human needs serve as the basis for well-being (Maslow, 1943), the hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) advances this study. This study utilized the hierarchy of needs to understand teachers' lived experiences and needs and how consistent prayer guides their decision to remain in their profession.

Theories Leading to the Hierarchy of Needs

To understand the hierarchy of needs theory of human motivation, one must understand some essential concepts on which this theory was built (Maslow, 1943). Maslow (1943) highlighted two developments that must be accounted for when understanding basic physiological needs. The first development is the research on homeostasis, and the second is the research on appetites. The concept of homeostasis was pioneered by Walter Bradford Cannon, a medical doctor (Cannon, 1939). Cannon (1939) discussed how the autonomic nervous system influences the regulatory functions of human physiology due to its unstable materials and associated processes. This bodily effort is known as homeostasis (Cannon, 1939). Appetite was the second of the two influential theories that led to Maslow's understanding of physiological needs. Certain human appetites indicate elements the body lacks at any given time (Young, 1936). An unmet appetite creates agitation in the human body system. Once the unmet appetite is fulfilled, a state of satisfaction is experienced, bringing the individual back to homeostasis (Young, 1936).

Two other influential theorists of Maslow were Sigmund Freud and Burrhus Frederic Skinner. Sigmund Freud (1920), an Austrian scientist and neurologist, developed his theory of psychoanalysis in 1920. His theory suggests that different behaviors are rooted in subconscious human desires. In 1938, Burrhus Frederic Skinner, an American Psychologist, developed his theory of behaviorism (Skinner, 1965). His theory posits that the nature of behavior and its predictability are often subject to external stimuli. Building on these theories, Abraham Maslow (1943) developed the hierarchy of needs theory. Maslow's theory (1943) claims that all human beings are perpetually found wanting; they have needs that must be met, and, by nature, these needs organize themselves in a unique hierarchy. A higher-level need becomes evident once a

basic need has been fulfilled (Maslow, 1943). The hierarchy of needs became one of several theories of positive motivation. This study attempted to show how prayer can be a way for human needs to be fulfilled.

Related Literature

Teacher attrition is an ongoing national problem that affects student outcomes (Fox et al., 2023; Madigan and Kim, 2021). In the past decade, national teacher attrition rates have increased alarmingly, negatively impacting the educational system (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). Research has been done on enhancing pedagogical skills in educators, improving educational practices, and encouraging teacher retention (Marzano et al., 2011; Zarzycka & Krok, 2021). However, a gap in the literature exists related to consistent prayer and its relationship to Christian school educators' well-being and attrition levels. This study aimed to describe the experiences of educators in Christian schools in the Midwest, especially those associated with the practice of consistent prayer and their decisions to remain in the profession. The topics discussed in this chapter include the current condition of education, teacher attrition, teacher well-being, teacher needs, and consistent prayer.

The History of Education

The history of American education dates to colonial times when children's schooling was primarily practiced at home (Rippa, 1997). The early colonists valued a family-centric society (Rippa, 1997) and wanted to carry their traditions to the New World. Their traditions included the Renaissance culture, emphasizing academic studies such as the sciences, literature, mathematics, philosophy, and the arts. Over time, private schools were established (Rippa, 1997), and the responsibility of education shifted from the home to the classroom. Initially, the schools were not supported by the government but were established by wealthy community

members. Several governmental acts transitioned education from the home to the school system (Provasnik et al., 2022). It was essential to understand the progression of those legislative acts as they contributed to the current condition of education, educators' well-being, and teacher attrition rates.

In 1642, the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed the Massachusetts School Law (1642), enforcing compulsory education in reading and writing for all children. The compulsory education legislation began the trend of governmental regulation of education. In 1867, the United States passed the Department of Education Act, which enacted the development of the United States Department of Education (DOE) to gather statistics about schools in the United States (Provasnik et al., 2022). The DOE went through a name change and became the Office of Education. In 1954, the Educational Research Act was instituted to permit the Office of Education to conduct such research (Provasnik et al., 2022). Once this Act was passed, the commissioner was required to give a yearly report on the condition of education in the United States (Provasnik et al., 2022). In 1979, the Department of Education Organization Act initiated goals for equal access to education, federal research, and state support. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) 2001 incorporated increased school accountability measures, including required standardized student testing and teacher professional development (Provasnik et al., 2022). Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 replaced the NCLB and considered state standardized tests instead of national ones, giving the states more accountability control (Provasnik et al., 2022). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) continues to administer surveys to gather data regarding school systems nationwide, and the commissioner of the United States Department of Education (USDE) completes yearly reports on the condition of education to satisfy the congressional mandate (Provasnik et al., 2022). It is essential to

recognize the evolution of American education to understand the statistical significance of the data produced by the United States Department of Education (Provasnik et al., 2022). This study attempted to discuss how prayer was a part of American education and its purpose in the field of education today, specifically in relation to the decisions teachers make to remain in their profession.

The Current Condition of Education for Teachers

The current condition of education for teachers must be understood from a statistical perspective to understand the teacher attrition rates better. The Department of Education, via NCES, has released several surveys exploring teacher, student, and schoolwide data (NCES, 2023). In a May 2022 nationwide survey, teachers were asked to give their perspectives on the condition of education (Marshall et al., 2022). These surveys showed that teachers are currently experiencing exhaustion due to the nature of their jobs (Marshall et al., 2022). Changes in school leadership, school threats, new curriculum, increased professional development, and filling in for vacant roles all cause undue stress on their physical, psychological, and emotional health (Marshall et al., 2022). Exhaustion is understood to be mental and emotional fatigue (Maslach et al., 1996). Exhausted teachers are not emotionally available to their students, are less able to produce quality instruction, and are most at risk for attrition (Sandmeier et al., 2022). Teachers are currently in a position where they are striving to meet lower-level needs, which reduces their ability to be their optimal selves for their students (Nair, 2022). Welzel (2013) states teachers have moved from thriving to barely surviving. This reduces their ability to focus on well-being since most of their energy is devoted to maintenance (Nair, 2022). This study attempted to study the different needs of teachers and how prayer related to these needs and influenced their decisions to remain in the profession.

The Workload

One key finding from the NCES teacher survey 2020-2021 was that teachers worked more hours than they were contracted for (Provaznik et al., 2022). The heavier workload led to stress, anxiety, and depression (Kim et al., 2022). Teachers also experienced taxation on their emotional health when parents got upset with them for policy issues beyond their control (Marshall et al., 2022). Teachers needed access to counselors. They lacked access to substitute teachers, lacked more resources, and did not have needed mental health days (Marshall et al., 2022). The long work hours contributed to inadequate time distribution toward recovery, leaving teachers in a perpetuating cycle of work, stress, exhaustion, and depletion (Sandmeier et al., 2022). Sandmeier et al. (2022) also found a direct correlation between teacher's well-being and student outcomes. Huyghebaert et al. (2018) also studied the relationship between workload and exhaustion. In their study, they found that teachers who had a heavy workload reported lower job satisfaction. In addition to this, teachers with a heavier workload reported increased mental fatigue and work-family conflicts. The workload issue needed to be addressed because it contributed to teacher's needs, well-being, and attrition rates. This study addressed the workload issue regarding teacher attrition rates considering the hierarchy of needs.

The Salary

According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the annual median pay for elementary and secondary teachers in 2022 was $62,930 (BLS, 2023). The average annual median income for private school elementary and secondary teachers in 2022 was $58,640 (BLS, 2023). According to the National Education Association (NEA), educator pay was not keeping up with inflation, and currently, educator pay is at a 6% decline on average (NEA, 2023). The inflation rate translates to $3,600 less income than in previous years. The numbers were even

more concerning when considering wages at the state level. The average starting salary for

teachers in Mississippi was $37,729 (NEA, 2023). South Dakota was the runner-up, with a

teacher pay of $41,170 (NEA, 2023). The statistics were striking when considering the private

school teachers' salaries. According to House Bill 1559, private schools in Missouri were exempt

from the minimum wage requirements, meaning many private school teachers in the state earned

below minimum wage (HB1559). For example, private school teachers in Missouri earned an

average of $17 per hour (Zip Recruiter). Considering the long hours, livable wages, and gross

earnings per individual, many teachers were edging close to the poverty line regarding their pay

scale (MIT, 2024). The issue of teacher salaries needed to be analyzed considering the hierarchy

of needs since this need contributed to teacher well-being and the nationwide problem of teacher

attrition. This study attempted to study national teacher salaries as they pertained to the current

teacher attrition rates.

Table 1

Living Wage Calculator

	1 Adult				2 Adults (1 working)			
	0 Child.	1 Child	2 Child.	3 Child.	0 Child.	1 Child	2 Child.	3 Child.
Food	4196	6185	9277	12330	7692	9575	12331	15035
Childcare	0	9423	18422	25313	0	0	0	0
Medical	3208	8227	8087	8666	6643	8087	8666	8159
Housing	9843	12875	12875	16903	10472	12875	12875	16903
Transportation	10204	11809	14875	17115	11809	14875	17115	17096
Civic	2889	5083	6398	7409	5083	6398	7409	6926

Other	4086	7294	7756	10720	7294	7756	10720	10305
Internet & Mobile	1464	1464	1464	1464	2034	2034	2034	2034
Required annual income after taxes	35889	62359	79152	99920	51026	61598	71150	76457
Annual taxes	6135	8880	10933	16025	7316	7979	8379	7715
Required annual income before taxes	42024	71239	90085	115945	58343	69578	79529	84172

Note. Adapted from *Living Wage Calculator* by C. A. Nadeau, 2024.

https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/29. Copyright 2024 by the Massachusetts Institute of

Technology.

The Students' Experiences

Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond (2019) suggested that there are critical factors

impacting teacher demands. These factors included student-teacher ratio changes, teacher

preparation, enrollment trends, and new teacher entry rates. Regarding enrollment, the US saw a

significant increase in student enrollment in the 1940s during the baby boom, which peaked in

the 1970s (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). During the 1980s, there was another significant increase in

student enrollment, and the numbers have been increasing ever since (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023).

Although there was an increase in student population, student scores from grades 4-8

substantially declined between 2018 and 2022 in math and reading (Condition of Education,

2023). According to the NCES, standardized test results for 13-year-olds in the 2021-2022

school year were the lowest in a decade (Nation's Report Card, 2023). According to the Nation's Report Card (2023), teacher quality was one of the three main reasons for this predicament.

There was also a significant disparity between the demographics of students enrolled in school versus the demographics of the teachers (Condition of Education, 2023). Pre-K through 12th-grade enrollment during 2021 demographics were as follows: 22.4 million were White, 14.1 million were Hispanic, 7.4 million were Black, 2.7 million were Asian, 0.5 million were American Indian/Alaska Native, 185,000 were Pacific Islander, and 2.3 million were listed as other (Condition of Education, 2023).

Since the pandemic, mental health issues in students have also increased (Condition of Education, 2023), with an average of 70% of the schools in the public school system reportedly seeing an increase in students seeking mental health services. According to Dorais and Gutierrez (2021), mental health concerns were also increasing on college campuses. However, the support staff was limited. This study attempted to address the issue of how teacher well-being is related to student well-being and the nationwide attrition rates.

Professional Development

Each state produced different professional development requirements that must be completed yearly (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.). For example, the Department of Education in Missouri (DESE) requires 20 professional development hours annually until the teachers receive a lifetime certificate (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.). The professional development hours included staff meetings, school service days, and parent-teacher conferences teachers must attend. Since teachers often work more hours than they are contracted to work, this study considered this critical because teachers needed time to rest and regroup to avoid burnout.

Decision Making

On average, educational leaders were reported to make 46 decisions daily (Kinchington, 2020; Stark & Koslouski, 2022). Some of those decisions impacted a few members of the school body, while others affected a larger group. Those decisions were interconnected to the individual actualizing them, a particular subject to the hierarchy of needs. Aristotle coined the term phronesis, which is the type of knowledge that refers to applied wisdom (Kinchington, 2020). He defined this type of wisdom as knowledge that can take the most appropriate action in each situation while serving the common good (Kinchington, 2020). He said that those actions must be motivated by values and ethics. Educators must be able to access that type of wisdom because they are responsible for the decisions made on behalf of the school. They are required daily to operate in wisdom, carefully making judgment calls that will impact their schools' well-being. This study attempted to understand how prayer influences the decision-making process of teachers in general and, more specifically, their decision to remain in the profession.

Teacher Attrition

Teacher attrition rates in the United States have nearly doubled in the past decade, with 40% of public schools and 30-35% of private schools struggling to hire new teachers (Irwin et al., 2023). In 2020-2021, 40% of public schools had vacant teaching positions (Condition of Education, 2023). Between 2011-2012, the average number of vacant teaching positions was around 17% (Condition of Education, 2023). From 2012-2020, teacher preparation programs saw a 30% decline in enrollment (Condition of Education, 2023). According to Fox et al. (2023), stress and burnout were the primary reasons for this attrition rate.

Since the 1980s, the teacher force in the United States has been decreasing alarmingly (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). In 1992, national attrition rates were listed at 5.1% (Carver-Thomas &

Darling-Hammond, 2019). In 2011-2013, 67% of the turnover rate was due to preretirement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The national attrition rate for educators in the 2020-2021 school year was 6% (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2023). The national attrition rate for educators in the 2021-2022 school year was 10% (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2023). This 4% difference means 114,000 more teachers than usual have left their jobs within one school year alone (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2023). This rate is also striking for principals, with the national attrition rate in the 2021-2022 school year listed at 16% (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2023). As a result, much attention has been brought to teacher attrition.

Teacher Attrition Defined

Teacher attrition, often used interchangeably with teacher turnover, refers to teachers who leave the workforce voluntarily preretirement (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). Preretirement indicates that teachers leave voluntarily before the legal retirement age (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). There is a difference between teacher attrition and teacher migration, those who transfer to another educational setting (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). The current problem is that teachers leave before retirement age, causing many adverse effects on the school system.

