TEACHER RETENTION IN TITLE I SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

Jessica Marie Stetekluh Cain

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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APPROVED BY:

Christine Saba, EdD, Committee Chair

Lucinda Spaulding, PhD, Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the elements contributing to teacher retention through the lived experiences of K-5 teachers at Title I schools in the Southern United States. The theory guiding this study is Maslow's hierarchy of needs as it applies to teacher retention. The central research question of this study is as follows: what are the experiences related to retention of K-5 teachers who teach in a Title I school? The sample size included 10 participants. The sample was a convenience sample of teachers from three Title I schools in an urban school district in the Southern United States. The data was collected through individual interviews, focus group interviews, and journal prompts. Interview responses were transcribed for data analysis. All data was analyzed through coding for commonalities and themes. Three themes emerged from the data: A Life of Good Works, Bear One Another's Burdens, and Peace and Mutual Edification. Two outlier themes emerged from the data: Adversity and Natural Reasons. Trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research were established.

Keywords: attrition, Maslow's hierarchy, retention, Title I, teacher turnover

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, my creator, who blessed me with gifts of passion and curiosity.

I dedicate this to my family.

To my husband, Coley, from the moment I embarked on this journey, you have been my rock and my greatest supporter. You have stood by my side with patience and understanding, lifting me up when I needed encouragement and celebrating with me in moments of joy. Your belief in me has been a guiding light, empowering me to pursue my dreams and overcome obstacles with courage and determination.

To my children, Emmilein and Noah, you have been my greatest inspiration and motivation. From the beginning, you have filled my world with boundless love, joy, and purpose. Your understanding and patience have been my pillars throughout this academic journey.

To my parents, Ann Marie and Jeff, this dedication is a testament to the guidance and encouragement you have provided me throughout my life. From the earliest days of my existence, you have been my steadfast champions, nurturing my dreams and fostering my growth with boundless patience and wisdom.

To my brother, Paul: tag, you’re it.

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Table of Contents

Abstract 3

Copyright Page 4

Dedication 5

Acknowledgments 6

List of Tables 14

List of Abbreviations 16

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 17

Overview 17

Background 17

- Historical Context 19
- Social Context 20
- Theoretical Context 21

Problem Statement 24

Purpose Statement 26

Significance of the Study 27

- Theoretical 28
- Empirical 28
- Practical 29

Research Questions 30

- Central Research Question 30
- Sub-Question One 30

Sub-Question Two 30

Sub-Question Three 30

Sub-Question Four 30

Sub-Question Five 31

Definitions 31

Summary 32

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW 33

Overview 33

Theoretical Framework 33

Related Literature 35

Title I Schools 36

Teacher Turnover 41

Needs of Teachers 43

Deficiency Needs: Physiological and Safety 43

Deficiency Needs: Belongingness 44

Deficiency Needs: Esteem 45

Growth Needs: Self-Actualization 46

Job Satisfaction 46

Salary 49

Teacher Preparation 50

Professional Development 52

Student Behavior 53

Mentorship 54

School Climate 60
Summary 62
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS 66
Overview 66
Research Design 66
Research Questions 68
Central Research Question 68
Sub-Question One 68
Sub-Question Two 69
Sub-Question Three 69
Sub-Question Four 69
Sub-Question Five 69
Setting and Participants 69
Setting 70
Participants 71
Recruitment Plan 71
Researcher's Positionality 72
Interpretive Framework 73
Philosophical Assumptions 73
Ontological Assumption 73
Epistemological Assumption 74
Axiological Assumptions 75
Researcher's Role 76

Procedures 78
Data Collection Plan 79
Individual Interviews 80
Journal Prompts 83
Focus Groups 85
Data Analysis 87
Trustworthiness 89
Credibility 90
Transferability 91
Dependability 92
Confirmability 92
Ethical Considerations 93
Permissions 93
Other Participant Protections 94
Summary 95
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS 96
Overview 96
Participants 96
Allison 99
Brittany 100
Christina 100
Daniella 102
Elizabeth 102

Frankie 103
Georgia 104
Heidi 105
Isabella 106
Jennifer 107
Results 107
A Life of Good Works 109
Encouraged 111
Joy 112
Love 112
Bear One Another's Burdens 112
Administrative Assistance 114
Help from Coworkers 115
Peace and Mutual Edification 116
Open Communication 119
Collaboration 119
Positive Environments 120
Outlier Data and Findings 121
Adversity 121
Natural Reasons 128
Research Question Responses 130
Central Research Question 130
Sub-Question One 131

Sub-Question Two 132

Sub-Question Three 134

Sub-Question Four 136

Sub-Question Five 137

Summary 138

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION 140

Overview 140

Discussion 140

Summary of Thematic Findings 140

Interpretation of Findings 141

Pre-Service Training & Professional Development 142

Mentorship & Climate 143

Leadership Support 143

Implications for Policy and Practice 144

Implications for Policy 145

Implications for Practice 145

Empirical and Theoretical Implications 146

Empirical Implications 146

Theoretical Implications 155

Limitations and Delimitations 158

Limitations 159

Delimitations 159

Recommendations for Future Research 160

Conclusion 161

References 162

Appendix A 181

Appendix B 182

Appendix C 184

Appendix D 190

Appendix E 192

Appendix F 197

Appendix G 198

Appendix H 200

Appendix I 203

List of Tables

Table 1 Teacher Participants Demographic Information 81

Table 2 Teacher Participants Grades Taught 86

Table 3 Themes & Contributing Codes..... 97

Table 4 A Life of Good Works: Subthemes..... 98

Table 5 A Life of Good Works: Individual Interview 108

Table 6 A Life of Good Works: Focus Group Interviews..... 109

Table 7 A Life of Good Works: Journal Prompts 110

Table 8 Bear One Another's Burdens: Subthemes..... 110

Table 9 Bear One Another's Burdens: Individual Interviews..... 111

Table 10 Bear One Another's Burdens: Focus Group Interviews 113

Table 11 Bear One Another's Burdens: Journal Prompts 113

Table 12 Peace and Mutual Edification: Subthemes..... 113

Table 13 Peace and Mutual Edification: Individual Interviews..... 114

Table 14 Peace and Mutual Edification: Focus Group Interviews..... 117

Table 15 Peace and Mutual Edification: Journal Prompts 117

Table 16 Outlier Theme 4-Adversity 117

Table 17 Outlier-Adversity; Subtheme 1- Emotional Discord: Individual Interviews 118

Table 18 Outlier-Adversity; Subtheme 1- Emotional Discord: Focus Group Interviews..... 122

Table 19 Outlier-Adversity; Subtheme 1- Emotional Discord: Journal Prompts 123

Table 20 Outlier-Adversity; Subtheme 2- Frustrations: Individual Interviews 123

Table 21 Outlier-Adversity; Subtheme 2- Frustrations: Focus Group Interviews..... 124

Table 22 Outlier-Adversity; Subtheme 2- Frustrations: Journal Prompts..... 126

Table 23 Outlier Theme 5- Natural Reasons..... 126

Table 24 Outlier Theme 5- Natural Reasons: Individual Interviews 127

Table 25 A Life of Good Works Open Coding..... 129

Table 26 Bear One Another's Burdens Open Coding..... 129

Table 27 Peace and Mutual Edification Open Coding..... 201

List of Abbreviations

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Organisation for Educational Cooperation and Development (OECD)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS)

Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS)

United States National Center for Education Statistics (USNCES)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Public schools in the United States of America have experienced difficulties in hiring and retaining teachers for several decades (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Gimbert et al., 2007; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Sutcher et al., 2019). Attempts to solve the problem of teacher shortages have been made but have yet to sufficiently fill the void created by teacher turnover (Gimbert et al., 2007; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Ingersoll et al., 2019). This chapter elaborates on the historical and social contexts of teacher shortages. The theoretical lens of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs and its impact on teachers is examined. The teacher retention problem was explored, and research questions were identified. Relevant definitions are provided. This chapter provides information to understand further the significance of the teacher retention problem.