Teacher attrition has become an issue at the governmental and institutional levels (Madigan et al., 2021). Teacher attrition impacts the labor market negatively as teachers who leave their jobs in masses prompt school closures (Richards et al., 2020). These closures affect the careers of tenured teachers and other underrepresented minorities, which creates a domino effect, promoting more attrition in a field that is already struggling to keep a steady workforce (Richards et al., 2020). This study attempted to study how prayer relates to teacher's well-being and influences current attrition rates.

Statistics Related to Teacher Attrition

Current assumptions regarding teacher turnover and its outcomes are that there aren't enough new teachers entering the profession; too many teachers are retiring, leading to poor school performance (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). Data shows that there are, in fact, enough new teachers in the pool to cover the number of retiring teachers and the influx in student enrollment (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). The number of teachers employed is twice the number of students enrolled (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). There aren't, however, enough teachers in the pool to cover preretirement attrition rates (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is a government agency that produces statistical information for the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) (Provasnik et al., 2022). The NCES administers surveys that track who is leaving, why they are leaving, where they are going, and which students are impacted (Carver-Thomas and Darling Hammond, 2019; Goldring et al., 2014). These surveys have been used in studies to understand better the motives behind teacher attrition, the consequences of teacher attrition, and the current strategies in place to address teacher attrition (Carver-Thomas and Darling Hammond; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). One of these surveys is the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). The SASS survey has been administered in cycles since 1987 (SASS). It is a set of questionnaires that includes a representative sample of educators from elementary and secondary schools in the nation (NCES). The following date ranges include the processes for each administration: 1990-1991; 1993-1994; 1999-2000; 2003-2004; 2007-2008; 2011-2012; 2015-2016; 2017-2018 (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2019; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). These surveys have been administered in public, private, and charter schools, among all the 50 states in the US, to 11,000 schools and over 40,000 teachers (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). Another survey is the Teacher Follow-up Survey

(TFS). The TFS has been administered to 6,000 teachers and tracks teacher attrition versus teacher migration (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023).

The TFS questionnaire asked teachers to disclose their reasons for leaving (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023), and teachers expressed reasons for resigning, including school characteristics, subject area, workplace conditions, and preparation pathway. The type of teacher preparation program that teachers go through also significantly affects their tendencies toward preretirement turnover (Guthery & Bailes, 2022). Data shows that teacher attrition is also directly related to school leadership and organizational conditions, including lack of administrative support, teacher salaries, and alternative certification routes (Carver-Thomas and Darling Hammond, 2019; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). The lack of administrative support was, in fact, the most predictive factor for turnover, with teachers being twice as likely to leave (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2019).

Data suggest teacher turnover is more likely in low-income schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2019). The teacher turnover is highest among urban, high-poverty, and students of color, with those schools seeing 12-14% attrition (Dilberty & Schwartz, 2023). Meanwhile, rural schools and high-poverty schools saw a principal turnover rate of 21-23% (Dilberty & Schwartz, 2023). Title I schools have a high percentage of low-income students as these schools saw teacher turnover 50% more than non-Title I schools. (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2019). Schools serving students of color saw a more than 70% turnover rate than schools with 10% or fewer students of color (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2019). Where less than one-third of the shortage is due to regular retirement, about 90% is due to the preretirement rate (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2019; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). This

study attempted to understand how prayer relates to the current statistics surrounding teacher attrition.

Consequences of Teacher Attrition

Teacher turnover has had many academic and financial consequences for a school's performance, such as educational and economic costs (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). Teacher turnover indirectly impacts student outcomes. Hiring inexperienced and unqualified teachers, cutting classes, and increasing class sizes negatively affect student learning (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). Teacher turnover leads to labor market imbalances as schools experience financial replacement costs (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2019). Consequences of teacher turnover also include more hiring difficulties and a more difficult time making school improvements (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2019). This study attempted to understand how prayer relates to the consequences of teacher attrition.

Proposed Solutions

Fox et al. (2023) have studied the importance of intervention methods for educator well-being in response to nationwide teacher attrition. Data suggests that effective school leadership and improved organizational conditions may help teacher shortages and improve school performance (Ingersoll & Tram, 2023). The current response to teacher turnover has been at the policy level, where schools and districts have implemented various recruitment initiatives such as scholarships, loan forgiveness, alternate certification programs, bonuses, and mid-career change programs (Carver-Thomas and Darling Hammond, 2019; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). Ninety percent of districts experienced policy changes due to teacher attrition (Dilberti & Schwartz, 2023). These changes included increased pay, alternate pathway preparation programs, and easing teaching requirements (Dilberti & Schwartz, 2023). This study sought to mitigate the gap

in the research on prayer and its relation to teacher attrition by studying the experiences of Christian school teachers in the Midwest who practice consistent prayer.

Teacher Well-being

There is no standard definition for educators' well-being, but universal signs indicate individual well-being (Blasoc-Belled & Alinet, 2022; Cobo-Rendón et al., 2020; Hine et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2020). These signs include physical health, psychological health, the meeting of basic human needs, autonomy, and job satisfaction. Maslow's hierarchy of needs posits that all living organisms possess the exact needs, albeit to different degrees and in increasing measures (Maslow, 1943). Human beings have specific needs that cannot be avoided or ignored (Moreno-Casado et al., 2022; Walker, 2020).

Teachers' well-being is correlated to numerous issues within the school system. Teachers' well-being affects their classroom performance, academic performance, psychological stress, and relational health (Fox et al., 2023; Hine et al., 2022). Teachers' emotional dispositions shape the environmental climate in their classrooms because expressing positive emotions fosters a healthy relationship with their students; however, expressing negative emotions inhibits students' progress (Hine et al., 2022; Stark & Koslouski, 2022).

Teachers serve a unique role in that they are faced daily with the needs frustration of students in the areas of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Lindert et al., 2022; Walker, 2020). Special education teachers have an increasingly laborious role as they deal with unique emotional needs (Stark, 2022). In addition to the emotional demands of their job, work pressures such as inadequate pay and lack of resources affect educators' well-being (Fox, 2023; Frey et al., 2022). Work-related stress is among the highest in education compared to other professions (Walker, 2020).

The task of educators is full of varied responsibilities. These responsibilities often present significant challenges for educators, regardless of their expertise in the field (Eadie et al., 2022; McIntosh & Rima, 2007). The educator role is also demanding because it is time-consuming and takes up a lot of emotional energy (Poulou, 2020). According to Warner and Wilder (2016), humans naturally possess six innate negative emotions: anger, fear, sadness, shame, disgust, and hopeless despair. The hierarchy of needs theory suggests that these emotions must be met with a response because they are part of the psychological needs of individuals (Maslow, 1943). If human desires are the fuel for satisfaction (Waterfield, 2018), how educators respond to challenging emotions provoked by prevalent daily situations determines their effectiveness as educators.

Much research has been dedicated to increasing teacher effectiveness in the classroom (Cann et al., 2022; Hine et al., 2022; Kinchington, 2020; Marzano, 2011). However, the challenges that present themselves will continue to hinge on the well-being of educators. With educators being humans who are subject to the hierarchy of needs, frustration, and satisfaction, they will only make decisions as far as they can reach with their unmet personal desires. This study sought to understand how prayer relates to the hierarchy of needs for teachers and their well-being.

Hierarchy of Needs Theory

In his paper, "A Theory of Human Motivation," Maslow (1943) references a few definitive conclusions that must be in place to ground his theory. The first conclusion is the integrated wholeness of an organism, also known as integration. Integration is essential in developing the hierarchy of needs, as it directly correlates to well-being. Integration is a significant term in biology (Wiley, 1966). It refers to the levels of activity that occur within the

human being from the most microscopic levels to the whole. The tiny components of the human cell enable the organism to function correctly, promoting homeostasis and a sense of well-being for the entire body system (Wiley, 1966). Disruptions to homeostasis, then, appear to be disruptions at the cellular level (Young, 1936). The minute structures of the human body (i.e., the mitochondria, chromosomes, endoplasmic reticulum, and nucleus, to name a few) have specific functions (Wiley, 1966). Disruptions at this level can cause a disturbance in the organism's homeostasis, affecting an individual's well-being (Young, 1936). According to Maslow (1943), when an individual is dominated by a particular physiological need, their philosophy of life changes concerning that need; for example, the starving man perceives utopia as a place with abundant food. For the starving man, access to unlimited food provides ultimate contentment; nothing else matters more, and every other need becomes less critical. Once the need for food is met, another need takes its place, and humans continue this quest for satisfaction driven by the need.

The second aspect of physiological needs is that basic consummatory needs are the primary channels for all the others (Maslow, 1943). Consummatory needs affect human decision-making processes, consistently altering the choices that are being made and how these choices are being made. The third aspect regarding physiological needs is that a higher need emerges when the organism fulfills a less dominating need. These needs are organized in order of relative prepotency (Maslow, 1943).

Research shows that when resources are limited, prayer is a coping strategy that many educators have adopted to deal with the challenges of their roles (South & McDowell, 2018; Walker, 2020). Prayer is linked to positive well-being as it acts as a buffer to stress (Parks-Stamm, Pollack, and Hill, 2020). This is important given that the unmet needs that result in stress

affect educators' decision-making. Since teacher attrition is a decision that many educators have been making, this hermeneutical phenomenology explored the lived experiences of educators in Christian schools in the Midwest, including how consistent prayer relates to teachers' choices to remain in the profession.

Teacher Needs

Ryan and Deci (2017) define needs as essential nutrients for well-being. An established correlation exists between teachers' needs satisfaction and teacher motivation, psychological health, and career commitment (Poulou, 2020). An established correlation exists between teachers' unmet needs and teacher burnout (Poulou, 2020). There appeared to be a direct correlation between teachers' motivation and students' metacognition and self-regulated learning (Jud et al., 2023). Teacher motivation translates to positive student well-being and better academic results (Hornstra et al., 2021; Poulou, 2020). On the contrary, teachers with unmet needs cannot carry the same degree of motivation (Sandmeier et al., 2022). Teachers who are unmotivated due to unmet needs often perpetuate negative student well-being and poorer academic results (Hornstra et al., 2021; Poulou, 2020). This study attempted to address teachers' needs and the issue of teacher attrition and well-being.

Psychological Needs Defined

Humans possess three basic psychological needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan and Deci, 2017). These needs are essential for human well-being (Moreno-Casado et al., 2022; Rao & Min, 2018). Educators serve a unique role in that they are faced daily with students' needs and frustration in autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Lindert et al., 2022; Walker, 2020). Special education teachers have an increasingly laborious role as they deal with unique emotional needs (Stark, 2022). In addition to the emotional demands of their job, work pressures

such as inadequate pay and lack of resources affect educators' well-being (Fox, 2023; Hine, 2022). Work-related stress is among the highest in education compared to other professions (Walker, 2020). Chirico et al. (2019) define burnout as chronic work strain. Three signs of burnout in teachers include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced efficacy as a professional. According to Chirico et al. (2019), burnout syndrome poses a psychosocial risk factor in the workplace, and organizations must find remedies to mitigate these risks and provide a healthy working environment. This study sought to understand and address teachers' psychological needs and well-being.

The Need for Competence

The need for competence can be described as the human desire to master something and, from that place, to cause an effect on the environment (Ryan and Deci, 2017). Teachers burdened with tasks must have their competence needs met (Weigelt et al., 2019). When teachers have more work they can't complete at school, they take their workload home and do weekend rumination, thinking about their unfinished tasks and associating them with personal feelings of failure (Weigelt et al., 2019). Continued workload burdens trigger and reinforce a cycle of the unmet psychological need for competence (Weigelt et al., 2019). This study sought to understand and address teachers' needs for competence concerning their well-being.

The Need for Autonomy

Autonomy is the need for individuals to make their own decisions without being pressured by someone else (Orazbayeva et al., 2021). Making decisions produces a sense of ownership and satisfaction with their job (Ryan and Deci, 2017). This specific need for autonomy directly correlates to teacher-student relationships, as teachers who do not have their needs for autonomy met negatively impact teacher-student relationships (Hornstra et al., 2021;

Poulou, 2020). There is also a correlation between teachers' satisfaction of needs and students'

motivation (Hornstra et al., 2021). Sandmeier et al. (2022) found that teachers who had their

needs for autonomy met were less likely to engage in behavior that would lead to exhaustion.

The need for autonomy is especially essential for educational leaders since they can develop

policies that make room for individual autonomy (Sandmeier et al., 2022). This study sought to

understand and address teachers' needs for autonomy related to their well-being.

The Need for Relatedness

The need for relatedness is for humans to be connected to a group in which they feel they

can contribute and belong (Orazbayeva et al., 2021). Teachers often sacrifice their needs for

relatedness for the need for competence by working overtime instead of spending time with

family and friends (Ryan and Deci, 2017), which takes a toll on their well-being. School

leadership directly affects the teachers' needs satisfaction for relatedness (Schoch et al., 2019).

There are two ways that school administration positively impacts teachers' demands for

relatedness (Schoch et al., 2021). When a school principal invests in encouraging and

commending a teacher, this personal recognition meets the need for relatedness (Schoch et al.,

2021). When a principal discusses the organization's mission with the team at large, it creates a

sense of comradery, fostering the group identity and relatedness among peers (Schoch et al.,

2021). This study sought to understand and address teachers' needs for relatedness as it supports

their well-being.

Physiological Needs

All humans possess the basic physiological needs for breathing, food, water, shelter,

clothing, and sleep (Maslow, 1943). Studies show teachers need to sleep more than they

currently are (Huyghebaert et al., 2018). The workload and emotional exhaustion can cause sleep

pattern interruptions in the most committed teachers (Huyghebaert et al., 2018). The lack of sleep is associated with emotional exhaustion, reduced performance, and job dissatisfaction (Huyghebaert et al., 2018). Job dissatisfaction contributes to teacher attrition (Irwin et al., 2023).

There also has been an increase in teacher victimization in the workplace (Berkowitz et al., 2022). This includes verbal threats, physical threats, and harassment (Berkowitz et al., 2022). According to one study, teachers regularly report being victims of foul language and inappropriate behavior (Berkowitz et al., 2022). Teachers are humans with the need to feel safe. This need is currently threatened and contributes to the stress on teacher well-being.

Human beings have a common need for friendship, family, intimacy, and a sense of connection (Maslow, 1943). A sense of belonging drives human behavior (Allen, 2020) and contributes to an individual's well-being. Educators who feel supported by their administration have a stronger sense of belonging (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2019). A stronger sense of belonging contributes to higher work engagement (Waller, 2020) and confidence. Educators who feel like they belong also become more competent, and the feeling of competence contributes further to feelings of belonging (Filstad et al., 2019). Moreover, the sense of belonging in teachers fosters a sense of belonging in their students (Allen, 2020), contributing to positive student outcomes. When teachers' needs are met, students' needs are more likely to be met. When teachers experience needs frustration, students are likelier to experience the same. All teachers have the basic needs of confidence, achievement, respect for others, and the desire to be unique (Maslow, 1943). All teachers have the innate needs for morality, creativity, spontaneity, acceptance, experience, purpose, meaning, and inner potential (Maslow, 1943). Unmet needs negatively affect teachers' well-being and motivation, leading to teacher attrition (Hornstra et al., 2021;

Poulou, 2020; Sandmeier et al., 2022). This study sought to understand and address teachers'

unmet needs and their well-being.

Current Responses

Educators worldwide are navigating the district and schoolwide demands by seeking out

ways they can personally regain some strength to avoid reaching the point of burnout (Fox et al.,

2023; Stark & Koslouski, 2022; Walker, 2020). For instance, principals in Canada and Australia

face these needs by reaching out to their friends, getting therapeutic counseling, and finding

comfort in their family as methods to cope with the stress and anxiety that plagues the well-being

of educational leaders; meanwhile, academic leaders in Jamaica, primarily rely on prayer as a

method of coping (Meints et al., 2023; Moreno-Casado et al., 2022). The Moreno-Casado et al.

(2022) study reveals that most Jamaican educational leaders rely on prayer to deal with the stress

and anxiety of their role because they have no other resources. Meanwhile, leaders in the United

States are looking to implement curriculum and hire mental health practitioners to help alleviate

some of the stressors and increase student needs satisfaction (Frey et al., 2022), alleviating their

leadership stressors. Still, other educational leaders in more developed countries, such as

Australia and the Netherlands, resort to self-medication or physical activities to relieve their

stressors and improve their well-being (Walker, 2020).

Contrary to the idea that prayer positively affects the well-being of educational leaders, a

study by Moreno-Casado et al. (2022) suggests that prayer is a coping mechanism for

educational leaders in Jamaica because psychological struggles are deemed a weakness in their

culture, and the discussion surrounding mental health is taboo; the stereotype behind mental

health needs has caused these individuals to rely on prayer as the only source of strength because

clinical help is not an option. Other researchers suggest that prayer as a coping method is

perceived as being rooted in religious belief (Thunstrom & Noy, 2022; Wan, 2021). Still, others believe disadvantaged groups rely more on prayer and believe in its efficacy, while those more fortunate often see it as an emotional response to different situations present (Froese & Uecker, 2022).

Educational and policy leaders must recognize that their role involves meeting the needs of their school body; as such, they must be prepared to provide and promote resources that would meet these needs while maintaining their sense of well-being (Frey et al., 2022). Because educational leaders impact a wide range of individuals, they must help their teachers cope with their stress and anxiety, increasing work demands, and overall school needs (Moreno-Casado et al., 2022). This study sought to address the current responses to teacher attrition, considering the hierarchy of needs and the concept of prayer.

Prayer

Prayer is a conversation with God where people disclose their thoughts and feelings to receive healing, hope, and answers in return (Suciadi, 2021). Prayer is continuing a conversation with God initiated by God (Keller, 2014). Keller (2014) expresses that prayer cannot be limited to a simple definition. Prayer is a communicative response to knowing God. It is a sign that the Spirit has entered a person's heart. It is a natural human instinct. According to John Calvin's discussion of *divinitatis sensum*, all human beings, made in the image of God, have an inborn awareness of divinity (Keller, 2014). This produces in them the instinct to pray. When faced with a painful experience, the innate primal response is a prayerful cry for help (Keller, 2014). Keller also depicts prayer as a spiritual gift (John 1:12-13; 3:5; Ga; 4:5-6), where once a person is born

again, the conversation between man and God is akin to a father and son. He further describes

prayer as a striving (Isaiah 64:7), an entryway, and an encounter. According to Keller:

> Prayer is the only entryway into genuine self-knowledge. It is also the primary way we
>
> experience deep change- the reordering of our loves. It is the way we know God, the way
>
> we finally treat God as God. Prayer is the key to everything we need to do and be in life.
>
> We must learn to pray. We have to. (2014, p. 18)

Studies show that disclosing personal distress is linked to mental health and well-being

(Zarzycka and Krok, 2021). It was essential to look at ways prayer relates to well-being because

teacher attrition is connected to the well-being of teachers. The concept of prayer is deeply

rooted in religion and personal beliefs about its implications; people pray because their culture

prays or lack in prayer because their environment lacks prayer (Dewhurst, 2022; Froese &

Uecker, 2022; Thunstrom & Noy, 2022; Zarycka & Krok, 2020). This study aimed to describe

the relationship between prayer, needs, and teachers' well-being in Christian schools in the

Midwest who practice consistent prayer, especially concerning their decisions to remain in their

profession.

Biblical Evidence of Prayer

We must consider what Scripture says about the purpose of prayer for humans (Keller,

2014). Hebrews 4:14-16 encourages us to confidently approach God's throne to receive mercy

and grace to help us in need (*King James Bible*, 2017). Hebrews 7:25 tells us that He can

completely save those who come to God through Him because He lives to intercede for them

(*King James Bible*, 2017). Romans 8:26-27 tells us that the Spirit helps us in our weakness; when

we do not know what to pray, the Spirit intercedes for us with wordless groans (*King James*

Bible, 2017).

The individuals mentioned in the Bible prayed often. Hannah prayed to God to conceive a child (*King James Bible*, 2017, 1 Samuel 1:27), and God answered her prayer by giving her a son. Daniel prayed three times daily prayers of confession, supplication, and adoration (*King James Bible*, 2017, Daniel 6). Daniel was an administrator of King Nebuchadnezzar and had governmental authority. Daniel prayed and received answers to his prayers. During one of his prayers, a messenger of the Lord came to him and said, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them" (*King James Bible*, 2017, Daniel 10:12). Paul prayed for the believers in Christ (*King James Bible*, 2017, Ephesians 1:15-19). During his sufferings, Job prayed to God, uttering prayers of adoration and thanksgiving (*King James Bible*, 2017, Job 1), petitioning (*King James Bible*, 2017, Job 3), and confessing/repenting (*King James Bible*, 2017, Job 42). Gideon prayed to the Lord a prayer of petition. He asked that the fleece be wet one day and dry the next as a sign that the Lord will save Israel (*King James Bible*, 2017, Judges 6). The Book of Psalms is a book full of prayers of David unto God. In Psalm 59, David prays a petition to God to be delivered from his enemies (*King James Bible*, 2017).

Jonah made a prayer of petition to the Lord to be delivered out of the belly of a whale (*King James Bible*, 2017, Jonah 2). Moses prayed to the Lord a prayer of petition and intercession, asking for God's presence (*King James Bible*, 2017, Exodus 32). God answered Moses with a promise that His presence would go before them. He hid Moses in the cleft of a rock, allowing His Presence to pass before Him. Moses secured the liberation of Israel from Egypt through prayer (Keller, 2014). Nehemiah prayed to God, confessing the sins of his people and asking God to remember his covenant to them (*King James Bible*, 2017, Nehemiah 1:4-11).

Solomon prayed for wisdom (*King James Bible*, 2017, 2 Chronicles 1:10) and prayed as he dedicated the temple (*King James Bible*, 2017, 1 Kings 8). Jesus prayed in solitude (*King James Bible*, 2017, Mark 1:35). He prayed with loud cries and tears (*King James Bible*, 2017, Hebrews 5:7). He made prayers of petition during his suffering (*King James Bible*, 2017, Luke 22:42). He prayed for his enemies. At the same time, he was being crucified (*King James Bible*, 2017, Luke 23:34). In Luke 23:46, we read that Jesus prayed with His last breath (*King James Bible*, 2017).

In the Old Testament, all the patriarchs practiced prayer. Abraham prayed for God to spare the city of Sodom (*King James Bible*, 2017, Genesis 18), Isaac prayed for an heir (*King James Bible*, 2017, Genesis 25), and Jacob prayed for protection (*King James Bible*, 2017, Genesis 32). The patriarchs were not the only ones who prayed. Jeremiah encourages the Israelites to lift their hearts and hands to God (*King James Bible*, 2017, Lamentations 3:41). The apostles were devoted to prayer (*King James Bible*, 2017, Acts 1:14; *King James Bible*, 2017, Acts 2:42). The church prayed earnestly for Peter while he was imprisoned (*King James Bible*, 2017, Acts 12:5). The apostle James instructs believers to pray for one another that they may be healed, emphasizing that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (*King James Bible*, 2017, James 5:16). The apostle Paul encourages believers to boldly approach God's throne to receive grace and mercy in times of need (*King James Bible*, 2017, Hebrews 4:16). In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, the apostle Paul encourages the believers to pray without ceasing (*King James Bible*, 2017). Paul instructs people to make prayers of thanksgiving, petition, and intercession for kings and those in authority (*King James Bible*, 2017, 1 Timothy 2:1). Paul makes prayers of thanksgiving and petition for the believers Ephesus (*King James Bible*, 2017, Ephesians 1:15-20) that they would know God better.

Jesus gave His disciples a blueprint of how to pray. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus teaches his disciples to make prayers of petition, asking for daily bread and being delivered from evil (*King James Bible*, 2017, Matthew 6:9-13). He said some demons can only be cast out through prayer (*King James Bible*, 2017, Mark 9:29). Jesus instructed against hypocritical prayers (*King James Bible*, 2017, Matthew 6:5). In Matthew 5:44, we learn that Jesus taught people to pray for those persecuting them (*King James Bible*, 2017).

Categories of Prayer

Keller (2014) notes the traditional forms of prayer: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication as concrete practices and profound experiences. We see these prayers illustrated in the Psalms of David and throughout the scriptures. The Lord's prayer includes adoration, petition, thanksgiving, and confession (Keller, 2014). Zarzycka and Krok (2021) categorize prayer into five types: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, and reception. Prayers of adoration refer to worshipping God; prayers of confession are acknowledgments of fault towards God; prayers of thanksgiving are a way of giving thanks to God; prayers of supplication indicate a request from God; prayers of reception indicate the individual is waiting on God to receive what they pray for (Zarzycka and Krok, 2021). These prayer types uniquely correlate to mental health (Whittinton and Scher, 2010). The prayer of adoration has a positive correlation with optimism and meaning and a negative correlation with depression; the prayer of thanksgiving has a positive correlation with well-being, self-esteem, and optimism and a negative correlation with depression; the prayer of reception has a positive correlation to self-esteem, meaning in life, and optimism and a negative correlation with depression; the prayer of confession has a negative correlation with well-being, self-esteem, and optimism (Whittinton and Scher, 2010). Parks-Stamm et al. (2020) categorize prayer types by focus: inward prayer (with a

focus on self), outward prayer (with a focus on others), and upward prayer (with a focus on the divine). The correlation between inward and outward prayer and well-being was positive since it facilitated social interaction between the individual and the divine (Parks-Stamm et al., 2020).

Prayer and Well-being

Many studies suggest that prayer correlates positively with increased well-being (South & McDowell, 2018; Stamm et al., 2020; Wan, 2021). Research shows that when resources are limited, prayer is a coping strategy that many educators have adopted to deal with the challenges of their roles (South & McDowell, 2018; Walker, 2020). A meta-analysis of the relationship between consistent prayer and student outcomes suggests a significant relationship between consistent prayer and students' behavioral and academic outcomes (Fides et al., 2023; Jeynes, 2020). This relationship was positive, where student outcomes, both educational and social, seemingly improved due to prayer (Jeynes, 2020).

Biblical Aspects of Prayer

Plante et al. (2010) discuss the value of centering prayer and its effects on well-being. Centering prayer is rooted in Christianity and is a form of intentional meditation. Centering prayer helps pull our attention away from the regular flow of thoughts and pull us into our spiritual nature (Keating, 2002). Keating (2002) describes the necessity for prayer as a method of refreshing us as much as we need food, rest, sleep, and water. In centering prayer, individuals let go of all competing thoughts and focus on a single, sacred word as one consents to God (Keating, 2002). The individual would sit in silence and focus on the one sacred word; this is sufficient to keep them awake and engaged but not distracted by competing thoughts (Keating, 2002). There should be no sense of expectation. Instead, this centering prayer is a posture of surrender to God in quietness (Keating, 2002).

Prayer is linked to positive well-being as it acts as a buffer to stress (Parks-Stamm, Pollack, and Hill, 2020). Many educators who practice consistent prayer express that they experience a sense of peace (Froese & Uecker, 2022; Moreno-Casado et al., 2022; South & McDowell, 2018), they are less worried about how to make ends meet for their school, they are not as concerned with the future and can focus in on the present, they are more available to their families and do not take the burdens of their work home with them each day (Hosseini et al., 2022; Moreno-Casado et al., 2022). Dorais et al. (2022) examined the effects of centering prayer on individual resilience and found a relationship between daily prayer and relational well-being. This is important because one of the three psychological needs teachers have is the need for relatedness. Dorais & Gutierrez (2021) found a positive trend between contemplation and well-being, where centering meditation promotes relational well-being. Centering mediation causes positive spiritual transcendence, increasing resilience.