Background

The phrase teacher shortage is not new in the field of education. Education has experienced a teacher shortage for over 35 years, with attrition levels ranging between 5% and 8% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Gimbert et al., 2007; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022b; Sutcher et al., 2019). Federal and state policymakers have created legislature to attempt to solve the problem of teacher shortages by allowing teachers to be certified through alternate methods (Gimbert et al.; Goldhaber et al.). Despite attempts to increase the number of teachers, teacher shortages persist (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; Goldhaber et al.; Sutcher et al.). Research has demonstrated that teacher shortages continue because of the high level of teacher attrition (Achinstein et al., 2010; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; DeMatthews et al., 2020; Fisher, 2011; Gimbert et al.; Goldhaber et al.; Goldhaber &

Theobald, 2019; Sutcher et al.). Even with the added teachers entering the workforce through alternative certifications, the number of teachers exiting the workforce is still higher (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond). It was critical to examine teacher attrition to understand why teachers are leaving education so changes can be implemented to increase teacher retention to combat teacher shortages.

It was also critical to examine the schools that experience the highest levels of teacher shortages. Throughout the literature, teacher shortages are most prominent in harder-to-staff schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Goldring et al., 2014; Ingersol et al., 2019). When these harder-to-staff schools were discussed, they were described as schools whose student body consisted mostly of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Schools that serve a student population of 40% or greater from a low socioeconomic background are Title I schools (Smith, 2020; U.S. Department of Education). In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was enacted. This act led to the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 and the School Improvement Grants from the Obama administration (Smith, 2020; U.S. Department of Education; Waddell, 2011). These acts acknowledge the needs children from low-income families have regarding educational support. They also acknowledge that the schools located in more impoverished areas lack the funding to provide teachers with the basic resources necessary to provide students with an education (Waddell). As a result, the acts pledge to provide financial assistance to schools that have higher concentrations of students from low-income families (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Title I provides federal funding to help elevate schools located in impoverished neighborhoods. Federal funding can provide much-needed resources for teachers (Waddell).

Historical Context

On November 19, 1963, President J. F. Kennedy addressed the Officers of the State Educational Association and the National Education Association (Kennedy, 1963, as cited in JFK Library). During his speech, he elaborated on the need for education and improvements to education (Kennedy, 1963, as cited in JFK Library). He also addressed the shortage of teachers to teach the abundant number of students (Kennedy, 1963, as cited in JFK Library). President Kennedy was not the first president to address teacher shortages, nor was he the last. According to Ingersoll, a professor of sociology and education at the University of Pennsylvania and expert in teacher retention, almost every president since Eisenhower has addressed the teacher shortage in America (Saldaña, 2022).

Factors that have been historically addressed as influencing teacher turnover are low teacher salaries, poor teaching conditions, and lack of respect and support (Martin & Mulvihill, 2016). Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), provides federal funding for schools whose percentage of students enrolled consists of at least 40% low-income families (Smith, 2020; U.S. Department of Education). A report released by the U.S. General Accountability Office in 1996 estimated that the funding necessary to improve school buildings to meet the minimum standards was at least $112 billion (Martin & Mulvihill). Consistently working in less-than-ideal environments has been a factor that has increased teacher turnover (Martin & Mulvihill).

Despite these factors being acknowledged, legislation has been primarily created to increase the number of teachers entering the field of education rather than focusing on retaining the teachers already teaching (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). While increasing the number of teachers entering education each year is not bad, that is only one side of the issue. By not addressing

teacher turnover, the number of teachers entering the field of education each year must increase. The teacher attrition rate has been around 8% since 2004 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019; Tran & Smith), significantly higher than in other careers (Fisher, 2011). The teacher attrition rate must be examined to understand why it is so high.

Social Context

Teacher turnover is the most significant factor contributing to teacher demand and the teaching shortage (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2019). According to the United States National Center for Education Statistics Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) (2011-12) and Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS) (2012-23), the most up-to-date data available, the teacher turnover rate is 16% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; Goldring et al., 2014; Ingersol et al., 2019; Taie & Goldring, 2020; USNCES, 2022). While this data is relatively old, the data collected since the initiation of the SASS and TFS demonstrates that the teacher turnover rate has remained consistent since the 1980s (Goldring et al.; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Taie & Goldring, 2020). Of the 16% teacher turnover rate, 8% is a result of teacher attrition, and 8% is a result of teacher migration (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond; Sutcher, 2019). Research has demonstrated that almost 20% of teacher attrition occurs for teachers at the beginning of their careers (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Tran & Smith). More specifically, 10% of teachers will leave the education profession in their first year, roughly 30% in their first three years, 40% in their first five years, and 50% in their first six years (Achinstein et al., 2010; Alemdar et al., 2022; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Gimbert et al., 2007; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Miller et al., 2020). For teacher attrition rates to be so high, especially for beginning teachers, there is a missing link in promoting retention.

Teacher turnover negatively impacts student achievement, school climate, school improvement, and school funding (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Newberry & Allsop, 2017). When teachers leave their school, the school is left to hire new teachers. Student achievement can be impacted as a result. If the school cannot hire a replacement teacher, students will be taught in overcrowded classrooms (Sutcher et al., 2019). The loss of teachers due to turnover can negatively impact the school climate (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Tran & Smith, 2020). Relationships formed between teachers are altered when teachers leave their school (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). School improvement plans are impacted when teachers leave. Initiatives started by the administration must be restarted with the new teachers and reconstructed to fit the remaining veteran teachers best (Alemdar et al., 2022; Bond & Blevins, 2020; Chuang, 2021). School funding is greatly impacted by teacher turnover. Research has demonstrated that replacing teachers can be costly (Ingersol & Tran). This research helped explain the reasons contributing to teacher attrition and benefited those in leadership positions.

Theoretical Context

Many causes of teacher turnover have been addressed by literature. Reasons for teachers leaving the teaching profession have been attributed to familial factors, such as raising a family or moving for a spouse's job (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019). School factors have also been attributed to higher levels of teacher turnover. The most often cited reasons for teacher turnover are poor working conditions, unsupportive administration, school climate, and lack of professional development (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Holmes et al., 2019).

Bandura (1977) developed the social learning theory, which postulates that a person's behavior is developed through observation and modeling. Bandura (1986) updated social learning theory to social cognitive theory when he published *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* (Ozer, 2022; Rumjaun & Narod, 2021; Schunk, 2020). In this publication, Bandura (1986) elaborated on triadic reciprocality (Ozer; Schunk). Triadic reciprocality refers to the reciprocal interactions of individual characteristics, the environment, and behavior (Schunk, 2020). Modeling in the social learning theory is specific and broken down into four essential parts: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1977). First, the observer must pay attention to the behavior displayed, and then the observer must remember the observed behavior. After attention and retention have occurred, the observer needs to reenact the behavior, thus ensuring their understanding. Finally, the observer must be motivated to reenact the behavior (Rumjaun & Narod). Through social cognitive theory, Bandura recognized social contexts through self-regulation as incredibly motivating (Schunk). Bandura believed that people do not demonstrate behavior to please others; they demonstrate behavior because it is the behavior they want to display. The desire to self-regulate behaviors to act according to an internal monologue is a key motivator for behaving a particular way (Bond & Blevins, 2020; Hall, 2020; Schunk). The intrinsic reward of modeling behavior that the individual believes will be useful or lead to success is enough of a positive reinforcer to the behavior (Hall; Schunk). According to the social learning theory, learning and growth will occur by observing and following all four modeling steps.

Social cognitive theory is essential to teacher preparation and professional development, effective mentorship, supportive leadership, and a positive school climate. Social cognitive theory can streamline professional growth (Hall, 2020) without making mistakes on the job and

having to learn from mistakes. Through social cognitive theory, administrators and teachers can observe modeled behaviors and then replicate the behaviors in a controlled environment rather than on the job. Then, they can discuss what they saw modeled, their attempt at replication, and the implications of the behaviors modeled (Hall). The environment, modeled behavior, and individual characteristics work together in triadic reciprocality to encourage growth. This allows for professional growth without the potential unintentional cognitive harm to others that occurs through mistakes (Ozer, 2022; Schunk, 2020). Bandura's social cognitive theory is highly applicable to today's education system and can be utilized for growth.