The Bible encourages believers to pray on many occasions. In the 8th century BC, the Israelites faced spiritual decline, social injustice, and political turmoil (Suciadi, 2021). In response to these situations, Isaiah 62:6-7 encourages the people to pray without ceasing (Suciadi, 2021). The prayers of the Israelites offered them hope and resilience in troubling times (Suciadi, 2021). Romans encourages believers to pray constantly (*King James Bible*, 2017, Romans 12:19). Colossians instructs people to be steadfast in prayer and to do so with thanksgiving (*King James Bible*, 2017, Colossians 4:2). The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus lifted prayers and supplications to His Heavenly Father (*King James Bible*, 2017, Hebrews 5:7). James instructs believers to pray during suffering and that the prayer of a righteous man has great power and works (*King James Bible*, 2017, James 5:13-16).

Benefits of Prayer

The prayer of supplication provides psychological benefits to individuals through resilience, satisfaction, and answers to life's problems (Suciadi, 2021). Research suggests prayer significantly influences self-control (Marcus and McCullough, 2021). Friese and Wanke (2014) suggests that participants who prayed before a suppression task could exercise self-control and not become depleted, unlike others who practiced free thought. Prayer acts as a buffer to the depletion of self-control (Friese and Wanke, 2014).

There is an established relationship between centering prayer and stress and anxiety (Fox et al., 2016). Illueca and Doolittle (2020) discussed a relationship between prayer and pain, where prayer is an adjunctive therapy for pain remedies. Over four weeks, students participating in a centering activity saw increased mindfulness and decreased stress levels (Dorais and Gutierrez, 2021).

Prayer and the Educator

Chirico et al. (2020) studied an Italian cohort of teachers. They studied spirituality and prayer on teacher stress and burnout. Their study found a large effect size. Teachers reported a reduction in emotional exhaustion, a decrease in psychological impairment, and an increase in job satisfaction. Chirico et al. (2020) found that prayer could be an effective therapy and preventative measure against burnout. Donoahoo et al. (2018) did a study with 27 teachers and exceptional education professionals using a mindfulness prayer intervention. Results showed a significant improvement in stress levels for those who practiced mindful prayer versus those who did not. Overall, the results showed a lower burnout rate for those who participated in the mindfulness prayer. A direct relationship exists between consistent prayer and educational

leadership (Zarzycka & Krok, 2021). When examined, the outcome of educators involves either meeting their students' and other constituents' needs or creating needs frustration.

This study aimed to explore this effect on a larger scale, hoping to improve the professional practice of how Christian school educators perceive and practice prayer. This study sought to inform the literature on the various themes that influence attrition, how prayer has influenced teachers' decisions to remain in their profession, and what other measures can be taken to further the success of teacher retention in education considering teachers' needs.

Summary

A literature review was conducted to study teacher attrition, well-being, needs, and overall educators' experiences practicing consistent prayer at Christian schools in the Midwest. This chapter presented the current peer-reviewed scholarly research on teacher attrition in light of Abraham Maslow's (1943) theory of the hierarchy of needs. The recurring themes found in this literature review included the current condition of education, teacher attrition, teacher well-being, teacher needs, and prayer. Teachers are experiencing workload stress (Provaznik et al., 2022), anxiety, and depression (Kim et al., 2022), causing them to leave the school system at alarming rates (Irwin et al., 2023). Teacher attrition causes adverse effects on the school system and job trends nationwide. Current research suggests poor school performance is a result of this attrition (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). The ramifications of these effects have yet to be determined. There is a dire need for teacher retention in the school system. The current methods designed to encourage teacher retention still do not address the basic human needs of individual teachers, presenting a gap in the literature. This study attempted to fill a gap in the literature regarding the need for more research on the experiences of educators in Christian educational settings who practice consistent prayer. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954) underpins this study by

explaining teachers' individual needs, describing how teachers experience consistent prayer, and understanding if teachers who practice consistent prayer choose to remain in their profession.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences, especially those related to the practice of consistent prayer and their decisions to remain in the profession, of educators in Christian schools in the Midwest. At this stage in the research, the concept of teachers who stay in or leave their positions pre-retirement will generally be defined as teacher attrition (Marzano et al., 2011; Zarzycka & Krok, 2021). This chapter focuses on the methodology of this research. It includes the following components: research design, research questions, setting and participants, researcher positionality, data collection plan and analysis, and trustworthiness.

Research Design

A qualitative research study was appropriate for this topic since it aimed to study educators' lived experiences in Christian schools (van Manen, 1990). This qualitative research design was a phenomenology, with the population comprised of educators who teach in Christian schools. Understanding the lived experiences of educators involves subjective openness, and as such, a hermeneutical phenomenological approach was used in this study (van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutical phenomenology is knowledge produced by observation and perception (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology was the appropriate research design for my dissertation because I studied a phenomenon - the experiences of Christian school educators practicing regular prayer. van Manen (1990) states that a hermeneutical phenomenological design seeks to study a specific phenomenon. My participants' reflections were documented to understand this phenomenon adequately. The subjects performed the intentional acts of prayer accompanied by the feelings that this intentionality produces, affecting their conscious perception of everything they do. One

special note about the characteristics of the phenomenology research question is that it does not seek out causal relationships (van Manen, 1990). I vividly described the participants' experiences while accounting for the fact that my questions must generate observations rather than conclusions about a cause-effect (van Manen, 1990).

Hermeneutical phenomenology involves the study of human experience and the reflection that these experiences produce (van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutical phenomenology studies human perceptions about the world around them (Dilthey, 2019). Phenomenology is knowledge that relies on intuition as opposed to empirical evidence. Hermeneutical phenomenology gives value to subjectivity, acknowledging that the reality typically considered objective depends on the subject (van Manen, 1990). Ideation (Husserl, 1931) is a critical concept in hermeneutical phenomenology. Ideation refers to when an individual has an experience in the real world; they interpret that experience via their conscious awareness, make meaning, and draw conclusions (Husserl, 1931). According to Husserl (1931)**,** as a person thinks, they uniquely hold onto the object in their mind, and doing so causes a specific behavior that would not be present in the same way without intentionality.

Research Questions

To conduct the research, a central research question and two sub-questions were established. The central research question focused on classroom teachers who practice consistent prayer. The central research question was used to generate several of the individual interview and focus group interview questions. The sub-questions concentrated on teachers' experiences in the classroom and their needs. These two sub-questions were also used to generate several of the individual interview and focus group interview questions.

Central Research Question

What are the classroom experiences of teachers at Christian schools who practice consistent prayer?

Sub-Question One

How do teachers describe their experiences with prayer related to their emotional and physical needs as educators?

Sub-Question Two

What factors are perceived by teachers as impacting job satisfaction with their needs?

Setting and Participants

The following section describes the setting and participants in this study. A general overview of the setting is followed by an introduction to the participants. The recruitment plan for the participants is also included in this section. Pseudonyms were used for all participants and schools in this study to protect anonymity.

Setting

The setting for this study included four different Christian schools in the Midwest. To protect everyone's identity, the pseudonyms Small Christian Schools (SCS1, SCS2, SCS3, SCS4) identified the four small Christian schools. These schools served Kindergarten students through seniors in high school in a Christian schooling environment. The schools were not affiliated with any denomination. They were led by a board of education and a leadership team of professionals in their fields. This setting was chosen because the leaders and faculty of these schools were part of a religious church that practices prayer in their city. This setting was

relevant to the study topic, focusing on educators in Christian schools who practiced consistent prayer.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 11 teachers from the four schools to allow for variation in gender, age group, grade level taught, and subject matter taught. The members were male and female participants aged 22-75 with various racial backgrounds. A demographic survey was included with the initial participation invitation to determine age and ethnicity. All of these participants have undergone professional development training. Part of this professional development included biblically focused training where prayer was discussed as a central theme to Christian education.

Recruitment Plan

Purposeful sampling was conducted in this study. The candidates must have had specific qualities to be selected for this study. Certain criteria were required before choosing the participants (Yin, 2017). This criterion included a minimum of one year serving in their positions at the schools, regular church attendance, and participants who practiced consistent Christian prayer. The sample pool at the schools contained 200 individuals. The sample size of this study consisted of 11 members from this sample pool, drawn from the faculty from the four schools. The members were male and female participants aged 22-75 with various ethnic backgrounds. These backgrounds included White American, Hispanic, English, Indian, Asian, and Dutch. Different backgrounds gave the researcher maximum variation, as multiple perspectives were accounted for (van Manen, 1990).

After securing IRB approval (see Appendix A), to inform the participants of the nature of this study and their right to withdraw, I sent an initial invitation to participate via email (see

Appendix B), including a demographic survey found in Appendix C. I asked that emails be

returned within a 1-week window. I obtained email addresses from the school administrators

(head of school) via networking or their school websites. One week after the initial invitation, a

follow-up recruitment email (see Appendix D) was sent with a 1-week window for return. If

enough participants were unavailable from the two schools, I planned to contact another private

school via email (see Appendix B) following the same procedures with a 1-week response time.

An informed consent letter was emailed upon securing the needed participants, found in

Appendix E. I asked for a response to this email within a week. In this letter, I shared that their

identity will not be disclosed, their information will remain confidential, and they will have

alternate names in the write-up. I included that physical information will be stored in a secure

folder in a private locked office, while electronic data will be held on an external hard drive.

Access to the hard drive required a password, while access to the private office required a key.

The initial research was to be stored indefinitely, and participants were given access to the

dissertation upon publication.

<div align="center">**Researcher's Positionality**</div>

Every researcher brings an interpretive framework and certain philosophical assumptions

into their research. This section describes my interpretive framework as that of a constructivist.

The philosophical assumption includes my Christian upbringing and the ideology of a Christian

worldview. The ontological assumption described is dualism. The epistemological assumption

varies and is discussed in more depth.

Interpretive Framework

Amongst the many interpretive frameworks in research, the constructivist perspective

best aligned with my goal as a qualitative researcher (Maxwell, 2012). As a leader in the field of

education, I aspire to challenge patterns of thought to sharpen my understanding of the world around me. What is unique about holding this interpretative framework is that the multiple meanings of language allow more exploration of the metanarratives I aspire to develop in my dissertation (Guba, 1990). As a native Romanian, my background in education affects my perspective toward challenging the subtexts in most of the information I consume. As such, it is valuable for me to recognize that my background influences my studies and utilize this understanding. As phenomenology is my research approach, carrying a skeptical approach from a constructivist framework is essential as I study the lived experiences of individuals (Maxwell, 2012).

Philosophical Assumptions

My philosophical assumptions come from my ethnic background and Christian upbringing. As an educator, I often consider the creation mandate in my work. In Genesis, we read that God commands man to be fruitful and to subdue all things on earth (Genesis 1:28, King James Bible). This ideology stems from a biblical worldview, which applies to my research in several ways. As I pursued a phenomenological study, I focused on teacher attrition within the school system. My role was not only to gain an understanding of the phenomenon but to challenge the perspectives surrounding that phenomenon. I did this by understanding how teachers who practice consistent prayer experienced needs frustration versus needs fulfillment, how this contributed to their well-being, and how this related to their thoughts regarding remaining in their position. In doing so, I could influence a particular education component by adding to the body of knowledge to influence transformation. This way, I allowed God to be glorified, even in education (*King James Bible*, 2017, Genesis 1:28).

Ontological Assumption

Ontology refers to the nature of reality, its attributes, and individuals' perceptions of reality (Guba, 1990). As a researcher, my position is to reflect on various themes observed during my research. My ontological assumption is dualism. I believe that physical and spiritual things exist and are not the same. As a Christian, I understand God created the material realm out of nothing while hovering over the waters as a spirit (*King James Bible*, 2017, Genesis 1:2). Many biblical passages discuss the duality of man as both spiritual and physical.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemology refers to how we know and understand things (Guba, 1990). As a researcher, I must recognize the value that individual experiences, though subjective, add to my research. As such, I must be immersed in the field with my subjects to gain enough data for rigorous analysis. It is difficult to assess where I fall as a researcher of empiricism, rationalism, constructivism, and skepticism. With a background in science, I could argue that empirical research is the only objective method of generating facts and constructing a theory. However, knowing and understanding the value of subjective experiences creates a dilemma in holding on to this position. I see myself as a skeptic because knowledge is infinite, at least when it comes to the wisdom offered by God. I can identify with rationalism because I appreciate factual evidence. I can also see constructivism because our interactions with one another construct knowledge. At this point, assigning just one fragment of the epistemological assumption to my research is challenging.

Axiological Assumption

Axiology refers to our view of ethics and morality (Guba, 1990). As a researcher, I identify my personal views and filter out biases. I can see how this assumption would be most

difficult for me as a researcher. The framework for my perspective of ethics and morality comes directly from my interpretation of scripture. It would be naïve of me to assume that I have all the correct perspectives and a pure theology, which are nonexistent. With the axiology position, I must hold fast to my values while acknowledging my values and biases.

Researcher's Role

As a researcher, I recognize that I am the human instrument in this study. All of the participants in this study are from different organizations of which I am not a part. I do not have any role in the research site beyond data collection. A potential bias I brought to the table is that I am a proponent of Christian prayer instead of any other form. This influenced how I conducted my analysis, as I limited my participants to teachers in Christian schools. I chose this particular design as a researcher because I was very interested in studying the concept of prayer and the lived experiences of educators, so phenomenology was the most fitting. My role in choosing this design implied that it would limit the research to Christian school settings. The study does not apply to all school settings. There are implications for data collection and analysis procedures with such a design. The data is subject to interpretation. The data in this phenomenology comes from individual educators who share their experiences. This entails their interpretation, as well as my interpretation of the data.

<div align="center">

Procedures

</div>

The procedures section in this study includes descriptions of the data collection plan, including how site permissions from gatekeepers are obtained and approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Additionally, this plan also includes participant recruitment methods. The data collection plan includes individual interviews, focus groups, and journaling. This method of collection is designed to achieve data triangulation. The data analysis plan in this section

highlights the processes of transcription, coding, and interpretation. Finally, the plan details the elements of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, ethical considerations, and my role in this study.

Data Collection Plan

In qualitative phenomenology, the researcher must employ specific data collection methods to generate quality information to obtain tested knowledge (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). However, there are many critical elements to data collection beyond the techniques used. These elements include acquiring site permissions, developing appropriate sampling strategies, accurately recording information, and securely storing data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

This qualitative research study used three data collection methods: individual interviews, focus groups, and journaling. The following section describes the data collection process for interviews, focus groups, and journaling. I conducted interviews with each participant. Before the interview, I asked the participants to be prepared to answer questions about how prayer relates to their role in education, their needs, their well-being, and their thoughts on attrition. I reflected on and analyzed the interview data in preparation for the focus groups. These data points were used as questions in the focus groups to explore the lived experiences of these teachers further.

Individual Interviews

The interview process is a structured conversation between the researcher and the participant, the knower, and the known (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interview procedures use sequences concerning Brinkmann and Kvale's (2015) seven stages of interview inquiry. The seven steps to interviewing include thematizing the interview project, designing, interviewing,

transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting. A copy of the initial interview is included in Appendix F. In this section, the initial four stages will be discussed.

The theme of the interview project was discussed verbally and in a formal letter to the participants. One interview was conducted with 11 participants individually via Zoom. During the initial part of the consultation, the purpose was to establish rapport with the participants. Questions were designed to be open-ended to create a variance in the responses (Morgan, 2022). During the interview's second half, the objective was to go more in-depth with the questions. Table 2 summarizes these questions.

Data collection during these interviews consisted of notetaking and audio recording. Notetaking increased the precision and accuracy of critical details. Recording of audio allowed for manual transcription of the data regarding the analysis. It also enabled me to pay attention to more information and control the direction of the interview. These recordings were stored on a password-protected drive. Participants were asked to confirm their agreement to permit audio and video recording during the interview. The digital transcripts and the manual notes were filed in a locked metal cabinet in my office.

Table 2

Individual Interview Questions

1. What skill do you think every teacher should have? CRQ

2. Please describe your current practice of prayer and meditation. CRQ

3. How do you utilize prayer when working in an educational environment? SQ1

4. How do you balance your life schedule to stay focused on your role in education? SQ3

5. What specific routine keeps you in the momentum as you embrace your role as an educator? SQ3

6. What are some specific examples of how you have responded to unforeseen events in your educational career? SQ3

7. Describe how prayer has influenced your role as an educator. CRQ

8. Describe successful events where prayer has positively impacted your role as an educator. CRQ

9. Describe any negative experiences you have had with prayer. CRQ

10. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with prayer and your role as a Christian educator? SQ3

These questions pertain to the problem and purpose of this qualitative research study. The purpose of conducting interviews for this qualitative phenomenology was to deeply understand the lived experiences of these educators who practice consistent prayer while working in a Christian school environment (van Manen, 1990). The topic was best developed as I heard directly from these individuals who shared their subjective experiences. I wanted to understand how teachers practice prayer, how it relates to their role in education, and what precisely they use prayer for.

Focus Groups

In addition to interviews, focus groups were conducted. This allowed multiple perspectives to be considered (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). These focus groups took place via Zoom. All focus groups were manually transcribed. As a technology backup, zoom video recording, and audio recording were used to ensure proper recording of the entirety of the interview should either system fail. Focus groups allowed a more tailored exploration of the topic because the groups were diverse. Observing more significant interactions between various educators and hearing multiple perspectives in a more extensive setting provided an advantage.

With both interviews and focus groups, gaining site access and permission from participants was one of the first elements of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Two focus groups were hosted. The first focus group consisted of five participants and the second focus group also consisted of five participants. The 11th participant was interviewed a second time separately, as they could not attend the focus group. The groups were formed from the participants at each school and included the individuals interviewed at those schools. The groups contained participants who taught different grade levels, such that multiple grade levels were represented in each group. Individuals were given set dates and times for the focus group meeting. The participants were notified of this via an emailed letter. Each focus group engaged with the same set of questions (See Appendix G). Table 3 below summarizes these questions. These questions were broad enough to allow and encourage participant dialogue and information to be built amongst the group. I also planned appropriate verbal transitions to keep the group on track and remain in control of the dialogue.

Table 3

Focus Group Questions

1. If you had to teach a class on one thing, what would you teach? CRQ

2. How do you define consistent prayer? CRQ, SQ3

3. What are some factors that impact your ability to perform your educational role? SQ3

4. Describe challenges you have encountered in your current position as an educator. SQ3

5. What are your opinions regarding prayer? CRQ, SQ3

6. How do you perceive the role of prayer for you as an educator? SQ1, SQ2

7. Describe an experience where you were affected by prayer. SQ3

8. What are your thoughts regarding the role of Christian educators in school settings? SQ3

9. What are your expectations for the school year regarding your role as an educator? SQ3

10. What are some obstacles regarding practicing consistent prayer? CRQ, SQ3

These questions were designed to build rapport with the individuals and address the central research question and sub-questions. They also created a snowball effect and allowed participants to respond to and offer more information regarding another participant's response. This method led to additional layers of generated questions and thoughts. Questions three and four were designed to promote this snowball effect. Questions one, five, and seven were intended to build rapport with the participants. I hoped to understand the individual challenges teachers face as educators.

Journal Prompts

Participants were also given two journal prompts of 150 words each. The journal prompts are found in Appendix H. The journal prompts were administered via a selected platform. The chosen platform used was Google Docs. Participants were informed of this task during the interviews and via email. Each participant received a link to the Google Folder with two separate prompts written on a Google Doc. Participants had access to their prompts on the day of their first interview. A link was emailed to them to access the prompt via the Google Drive platform. The journal prompts found in Appendix H included the necessary instructions for them to complete the task successfully. Participant prompts were shared directly with them, with restricted access to anyone else, via a secure link to Google Drive. Each prompt took between 10 and 15 minutes in total. I established May 24th, 2024, as the deadline for prompt submissions, giving them two weeks to complete the prompts successfully. This gave me ample time to analyze the data from the prompts. The first journal prompt asked participants to discuss the following: Discuss your understanding of prayer and its use in daily life. The second journal

prompt asks participants to discuss the following: Discuss times when your job has been stressful. Give specific examples of the situations. What was your solution to remedy the problem?

Data Analysis

The data analysis protocol used included the steps of data analysis by van Manen (1990). Additionally, the correlation between the noema and noesis was an essential element of phenomenology in qualitative data analysis (van Manen, 1990). The correlation between the noema and noesis sums up the intentionality of consciousness. Recognizing that the participant's subjective experiences are considered in such a study was imperative. Qualitative researchers must consider these elements to ensure data validity. Data analysis for individual interviews and focus groups included manual transcription and coding methods. I began by transcribing each personal interview and focus group interview by hand. I reviewed these transcriptions multiple times to ensure accuracy. I also sent these transcripts from the interview to each participant to complete the member-checking process. I then sent the transcript from each focus group discussion to the participants of the respective focus group for member checking as well. Once I transcribed each interview and focus group discussion, I went through it sentence by sentence and highlighted any string of words that conveyed an idea or a concept. This process began with in-vivo coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

I named the concepts generated from the interviews to indicate what this section discusses. Once I identified the codes, I moved toward thematic coding. Coding carefully analyzes significant data topics and draws out common themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I created a table that shows the initial codes, the grouped intermediate codes, and the resulting themes. Each code was listed in the table in the first column. I then assigned a color to similar

codes and highlighted them in the same color. These similar codes were then grouped in the

second column as intermediate codes. From these grouped intermediate codes, themes were

developed. I went through the coding in this manner with each interview I conducted. I analyzed

the pattern to understand the main overarching themes versus subthemes (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). This in-vivo coding method revealed themes that will be interpreted for meaning. The

interpretation of such themes sought to produce knowledge that could further inform the

literature on this topic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data analysis for journal prompts included manual transcription. These transcripts were

analyzed for data, and several themes were identified. I made sure to contextualize the lives of

these participants and how prayer relates to their role as an educator, their needs, their well-

being, and their perspective on attrition. I transcribed each word by copying/pasting it from each

participant's Google Doc to a Word Document. I reviewed these transcriptions multiple times to

ensure accuracy. Once I transcribed each journal prompt, I went through it sentence by sentence

and highlighted any string of words that conveyed an idea or a concept. This process began with

in-vivo coding and followed the previous pattern for data analysis. After the individual

interviews, journal prompts, and focus group discussions were individually analyzed, the data

analysis from these three sources was synthesized to allow for data triangulation. The themes

drawn from the data analysis were analyzed. Manual coding was used to draw out these themes

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I conducted another pattern analysis to understand the main

overarching themes versus subthemes across the three sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and synthesize the information.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness involves considering certain elements to ensure the research is valid. These elements include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Schwandt et al., 2007). These are the set criteria for conducting a phenomenological qualitative research study. In addition to these elements, I will discuss ethical considerations required for any study, as the research involves human participants.

Credibility

Credibility has to do with the internal validity of a study (Schwandt et al., 2007). To ensure credibility, I spent ample time observing and recording these notes. My engagement with the participants included one interview per person and, in addition, contained two focus group meetings. I aspired to have data triangulation, a method of acquiring evidence from various sources to highlight themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was achieved by coding data from literature, interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts. I included peer debriefing and member checking when conducting my data analysis to ensure accurate data collection.

Transferability

Transferability involves external validity and asks whether a study is reproducible in a particular setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I aimed to produce thick, descriptive data from the sites and samples (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I incorporated a maximum variation in my sample, specifically regarding age, gender, ethnicity, and years of experience in education. This reduced the limitations and accurately represented the population served at the sites.

Dependability

Dependability depends on how reliable a study is based on the associated data and how the data was acquired to minimize any threats to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It ensures the data can withstand changes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I planned to describe both the methods and procedures in depth. I created an audit trail for all research. All documentation was purposely filed both in hard copy and digital format. All notes about written data, interviews, focus groups, journal prompts, and reflexive notes were saved in individual and categorized file folders. An external audit occurred when the committee chair assigned to me audited the audit trail. I secured an expert researcher (outside of the committee appointed to my dissertation) to consult with them and review the findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability involves the ability to remain objective and produce objective results in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This specifically means that the data will drive the findings instead of my personal bias (Shenton, 2004). In this phenomenology, I aimed to document the participants' lived experiences and avoid including personal interpretations. All the memoing was included in this documentation. To reduce bias and bracket my presuppositions, I disclosed all intellectual and environmental predispositions to account for them. I included data-oriented and theoretical audit trail diagrams (Shenton, 2004).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations involve acquiring specific approvals when researching human subjects (Lincoln, 2009). I received written permission from all the gatekeepers and allowed them to ask questions regarding my study. I first acquired my research approval from Liberty

University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). I then approached the highest authority at the

chosen site and received written permission from the board chair and the school administrator.

Permissions

I secured approval from Liberty University's IRB before the commencement of the study

in January 2024, and procedures continued through May 2024. I secured site approvals from all

of the gatekeepers in January 2024. Upon completing the defense, an application was submitted

to the IRB at Liberty University via the Cayuse platform. The dissertation committee chair was

notified once the application had been submitted. See Appendix A for the IRB approval

application. The IRB approval letter was sent to the Liberty University School of Education

(SOEDocReview@liberty.edu) for review. No data was collected before IRB approval and

approval from the highest-level gatekeepers. In this study, the gatekeepers were the head

administrators for each school. I then gained their approval via an emailed letter that was sent

before any emails for recruitment.

Other Participant Protections

I next sought approval from the participants. After receiving the consent letters from the

gatekeepers and the heads of each school, I emailed the participants an invitation to participate in

the study. Information regarding their ability to withdraw, opt out, or withdraw at any time was

included. No minors were included in the study. Pseudonyms represented all sites and

participants to protect the confidentiality and identity of those involved. All hard-copy data will

be stored indefinitely in file folders and locked in my office in a metal cabinet. All digital data

will be held indefinitely on a password-protected external hard drive. The laptop used to produce

data always remained password protected. The transcripts were filed in a locked metal cabinet in

my office. These transcripts were analyzed for data, and several themes were identified. I

contextualized the lives of these educators and how prayer affected their role, particularly in their school setting. See Appendix E for participant consent forms. I scheduled a time two weeks after the last acceptance of the invitations for research to conduct the study.

The nature of this study lends itself to some risks. One such risk includes how a specific interview question may affect an educator's self-perception. Educators often overlook the area of needs and well-being for the scope of efficacy. In this case, focusing on different needs could have triggered vulnerable individuals' responses. I aimed to create a good rapport with the educators to minimize such a risk. Benefits may include a deeper understanding of the selected phenomenon, with the feeling of good citizenship to broaden the scope of knowledge surrounding such.

Summary

In qualitative research, a phenomenological approach is best suited for understanding the lived experiences of prayer on educational leaders in a Christian school setting. A group of 11 participants was purposefully selected for interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts for data collection. Using manual coding, the generated results will inform the literature on educators' experiences practicing consistent Christian prayer. This chapter focused on the methodology of this research. It included the following components: research design, research questions, setting and participants, researcher positionality, data collection plan and analysis, and trustworthiness.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences, especially those related to the practice of consistent prayer and their decisions to remain in the profession, of educators in Christian schools in the Midwest. The chapter includes participant descriptions, data, themes, and research question responses. The participant data is summarized in a table. A narrative description of each participant follows the table summary.