Social cognitive theory provides the social support and role modeling behaviors essential to improving teacher retention. (Bond & Blevins, 2020). Social cognitive theory offers a template for role modeling in teacher mentorship necessary for mentee growth. Additionally, social cognitive theory promotes abandoning having only one mentor per mentee. It is beneficial to have a mentor whose grade aligns with the mentee; however, social cognitive theory suggests having a group collaboration with multiple mentees (Bond & Blevins). This group collaboration creates a social support network and improves the school climate. It encourages professional development for all, furthering teachers' investment in their classrooms and grounding teachers at their schools, thus reducing teacher attrition.

Eisenberger and colleagues (1990) developed organizational support theory in 1986. Organizational support theory is the concept that organizations provide positive resources to employees and, as a result, the employees develop beliefs regarding how much they are valued for their contributions and well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The beliefs the employees develop about their perception of their organization's commitment to them are also known as perceived organizational support (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2020; Eisenberger et al., 1986).

When employees feel more valued by their company, the level of absenteeism decreases, and the level of commitment increases (Eisenberger et al., 1986). When employees perceive their company supports them, they demonstrate attentiveness, commitment, and innovative behaviors (Eisenberger et al., 1990). Additionally, when perceived organizational support is higher, employee retention is higher (Eisenberger et al., 1990).

Organizational support theory is important to teacher retention. When administrators acknowledge organizational support theory and utilize methods to increase perceived organizational support in teachers, teacher turnover should decrease. Research supports that higher levels of perceived organizational support result in employees fulfilling socioemotional needs, leading to increased productivity and drive (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2020). This also results in reduced burnout, increased satisfaction, increased commitment and engagement, and reduced turnover (Caesens & Stinglhamber). When applied to schools, organizational support theory can reduce burnout and turnover.

Problem Statement

The problem is that teacher turnover rates in the United States are too high, especially in Title I schools. Teacher attrition rates were below 6% in 1989 but increased to around 8% in 2004 and have remained near 8% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019; Taie & Goldring, 2020). According to the SASS and TFS, Teacher migration rates are about 8% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Goldring et al., 2014; Ingersol et al., 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019; Taie & Goldring, 2020; USNCES, 2022). Teacher turnover is calculated to be about 16% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Goldring et al., 2014; Ingersol et al., 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019; Taie & Goldring, 2020; USNCES, 2022). Teacher attrition impacts Title I schools the most (NCTAF, 2003). Teacher attrition in Title I schools is

almost 50% more than in other schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Teacher attrition and migration can have catastrophic impacts on student achievement and schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Sutcher, 2019). A common school response to teacher shortages is to hire unqualified or inexperienced teachers or to increase class sizes, which impacts student achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; Sutcher). In addition to impacting student achievement, teacher turnover can negatively impact school-wide improvement and collaboration efforts (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Sutcher). Teacher retention is an issue in schools that can be addressed by examining what leads to teacher attrition and migration. Teachers give several reasons for deciding to leave a school, including natural reasons to leave a job, such as retirement and relocation (Tran & Smith, 2020). Another reason for leaving the field of education is to leave for child rearing, intending to return (Tran & Smith). However, research has highlighted that the longer a teacher is away from the teaching profession, the less likely it is for them to return (Sutcher et al.). It is important to focus on the root causes of teacher turnover to increase teacher retention. Some reasons for teacher turnover supported by research are lack of teacher preparation and professional development, ineffective mentorship, lack of administrative support, and negative school climate (Achinstein et al., 2010; Anderson et al., 2020; Alblooshi et al., 2021; Alemdar et al., 2022; Audebrand & Pepin, 2022; Bond & Blevins, 2020; Cancio et al., 2013; Carter et al., 2022; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Cawte, 2020; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Farmer, 2020; Feng & Sass, 2018; Fisher & Royster, 2016; Fisher, 2011; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Gimbert et al., 2007; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022b; Goldring et al., 2009; Gul et al., 2019; Harrell et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2019; Kalkan et al., 2020; Kasalak et al., 2020;

Kottkamp, 2011; Miller et al., 2020; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Padilla et al., 2020; Sutcher et al.; Torres, 2019; Tran & Smith; Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Warnock et al., 2022; Wilkinson, 2022). These reasons are a problem because they are fixable.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the elements contributing to teacher retention through the lived experiences of K-5 teachers at Title I schools in the Southern United States. The elements consistently highlighted in the literature as contributing to teacher retention are generally defined as beneficial teacher preparation and professional development, effective mentorship, good administrative support, and a positive school climate. The theory guiding this study is Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, as it explains the relationship between the needs of teachers and teacher retention. Teacher preparation and professional development refer to the education the school provides to produce effective teachers. Literature supports teacher retention when schools invest in the education of their teachers (Bond & Blevins, 2020; Ramanan & Mohamad, 2020). Mentorship refers to programs for veteran teachers to work with novice teachers to prepare them for teaching expectations. Literature supports teacher retention when schools provide a mentorship program for veteran teachers to mentor novice teachers (Alemdar et al., 2022). Administrative support refers to the leadership styles utilized by the administration at the school and how effective the leadership style is for empowering teachers. Literature supports teacher retention when school leadership supports teachers (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Torres, 2019). School climate refers to the attitudes and expectations present among the faculty and staff in a school. Literature supports teacher retention when schools have a positive climate (Harrell et al., 2019; Torres).

Significance of the Study

Teacher attrition rates are significantly higher than the attrition rates of other careers (Bond & Blevins, 2020; Carter et al., 2022; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Cawte, 2020; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Farmer, 2020; Feng & Sass, 2018; Fisher & Royster, 2016; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022b; Gul et al., 2019; Harrell et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2020; Sutcher et al.; Torres, 2019; Tran & Smith, 2020; USNCES, 2021; USNCES, 2022). Research supports that not all schools have the same rate of attrition. Urban schools in the south that have a student body consisting of low-income students have a higher rate of attrition than others (Achinstein et al., 2010; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; DeMatthews et al.; Djonko-Moore; Farmer; Geiger & Pivovarova; Goldhaber et al.; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022b; Harrell et al.; Holmes et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2020; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Padilla et al., 2020; Sutcher et al., 2019; Torres, 2019; Tran & Smith, 2020; USNCES, 2021; USNCES, 2022). Research also shows that reasons for teachers leaving are multi-dimensional (Alemdar et al., 2022; Audebrand & Pepin, 2022; Bond & Blevins, 2020; Carter et al., 2022; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; Cawte, 2020; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022b; Gul et al., 2019; Harrell et al.; Miller et al.; Padilla et al.; Sutcher et al.; Torres; Tran & Smith; Van der Vyver et al., 2020). This study explored the experiences of K-5 teachers in Title I schools to help better understand the phenomenon of teacher retention. The results of this study can potentially impact the field of education by illuminating what needs teachers have that must be met to ensure retention.

Theoretical

This research is theoretically significant because it relates the experiences of K-5 teachers in Title I schools to needs in Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. When the participants' experiences were analyzed, they were examined through the theoretical lens of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. This allowed the data to show teacher retention as a result of having needs met (Cawte, 2020; Adair, 2006; Adams et al., 2015; Fisher & Royster, 2016; Fives & Mills, 2016; Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023; Freitas & Leonard, 2011; Gawel, 1997; Maslow, 1954; Riley & Mort; 1981; Weller, 1982; Navy 2020). This confirmed the application of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs to the teaching profession. Data demonstrated when teachers are supported and have their needs met, as outlined in Maslow's (1954) hierarchy, there are higher levels of retention.