Participants

This section identifies the participants in this study. It provides a detailed description of everyone who participated. Pseudonyms were used to represent each participant and protect their anonymity. Each participant listed below has experience teaching in the Christian school setting and practices consistent prayer. The table is followed by a narrative description of each participant listed.

Table 4

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Years Experience	Highest Degree Earned	Content Area	Grade Level
Candace	2	Masters	Ancient Civilizations	6th
Cindy	6	Masters	All	2nd
Jennifer	2	Associates	Math & History	7th - 10th
Gina	3	Bachelors	Spanish	Middle & High School
Mina	3	Masters	Math, Creative Writing, History, Science and Health	1st

Name		Years	Degree	Subjects	Grades
John	9		Bachelors	Physical Education, Health, Geography, and History	6th-10th
Phil	3		Bachelors	History, Math, Bible	6th-8th
Alice	3		Bachelors	All	5th
Beth	5		Bachelors	All	Kindergarten
James	5		Bachelors	Science/Math	Middle-High School
Andrea	2		Bachelors	Spanish	High School

Candace

Candace is a White, 34-year-old married female. Candace serves as a 6th-grade teacher in her current position at her school. She practices regular church attendance at her Baptist church and practices consistent prayer. Candace has a background in teaching multiple subjects. Her passion is to analyze Biblical text at its root. Outside of her commitment to 6th-grade Ancient Civilizations, Candace has experience teaching high school Psychology. She also serves her local university by creating a curriculum for Origin Hebrew Studies. Candace is passionate about helping further educational research, especially concerning prayer.

Cindy

Cindy is a White, 35-year-old married female. Her ethnic background includes English, Irish, Scottish, and Polish. She teaches 2nd grade at her school. Cindy has experience teaching 1st grade, 2nd grade, and 5th grade. She teaches Math, Phonics, Spelling, Grammar, Writing, Bible, History, Science, Reading, and Social Skills at the current second-grade level. Her passion is currently at the first-grade level, which she will teach in the upcoming school year. Cindy enjoys hands-on opportunities for her students, manipulatives, and group work. She creates a peaceful

classroom environment by regularly playing soft worship music in the background. Cindy practices regular church attendance at her Messianic congregation. She also attends Shabbat fellowship on Friday nights. Cindy also practices consistent prayer. Outside of her regular job commitment at her school, Cindy teaches private music lessons to elementary students.

Jennifer

Jennifer is an Indian (East-Asian) 70-year-old single female. She teaches 7th-10th grade at her school. She has experience teaching 1st grade, including Math, English, Writing, Bible, History, Science, Reading, and Social Studies. In her current position, Jennifer teaches Math and History. Jennifer also practices regular Shabbat fellowship on Saturday mornings, and she practices consistent prayer. Jennifer also has a background in nursing and theology. When she is not working, Jennifer enjoys attending biblically based conferences tailored to growing her spirituality. Jennifer also practices prayer outside school, setting up a daily regimen of morning and evening prayer and devotion times.

Gina

Gina is a 37-year-old Hispanic female with a Business and Finance background before becoming an educator at her school. She is married to a journalist major who also practices regular prayer. Gina currently serves as a Spanish teacher for middle and high school students. Gina practices regular church attendance at her non-denominational church and consistent prayer. She has attended her local prayer room for the past five years, where she was engaged as a member and a staff member. She was the director of a local internship that connects ministry to the prayer room and helps individuals learn to engage in regular prayer.

Mina

Mina is a 35-year-old single Asian female. She currently teaches 1st grade at her

school. Mina has experience teaching multiple age groups and subjects, including Math, English, Writing, History, Science, Health, and the Bible. Mina practices regular church attendance and tries to practice prayer consistently. Mina's passion is to see children experience freedom as they are in an environment that speaks the truth over their lives. She speaks to them gently and always stops to reflect on the roots of behaviors before administering a consequence. With a background in Theology, Mina finds herself returning to Scripture and prayer to ground herself during the school year.

John

John is a 41-year-old White male. He is married and has three children. John teaches middle school and high school History and Physical Education at his current school. John has around ten years of experience teaching subjects such as health, British literature, geography, American history, US history, and world history. John practices regular church attendance and consistent prayer. For John, prayer is everything. He is faithful in his tasks and can juggle life outside the school with three children and life inside the classroom with 90 students rotating through because prayer is his reset.

Phil

Phil is a 47-year-old married White male. Phil has experience teaching all subjects in the elementary grade levels. His background is in Writing and Journalism. Phil teaches History, Math, and Bible to middle and junior high school students. Phil practices regular church attendance and consistent prayer. He believes that when prayer is a community effort within the school, it creates an incredible school culture. Phil appreciates the opportunity to minister to his students through prayer. Phil also practices street evangelism, inviting students to join him on these experiences.

Alice

Alice is a 41-year-old single White female. She has experience teaching all subjects at the 5th-grade level. She serves her school this year with the newly developed early childhood program. Alice practices regular church attendance and consistent prayer. She is very invested in her career and believes that her role with this age group is character and developmental training. Alice also loves to worship and take nature hikes with the small groups she is a part of.

Beth

Beth is a 38-year-old married White female. Beth has two children. She has experience teaching Kindergarten as well as 5th grade. The subjects she teaches include all core subjects-English Language Arts, math, science, and social studies. Beth currently serves as a Kindergarten teacher at her school. She practices regular church attendance and consistent prayer. Beth also has a background in Psychology and aspires to move forward in her career by earning her Master's degree to become a school counselor. She is currently in the application phase of her counseling program and looks forward to the next career steps. Her husband is a PhD licensed psychologist, and both partner to minister to people with their skills.

James

James is a 32-year-old single, White/Hispanic male. He is an experienced science teacher. James has experience teaching science to middle school, junior high, and high school students. James teaches Math and Science to his school students in grades 7-12. He practices regular church attendance and consistent prayer. James also helps lead worship at his church, which he has enjoyed picking up in the last year. James has a history of growing up in a

prayer and worship environment. His family relocated to a new state for the prayer room when he was young, and he grew up attending the prayer room and leading worship for the youth groups.

Andrea

Andrea is a single Hispanic female. Her experience includes teaching Spanish at the high school level. Andrea practices regular church attendance and consistent prayer. She also attends daily prayer room hours at her local prayer room. Andrea shared that for her, prayer is everything. She also serves as a staff member of her local prayer room, assisting with human resources and prayer room staff. Andrea's decision to be where she is was based on the Lord speaking to her and giving her specific direction. She believes she is called to uphold and restore the prayer movement, which is her ministry.

To begin the recruitment process, I contacted 62 teachers through email. After one week, I sent a follow-up email to each of these teachers. Two of these teachers responded by declining participation, while two others responded with a desire to participate. I sent those two teachers a consent form and demographic survey, set a deadline for them to return the study, and signed consent forms digitally. No other teachers from that initial group responded with a desire to participate. I then sent a new recruitment email to a new set of 19 teachers. I have yet to receive a reply from this new group. I sent a new recruitment email to a new set of 11 teachers. These particular teachers replied, confirming their participation. I sent all teachers a consent form and demographic survey with a deadline for them to return it to me digitally. All teachers have signed and returned their consent forms and demographic surveys. My goal was to secure 10 participants, and I was able to secure 11. I scheduled a visually and audio-recorded Zoom interview with each participant. Consent forms are found in Appendix E.

Results

This section includes data analysis from the interviews, focus groups, and teacher journal prompts. It discusses the importance of prayer and its relevance to teachers and examines direct and indirect relationships to teacher attrition. This section also includes themes and subthemes from the collected data. Table 5 below summarizes the themes and subthemes.

Table 5
Themes & Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Subtheme	Subtheme
Workload	Relational Demands	Flexibility Demands	Boundaries
Prayer: A Constant Dialogue	Prayer in the Classroom	The Value of Prayer	Purposeful Prayer

The Workload

Elements of workload appeared across all three sources of data for most participants. The sub-themes in this section include relational demands, flexibility demands, and boundaries. All participants who were interviewed are exceptionally committed to their jobs as teachers. These participants worked beyond the contracted hours and outside of their classrooms. They spent time entering grades, preparing materials, and improving themselves. Mina says:

> I pretty much give, like, a big mental, I guess, focus to my job…I do prioritize my job before my commitments, just because I do not have a commitment to a spouse or commitment to children, or commitment to running a house.

Other teachers used time outside of school for professional development. Alice said she spends her time "Just continuing to learn myself…learning about the best practices for how to deal with conflict, how to train kids to have emotional regulation, and all that stuff." Some

teachers found it challenging to take work home, especially if they were newer to the position. Candace said that it:

> Takes so much effort to plan each lesson and grade all the things…last year, there was no work-life balance, really, other than on Friday nights I would probably work pretty late…seven or eight or nine…. it was tough last year, and some of this year to make it to church and to make it to my Bible study.

Contrary to most teachers interviewed, some teachers held a philosophy of leaving their work at work. For example, Phil tried to complete his work immediately after school. Phil said:

> At the end of each day, 30 minutes to an hour at the end of each school day to enter grades, to clean up from the day and prep for the next day… I found that very effective, so I do not fall behind.

James said:

> I also set aside like right after school just kind of some like my time, but then at a certain point, like usually maybe after dinner, I'll kind of look over what's coming up on like the schedule for the week or maybe like there's a specific thing for the next day.

In the classroom, Gina said that to handle the workload and demands, "It is easier just to pray to the Lord and seek wisdom in this specific situation if you know that you need help from the Lord."

Relational Demands

The codes of emotions, empathy, relatability, patience, capacity, connecting, and relationships were clustered to form the sub-theme of relational demands. These codes appeared 66 times in participant interview transcripts, journal prompts, and focus group transcripts. Several teachers believe that classroom management is a crucial skill for all teachers. Cindy said

regarding classroom management, "Once that's solid, then they can build relationships and teach and do the content." Gina believes teachers need to have "patience." Alice echoed this statement because she believes that patience "Is a skill that can be learned, and some people don't have that skill." Candace thinks, "Every teacher should have the quality of empathy to build the skill of discernment as to what that child needs." Jennifer voiced a similar comment, saying that she believes each teacher should have the skill to "Understand the student." James also feels that "Every teacher should have a level of relatability to the students, a way of connecting with the students, so that they, I guess, can feel welcome and understood." Candace shared, however, that "Empathy is draining and constantly having to discern and choosing to discern and adapt and help kids where they're at…and be available for them as you know, just relationally outside of the classroom; like that's draining and exhausting." Teachers had varying opinions of what their position demands of them; however, they all agreed that vital skills exist to meet their students' relational needs. Phil responded to relational demands in the classroom with prayer. He said, "Asking the Lord for help with wisdom, and plenty of times where I felt like almost a supernatural wind or a supernatural door open, or supernatural insight." When students had needs beyond what the teachers could give, they often found prayer a resource. Gina said:

> I know that if I have a student who is not paying attention, having trouble at home, or something happening in their lives, I am their spiritual help. And the source of my spiritual help is prayer. It comes out of prayer…maybe once or twice, I've even stopped class to pray for a student… or when we hear bad news about something, so I know that has an effect.

Flexibility Demands

The codes routines, flexibility, demands, pivot, and the unexpected were clustered to form the sub-theme of flexibility demands. These codes appeared 47 times in participant interview transcripts, journal prompts, and focus group transcripts. Unpredictable situations often present themselves in a school setting. The current participants have had various such situations at their school. These scenarios included personnel who left the school prematurely, computers that regularly crash, buildings flooding, being forced to go remote, and software malfunctions. According to most of them, they would pivot. Beth found "the skill of being flexible and thinking on your feet" very important for teachers. Candace said, "My computer started smoking yesterday, literally started smoking." When the computer crashes, Jennifer said, "We have alternatives like you can use a workbook, so we have copies of the world book." More than this, several of these teachers were asked to pick up random subjects for which they were unprepared. The lack of resources compounded the stress of the unpredictable. Through it all, these teachers have learned to master the art of flexibility. Cindy thinks, "Another tool that teachers that teachers need to have is, you know, that flexibility." James said, "I kind of try to make myself as flexible as possible so that I can kind of pivot if something comes up that I was not expecting at all." Teachers often needed prayer to help them find strength outside their limited strength. John said, "I think using prayer is a great way to adjust. Sometimes there's like stressful situations, and then some of the issues suddenly arise out of nowhere, and just a quick prayer for myself is a way to reset yourself…asking outside of yourself, hey, like, I need more than just my strength."

Boundaries

The codes of boundaries and health were clustered to form the sub-theme of boundaries.

These codes appeared 25 times in participant interview transcripts, journal prompts, and focus

group transcripts. Alice has found the need to maintain a good rhythm; she said:

> So many times, I've talked to other teachers who are always overwhelmed, and I'm just
>
> like, you need to have healthy boundaries. To me, having boundaries was always the best
>
> way to stay vibrant in any, you know, career. Especially if you're having a lot of output
>
> with kids and stuff. You have to have healthy boundaries, like leaving when you need to
>
> leave work at work.

For Beth, boundaries look like prioritizing her tasks. Beth said:

> Well, during the school year, it means that I don't do many other things…I don't have the
>
> emotional capacity for much else... I'm a little behind because my family has to be a
>
> priority outside of my work hours ...that's a practical, practical boundary.

Often, teachers resorted to prayer to get help with setting boundaries for themselves. Alice said:

> I'm praying for the Lord to help me, you know, patience in the places that I know, and
>
> also being able to release burdens because it could be heavy to carry them if you don't
>
> have prayer. So, you have to let them go, release them to the Lord, and let Him work on
>
> them so you can see outcomes based on Him operating versus just being weighed down
>
> by the trouble and stress.

Prayer: A Constant Dialogue

Elements of prayer as a constant dialogue appeared across all three data sources for most

participants. The subthemes in this section include prayer in the classroom, the value of prayer,

and purposeful prayer. The participants interviewed had in common the fact that prayer is a

constant conversation with God. Phil views prayer as "Communing with God and having a

constant dialogue." Alice also sees it as "Having an ongoing dialogue and listening to His

instructions, His direction." Jennifer said prayer is "Connecting to His heart" and gave an example from Mary of Bethany. Jennifer said, "She gave him the honor of listening to, trusting, and believing him, and he took the time to reveal deep secrets that he wouldn't, so that's the depth of the value of that." Cindy's practice of prayer included "Praying throughout the day, like praying in tongues, praying in the Spirit, when something comes up."

Throughout the school year, Mina found it "Very hard to keep a consistent prayer life" because of the busyness of the schedule. Candace said of prayer this year, "It's been a lot of foxhole prayers." She views prayer:

> Not as structure, but more of a stream of consciousness… praying when those things are on my heart and mind for decision-making. And then… in my journal, writing those things out, writing out the thought processes around it, you know, trying to apply scriptural principles into that thought process. Once I get the feelings out, then…applying, reading scripture and writing that down.

Beth's prayer time included "Asking a lot of questions and just kind of sitting in the discomfort of not knowing everything" and "praying the Psalms, just asking for grace and capacity. Just like the help me Jesus kind of prayer, I pray a lot." James also views prayer as "A conversation with God…incorporated throughout the day rather than…what's seen as like the traditional sit-down and pray." Andrea believes that "Every teacher…they need to know prayer. That is a weapon for everything." Some teachers find it best to reach out to the Lord consistently. Alice said, "My current practice is talking to the Lord throughout the day and listening, just having an ongoing dialogue and listening to His instructions, His direction."

Prayer in the Classroom

The codes of personal prayer, prayer time, praying for God to expand the heart, prayer for

capacity, guidance, focused prayer, prayer for needs, prayer for soft hearts, and keeping students in prayer were clustered to form the sub-theme of prayer in the classroom. These codes appeared 417 times in participant interview transcripts, journal prompts, and focus group transcripts. All of these participants have experience with teaching in a Christian school setting. Therefore, prayer was also a part of their classroom routine. Mina experienced a lot during classroom prayer this year. She said prayer, "Really changed the atmosphere in the classroom. I could feel peace; I could feel peace in the classroom. James said, "I not only use prayer just for myself, but I also usually want to keep the students in prayer so that I'm doing what needs to be done at any given moment." Andrea said, "Prayer is everything for me. I started asking the Holy Spirit to bring dreams, and the kids started dreaming, too. For me, it was the key to everything." John views prayer in the workplace as "A way to kind of like reset yourself." Gina believes prayer during the work day "Is more a part of you, instead of something that you do." Phil said during the school day, "I seek the Lord's help with matters big and small…" and says there are "plenty of times where I felt like almost like a supernatural wind or a supernatural door open, or supernatural insight." Beth echoed that by saying, "A lot of my prayer in the workplace consists of those three-second prayers for help, like help me, Jesus." Alice believes in "Teaching the kids how to have an open dialogue with the Lord just listening, knowing that He's ready to speak and kind of like, practicing the skills of listening to the Lord, like what do you think the Lord is saying about this situation." She also said, "You ask the Lord for help when we struggle. It's like that's our go-to." Jennifer practices "Praying in the classroom before the class starts." She said, "Go from chair to chair, anoint it with oil, and pray for each student." Cindy also practices morning prayer, saying, "Welcoming Holy Spirit into our class." Beth says, "A lot of my prayer in the workplace consists of those three-second prayers for help, like help me, Jesus," She said:

I have had instances where I used prayer in the classroom as a tool to reset kind of out-of-control moment where I, I have done it a few times where I'll just feel like, okay, everybody is dysregulated and we need to reset.

The Value of Prayer

The codes of communing, connection, reset, and relationship were clustered to form the sub-theme of the value of prayer. These codes appeared 30 times in participant interview transcripts, journal prompts, and focus group transcripts. Phil shared:

I think authentic prayer is helpful to being an authentic person and an excellent educator. If it's truly done to commune with God, he knows how to solve every problem and help us help our students. And I think it's even more effective in a praying community. When the whole school or community you're in is aligning on those values, endorsing those values. It can be even more effective; it can still work if you're the only Christian at your school or in a different environment. God can still bless or care for you at that, but I think there's a synergy when the school itself endorses or is based on prayer.

The educators are trying to pray that an act can produce positive results. Gina believes, "You're a spiritual leader in the classroom." Phil said:

The highest goal I have is to form these people into the image of Christ. And so I can't do that unless I know him, which is through prayer, and I can't get his heart for the students if I'm not in close contact, which is through prayer. I solve problems and can't be effective if I'm not prayed up or in a close conversational relationship with the Lord, carrying his heart. So I think the main thing is that I can't represent Him and form Him in others if I'm not close to Him.

Alice said that her:

Prayer life has helped me to be able to grow in the things that I need to grow in, like

patience and stuff like that. I'm praying the Lord to help me, you know, patience in the

places that I know, and also just being able to release burdens, you know, because, you

know, something's going on, it could be heavy to carry those if you don't have prayer. So

you have to let them go, release the Lord, and let him work on them so that you can see

outcomes based on him operating versus just being weighed down by the trouble and the

stress.

Purposeful Prayer

The codes of personal prayer and prayer time were clustered to form the sub-theme of

purposeful prayer. These codes appeared seven times in participant interview transcripts, journal

prompts, and focus group transcripts. Jennifer said, "I think Jesus is a master teacher. So I think

you want to listen to his teachings as a teacher." Mina said:

When I'm spending time… in prayer, with God, I am more patient. I am more proactive

than reactive. That resulted in building good relationships in the classroom, and I handled

difficult situations in a way that gave grace and showed light to the students. And I know

that if I didn't spend time with God, and if I didn't pray if I didn't pray beforehand, I

would have or could have handled the situation in a very impatient, rushed, or ungentle

way.

Cindy believes in the importance of consistent prayer. She said:

Start your day in prayer with the Lord because He knows what will happen during the

day, and we don't know where the kids will come from… did they have breakfast? Did

they get a good night's sleep? Was their brother crying all night? So having a foundation

of prayer and… meditation in His Word, washing your mind in the Word… is like your

shield and your… armor. I think that's so important so that you're not coming at it

reactively, but you can respond with that peace that the Holy Spirit gives you so it

protects you. It protects them, and it, like, is the glue; it is the glue that holds everyone

together. I can't say enough about it.

Mina said, "I don't think I would be a teacher without prayer. I don't think I would ever choose

this profession without a prayer." Cindy said, "Prayer has been so important for knowing how to

respond to students, like in the moment." Mina shared, "Connection with God makes you realize,

okay, there's the eternal reward and impact of what I would do or could do." She said:

You know, all the hard things we go through, we go through spiritual journey… those are

for forming our characters. So one day, we could be an example to the next generation, or

we could show the next generation how to do things or have to go about maybe solving

conflict, go about solving low self-esteem, or solving any emotional or physical

problems…we have now tools and keys and answers to show to the next generation.

Candace shared, regarding her students, "These are eternal. These are souls. They're important

young people and going out into the world…I think the prayer orients us around God's Will

versus always what feels the best for us." Mina said, "We didn't realize they were in a spiritual

battle. Yeah. In the classroom is a spiritual battleground…we're trying to snatch as many souls as

we can…for God. I think the only thing that works in that situation is to prevail. Prevail in prayer

when things are going the opposite of what you want. Even though you are praying a lot, I would

say keep praying and prevailing."

Research Question Responses

This section includes the answers to the central and sub-research questions. A narrative

summary of the themes particular to the question is included. Finally, supporting participant

quotes are included in these answers in this section.

Central Research Question

What are the classroom experiences of teachers at Christian schools in the Midwest who practice consistent prayer? The participants believe prayer is crucial to their daily lives, mainly as classroom teachers, and influences their decision-making. Mina said, "I know that if I didn't spend time with God, and if I didn't pray beforehand, I would have or could have handled the situation in a very impatient, rushed, or ungentle way." These participants sought the Lord in prayer for particular purposes as it helped them gain understanding. Phil said, "I seek the Lord's help with matters big and small. Sometimes, how do I convey this concept? How do I put together my lesson plan? How do I deal with that difficult student but ask the Lord for help with wisdom."

Sub-Question One

How do teachers describe their experiences with how consistent prayer relates to their emotional and physical needs as educators? Participants described a clear relationship between prayer and their needs as teachers in the classroom. James shared, "I not only use prayer just for myself, but I also usually want to keep the students in prayer so that I'm doing what needs to be done at any given moment." Prayer influenced teachers' decisions to remain in their profession. Candace said, "Regularly, prayer is huge. It was a huge part of whether or not to take the job, whether or not to stay on another year, what to do in the coming years…just seeking God's will in that way. It's always on my mind, always in the back of my mind." Educators are also using prayer as a personal reset throughout the day. John said that prayer "centers" him and allows him to get back on track.

Sub-Question Two

What job factors do teachers perceive as relating to their needs and well-being? Participants agreed that their time outside school hours must be protected to function well. Alice said, "So many times I've talked to other teachers who are always overwhelmed, and I'm just like, you need to have healthy boundaries." Beth echoed this statement by saying, "Well, during the school year, it means that I don't do many other things… I just don't have the emotional capacity for much else." Parental interactions with the teachers were another major cause of teacher stress for these participants. Some parents had a negative attitude toward the teachers, which was then imitated by the students in the classroom, causing anxiety. Candace said students come in and say what they hear in the home, pushing the boundaries. She said, "That's a big obstacle that's only been overcome through prayer, relationship building, and consistency."

Summary

The participants' interviews highlighted several themes and subthemes. The main themes were workload and prayer as a dialogue. The subthemes associated with these main themes included relational demands, flexibility demands, boundaries, prayer in the classroom, the value of prayer, and purposeful prayer. Findings include that participants view a direct relationship between prayer and their decision-making behavior in the classroom. They also perceived there to be a direct relationship between prayer and their well-being.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences, especially those related to the practice of consistent prayer and their decisions to remain in the profession, of educators in Christian schools in the Midwest. Chapter five includes the interpretation of my findings, the implications for policy and practice in the field of education, and the theoretical and methodological implications. Finally, this chapter also includes a list of limitations, delimitations, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

This section discusses the study's findings. It first summarizes the themes briefly and interprets them. Next, it provides implications for school policy and practice related to teacher attrition and prayer. This section also summarizes the theoretical and methodological implications. A brief statement of the limitations and delimitations of this study is included. Finally, this section suggests several recommendations for future research.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Significant themes are identified in this study, both in the literature review and in the data collection process. The workload is a core theme contributing to teacher attrition. The subthemes related to workload include relational demands, flexibility demands, and boundaries. A second key theme is prayer as a dialogue. The subthemes pertaining to this include prayer in the classroom, the value of prayer, and purposeful prayer. The findings are interpretations based on the literature review and the data analysis surrounding these themes.

Interpretation of Findings

This section provides an interpretation of the findings of this study. Several interpretations are presented in light of the themes above. These interpretations include teacher burnout, teacher incentives, the science of words, the power of prayer, and prayer for the educator. This section also discusses these individual interpretations as they pertain to the experiences of educators who pray and the idea of teacher attrition. It puts prayer at the front and center of Christian education and identifies it as a critical component for teacher success.

Teacher Burnout

The work of the Christian school educator is challenging on many levels. Unlike a task-oriented career that deals with primarily material objects, an educator works with human beings, their bodies, minds, souls, and spirits. The educator, being human themselves, possesses specific needs, as illustrated by the hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). The educator, more specifically, works with human children who carry their own sets of needs. The needs of these children span all levels of their being and, in turn, demand great energy from the educator. According to Candace, "Empathy is draining." Beth also said, "I think teaching has gotta be one of the hardest jobs…it's tough…because you're managing so many different personalities and needs."

Teachers are quitting their jobs because the workload demands meeting needs beyond their capacity. Their students' needs and working environment drain their buckets dry and leave them unable to sustain the constant output demanded of them. Alice said, "I've talked to other teachers who are always overwhelmed." This burnout state influences their decision-making process, which is a leading cause of teacher attrition (Fox et al., 2023).

Teacher Incentives

Many school systems attempted to remedy teacher attrition by creating different avenues for educators to have their needs met. These incentives included financials, shorter school schedules, shorter certification pathways, and more (Carver-Thomas and Darling Hammond, 2019; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). Though these incentives are beneficial, they bear little weight compared to the role stress teachers face. Teachers' output is still greater than their input, causing them to give of themselves to meet school body needs beyond what they have available.

The Science of Words

God spoke the world into existence (*King James Bible*, 2017, Psalm 33:9). He used His own words to create all things visible and invisible; as He said, things took form in the natural. God also created man in His image (*King James Bible*, 2017, Genesis 1:27), giving man the authority to use words to name all things God created. Dr. Caroline Leaf, author, and neuroscientist, said, "Words can be measured. They are electromagnetic light forces that you can physically measure, and…they impact the ears and brains of the listener." (Leaf, 2011) Every word humans utter causes changes in nature, and these words alter physical matter. As human beings communicate using spoken words, they release energy. This energy is transferred and converted into various types of matter. According to Dr. Andrew Newberg, a neuroscientist at Thomas Jefferson University, and Mark Robert Waldman, a communications expert, "a single word has the power to influence the expression of genes that regulate physical and emotional stress" (Newberg & Waldman, 2012).

The Power of Prayer

Prayer is a conversation using words to communicate thoughts, feelings, ideas, and states of being. When an individual utters a prayer to God, this communication crosses realms. With

the belief that God hears prayers and acts on behalf of those who pray, we know that every Word prayed to Him matters and that this prayer affects transformation in human lives. As human beings speak, things change. Prayer changes things. James, one of the participants, said of one of his experiences with prayer for a student, "Okay, this prayer is actually working, he's actually opening up, I'm seeing a huge change just in personality in general and his attitude and how happy he looks now compared to the beginning of the year." Prayer is a dialogue with God that connects one realm to another. It allows humans to draw strength from someone more significant than them, outside their realm, to help them in the natural. There is a unique value to this phenomenon. It opens an alternate avenue for educators to fill their buckets so that their output is no longer more significant than what they have available to give.

Prayer for the Educator

For teachers, prayer was the pathway to an alternate route in their careers. When praying, teachers received instructions and directions. They learned how to best navigate a situation in the classroom so that instead of their buckets running dry, they overflow as prayer acts as a buffer to stress (Parks-Stamm, Pollack, and Hill, 2020). Prayer allowed educators to have an increased capacity to love regardless of their personal needs. According to the teachers interviewed, prayer is a weapon. It demolishes strongholds that set themselves against individual lives and can only come down in the spirit realm. The Bible also supports this by saying that our warfare is not against flesh and blood but rather against principalities (*King James Bible*, 2017, Ephesians 6:12). The Word is clear that these unseen forces are at work in the natural, seen realm. Prayer is a joyful conversation, a means to center, and a dialogue with an omnipotent and omnipresent Person. This Person is Yahweh, a God who is not limited by time, space, or any energy and has the solutions to every problem.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Teacher attrition has become a crisis in the field of education. Teachers are burnt out because of the nature and dynamics of their roles. If teachers are to remain in their positions long-term, avoid burnout, and succeed at their jobs, they need to tap into a source of strength outside their realm. Prayer can create an alternate pathway to retention, and the teacher interviews reflect this. The participants agreed that prayer played a significant role in their daily decisions on their job. Some even shared that prayer influenced their decisions to stay in their role at their current school.

Implications for Policy

Christian schools must consider prayer in their policies. Christian school handbooks should implement a statement of faith and a regular commitment to fervent prayer. Applications and interviews with teacher candidates should gauge whether the individual practices consistent prayer. Personnel manuals should include prayer as a regular regimen. School schedules should include prayer, Scripture reading, and chapel services as a daily regimen. The practice of prayer should be taken off the back burner in the world of education and returned to central focus, as was confirmed in the early founding of American education.

Implications for Practice

School administrators can quickly gauge whether consistent prayer is evident in the life of an educator. Administrators should regularly meet with educators to keep a pulse on how things are going in the classroom. When difficult situations present themselves, these administrators must ask specific questions to determine how the educator handled the situation. If the educator acted in their strength, the administrator must help them reflect and return to center prayer. This takes the responsibility of problem-solving off the administrator and the

educator and redirects it back to God.

Educators must be willing to return to consistent prayer to engage in their career field successfully and in the long term. The Christian school educator is not merely teaching content knowledge. They are tasked with training up souls for the Kingdom of God. The Bible tells us to exercise our senses by reason of use. Educators must diligently practice communicating with God to exercise their senses. The Bible also tells us that those who come to Him must first believe that He exists and reward those who earnestly seek Him (*King James Bible*, 2017, Hebrews 11:6). Consistent dialogue with God is an act of faith that trains the soul to believe that God exists. Such discipline leads to the reward of God intervening in situations outside of the natural scope of reason.

School administrators can partner with educators by setting policies that influence the school culture toward prayer. Board members and heads of schools should collaborate on interventions that would be critical and helpful at every grade level. For example, school administrators can facilitate structured group prayer times for teachers and staff members. These prayer meetings could be as simple as praying for one another, praying for specific needs, or praying for classrooms. Some schools do a prayer walk around and within the building at the beginning of each school year. This is another way to create a worship culture within the school body and recognize it as an integral part of Christian school education.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

This section identifies the theoretical implications of this study. The themes in this section reflect both those found in the literature review and those found in the data collection process. These themes support the empirical implications identified. The theoretical implications highlight how Maslow's hierarchy of needs underpins the study.

Empirical Implications

The literature review highlighted several key elements that were supported by the participant interviews. Teachers leave their positions because of role stress (Conley & You, 2009), which takes many forms and has created a crisis of attrition in the field of education. Teachers are quitting their jobs because the workload demands meeting needs beyond their capacity (Fox et al., 2023). Although many school systems have implemented measures to remedy the condition, it is an ongoing problem (Carver-Thomas and Darling Hammond, 2019; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). The interviews supported the research that showed that teachers are currently experiencing exhaustion due to the nature of their jobs (Marshall et al., 2022). The interviews also showed that teachers are facing various challenges in the school system. Changes in school leadership, school threats, new curriculum, increased professional development, and filling in for vacant roles all cause undue stress on their physical, psychological, and emotional health (Marshall et al., 2022). Prayer is a conversation with God where people disclose their thoughts and feelings to receive healing, hope, and answers in return (Suciadi, 2021). The participant definitions of prayer are consistent with the literature review. Participant experiences with student needs were also consistent with the literature review. Educators serve a unique role in that they are faced daily with students' needs and frustration in autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Lindert et al., 2022; Walker, 2020).

Theoretical Implications

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs sheds light on the fact that all human beings possess needs, which are organized in a hierarchy. Once basic-level needs are met, the door opens to the next most prominent need. This is true in education and is supported by literature and data collection. The literature review highlights that teachers have physiological, psychological,

competence, autonomy, and relatedness needs. The interviews highlighted these exact needs. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs explicitly says that individuals cannot access higher-level needs if the lower-level needs remain unmet.

Teachers' unmet needs are typically at the lower level of the hierarchy. Both the literature and the data collection reflect that teachers have not reported needs in the areas of self-esteem and self-actualization. This creates an unhealthy social pattern with educators who are supposed to be pouring into students to self-actualize, but they need the capacity to do so. Findings in this study showed that teachers experienced unmet needs in their career and looked for avenues to have these needs met in order to self-actualize.

Limitations and Delimitations

This section includes the limitations and delimitations of this study. Limitations include teacher demographics, perceptions towards teaching, time spent teaching in the classroom physically, and teachers' personal life circumstances. Delimitations include the study's participants, years teaching at the school, the setting, and the nature of the participants. Both limitations and delimitations can affect the research and have been accounted for. These limitations and delimitations will be further summarized below.

Limitations

I was able to secure the participants for this study. However, I had no control over the demographics at each school. In my research, I generated a diverse group of participants. I also cannot control my participants' perceptions of teaching. Some may enjoy their career, some may consider it a source of income, while others may have had various past experiences that influenced their current perception, all outside my control. I could not monitor the time each teacher spends physically in their classroom. Each school has different policies and different

requirements for its staff. This time spent physically in the school was another variable in their overall satisfaction with their job. Finally, I could not gauge teachers' life circumstances and determine how they influenced their decisions to remain in their profession.

Delimitations

I limited my study to teachers in the Midwest who teach in Christian school settings. I chose this intentionally because my research focuses on prayer and how these teachers experience prayer. Often, prayer is not included in the public-school setting, which would have limited my research. I limited my study to teachers with at least one teaching experience in their school. New teachers experience many additional variables while acclimating to the school system, which would have skewed my study's objective. Finally, I limited my survey to teachers who pray consistently. This was done so I could properly understand the relationship between their experiences with prayer, their needs, and their decisions to remain in the profession.

Recommendations for Future Research

In light of this study on the experiences of Christian school educators in the Midwest who practice consistent prayer, there are several recommendations for future research. First and foremost, the target population here includes teachers from Christian schools in the Midwest. Further research should consider Christian schools outside of the Midwest. Different states have different educational policies, which are a factor to be considered when understanding teachers' experiences in the classroom. Christian schools in rural versus suburban or urban areas should also be studied. Future research studies should target specific types of Christian schools. The religion of Christianity has many denominations, all of which influence the schooling system and policies. Research can consider comparing different denominations of Christian schools, the

teachers' experiences with those expressions of prayer, and their decisions to remain in the profession.

A more comprehensive range of participants' demographics would enhance further research. Before data collection, surveys could be conducted to assess teachers' perceptions of education and teaching and their position to understand the role these factors play in their experiences with prayer and their decisions to remain in their profession. Another factor to consider is the amount of time teachers spend physically in the classroom with students. Some teachers have different career experiences but teach fewer hours daily than others. Some teachers' life circumstances also play a part in their professional experiences.

Further studies should analyze this background information and how it relates to teachers' prayer consistency and their decisions to remain in the profession. Further research should also be done on the influences of prayer within the school body as a whole as it relates to the experiences of Christian school educators. Finally, more research is needed on the specific needs of teachers and how they relate to their decisions to remain in the profession.

Conclusion

This study focused on the experiences of Christian school educators in the Midwest who practice consistent prayer and their decisions to remain in the profession. The study identified Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1974) as the guiding theory underpinning this study. To generate data related to teachers' classroom experiences, interviews were conducted with 11 different participants to discuss these topics in depth. The themes generated from this data collection process were analyzed and then interpreted. Two key interpretations included workload and the influence of prayer on teachers' decision-making processes.

Teachers collectively expressed their experiences with burnout in the classroom due to student needs and their own unmet needs. These teachers presented examples of classroom stressors and how they affect students' well-being. These same teachers said prayer buffers their stress and influences their decision-making processes. They gain the strength to handle classroom needs and their own needs and wisdom to function successfully. In conclusion, there is a relationship between prayer and these educators' decisions to remain in their profession.

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Appendix A

IRB Exemption Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 10, 2024

Noemi Blig
Mary Strickland

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-1422 THE EXPERIENCES OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOL EDUCATORS IN THE MIDWEST WHO PRACTICE CONSISTENT PRAYER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Noemi Blig, Mary Strickland,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application per 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 described in your IRB 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, **which you must use to conduct your study,** can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

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

Sincerely,

Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

Dear Teacher,

As a PhD candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand, describe, and interpret the experiences of prayer and attrition for educators at Christian schools in the Midwest. I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be teachers who have at least one year of teaching experience and must practice regular prayer. Participants will be asked to take an online demographic survey, take part in a one-on-one, audio and video-recorded virtual interview, take part in an audio and video-recorded online focus group, and answer two written questions, which will be done online. Participants will be asked to do member-checking, which means reviewing their answers to ensure accuracy. It should take between 60-65 minutes 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   If you meet my participant criteria, I will contact you 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 will need to sign the consent document and return it to me via email before [date], 2024.

Sincerely,

Appendix C

Demographic Survey

1. What is your name?

2. What is your gender?

3. How old are you?

4. How long have you served as a teacher at your current school?

5. What grade level do you teach?

6. What subject areas do you teach?

7. Do you practice regular church attendance?

8. Do you practice regular Christian prayer?

9. What is your ethnic background?

Appendix D

Follow-up Recruitment Letter

Dear Teacher,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD. Last week, an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to complete the survey if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is [date], 2024.

Participants must be teachers who have at least one year of teaching experience and claim to practice regular prayer. Participants will be asked to take an online demographic survey, take part in a one-on-one, audio and video-recorded virtual interview, take part in an audio and video-recorded online focus group, and answer two written questions, which will be done online. Participants will be asked to do member-checking, which means reviewing their answers to ensure accuracy. It should take between 60-65 minutes 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   If you meet my participant criteria, I will contact you 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 will need to sign the consent document and return it to me via email before the [Date].

Sincerely,

Appendix E

Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: The Experiences of Christian School Educators in The Midwest Who Practice Consistent Prayer: A Phenomenological Study
Principal Investigator: Noemi Blig, PhD 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 a teacher who has at least one year of teaching experience and must practice regular prayer. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the study is to understand, describe, and interpret the experiences of prayer and attrition for educators at Christian schools in the Midwest.

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. Complete an online demographic survey, which should take approximately 5 minutes to complete.
2. Participate in an online, audio- and video-recorded interview that will take no more than 20 minutes.
3. Participate in an online, audio- and video-recorded group interview that will take no more than 20 minutes.
4. Complete a two-question write-up online which should take no more than 10 minutes.
5. Participate in member checking which is a short review of your answers. This should take no more than 10 minutes.

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 adding to the body of literature regarding teacher attrition, teacher wellbeing, prayer, and overall school health.

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 and doctoral committee will have access to the records.

- Participant 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 used in future research studies and/or 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.
- All hard-copy data will be stored indefinitely in file folders and locked in my office in a metal cabinet. All digital data will be held indefinitely on a password-protected external hard drive. The laptop used to produce data will always remain password protected. The transcripts will be filed in a locked metal cabinet in my office.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer indefinitely. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Noemi Blig. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Mary Strickland, at ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓.

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

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered

and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

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

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix F

Individual Interview Questions

1. Ice Breaker: What skill do you think every teacher should have?

2. Please describe your current practice of prayer and meditation.

3. How do you utilize prayer when working in an educational environment?

4. How do you balance your life schedule to stay focused on your role in education?

5. What specific routine keeps you in the momentum as you embrace your role as an educator?

6. What are some specific examples of how you have responded to unforeseen events in your educational career?

7. Describe how prayer has influenced your role as an educator.

8. Describe successful events where prayer has positively impacted your role as an educator.

9. Describe any negative experiences you have had with prayer.

10. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with prayer and your role as a Christian educator?

Appendix G

Focus Group Questions

1. Ice Breaker: If you had to teach a class on one thing, what would you teach?

2. How do you define consistent prayer?

3. What are some factors that impact your ability to perform your educational role?

4. Describe challenges you have encountered in your current position as an educator.

5. What are your opinions regarding prayer?

6. How do you perceive the role of prayer for you as an educator?

7. Describe an experience where you were affected by prayer.

8. What are your thoughts regarding the role of Christian educators in school settings?

9. What are your expectations for the school year regarding your role as an educator?

10. What are some obstacles regarding practicing consistent prayer?

Appendix H

Journal Prompts

1. In 150 words, discuss your understanding of prayer and its use in daily life.

2. In 150 words, discuss times when your job has been stressful. Give specific examples of the situations. What was your solution to remedy the problem?