Empirical

Researchers have explored the causes of teacher turnover being poor teacher preparation and professional development, ineffective or nonexistent mentorship, unsupportive leadership, and a poor school climate (Achinstein et al., 2010; Anderson et al., 2020; Alblooshi et al., 2021; Alemdar et al., 2022; Audebrand & Pepin, 2022; Bond & Blevins, 2020; Cancio et al., 2013; Carter et al., 2022; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Cawte, 2020; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Farmer, 2020; Feng & Sass, 2018; Fisher & Royster, 2016; Fisher, 2011; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Gimbert et al., 2007; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022b; Goldring et al., 2009; Gul et al., 2019; Harrell et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2019; Kalkan et al., 2020; Kasalak et al., 2020; Kottkamp, 2011; Miller et al., 2020; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Padilla et al., 2020; Sutcher et al.; Torres, 2019; Tran & Smith, 2020; Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Warnock et al., 2022;

Wilkinson, 2022). Other studies also explore that hard-to-staff schools are a cause of teacher turnover because of their higher rates of students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Achinstein et al., 2010; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; DeMatthews et al.; Djonko-Moore; Farmer, 2020; Fisher; Geiger & Pivovarova; Goldhaber et al.; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022b; Harrell et al.; Holmes et al.; Miller et al.; Newberry & Allsop; Padilla et al.; Sutcher et al.; Torres; Tran & Smith; USNCES, 2021; USNCES, 2022). The problem of excessive teacher attrition has been an ongoing issue for several decades (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; Sutcher et al.; Taie & Goldring). Some studies, such as the SASS and TFS, address statistical data regarding teacher turnover, which gives great insight into teacher turnover. There is a gap in the literature addressing the qualitative issues surrounding teacher turnover. This study aims to fill the gap in the literature by identifying that beneficial teacher preparation and professional development, effective mentorship programs, supportive leadership, and a positive school climate in Title I schools impact teacher turnover. The exploration of these topics through this phenomenological study will help explain the problem of teacher attrition. Once the problem is better understood, solutions can be found.

Practical

Research supports that teacher turnover is the most prevalent in urban settings, schools in the south, and schools with a larger number of low-income students (Achinstein et al., 2010; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Farmer, 2020; Fisher, 2011; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022b; Harrell et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2020; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Padilla et al., 2020; Sutcher et al., 2019; Torres, 2019; Tran & Smith, 2020; USNCES, 2021; USNCES, 2022). This study consisted of participants from

Title I schools in an urban area of the Southern United States. The findings from this study have implications for the schools most affected by teacher turnover by highlighting teachers' needs. By acknowledging teachers' lived experiences, administrators can adjust their leadership styles to provide the correct support and implement appropriate professional development to prepare teachers better and positively impact the school climate.

Research Questions

Research has highlighted four elements contributing to teacher retention. These elements are beneficial teacher preparation and professional development, effective mentorship, supportive administration, and a positive school climate. The research questions will provide greater insight into the experiences of K-5 teachers in a Title I school regarding these elements.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences related to retention of K-5 teachers who teach in a Title I school?

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences of Title I K-5 teachers regarding pre-service training?

Sub-Question Two

What are the experiences of Title I K-5 teachers regarding in-service professional development?

Sub-Question Three

What are the experiences of Title I K-5 teachers regarding mentorship?

Sub-Question Four

What are the experiences of Title I K-5 teachers regarding leadership support?

Sub-Question Five

What are the experiences of Title I K-5 teachers regarding school climate?

Definitions

The following are terms that are relevant to this study and their definitions.

1. *Teacher Attrition* – Teachers who leave the field of education (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Goldhaber et al., 2022b; Harrell et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2019; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Ingersoll et al., 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019; Tran & Smith, 2020).
2. *Teacher Migration* – Teachers who transfer or move to teach or take on another role at another school. They are also called movers or shifters (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Goldhaber et al., 2022b; Harrell et al., 2019; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Ingersoll et al., 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019; Tran & Smith, 2020).
3. *Teacher Retention* – Teachers who remain at the same school for the following school year (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Harrell et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2019; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Ingersoll et al., 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019; Tran & Smith, 2020).
4. *Teacher Shortage* – The inability to fill with new teachers the vacant teaching positions created by the number of students enrolled and teacher turnover (Alemdar et al., 2022; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Ingersoll et al., 2019; Saldaña, 2022; Sutcher et al., 2019).
5. *Teacher Turnover* – Teacher attrition plus teacher migration (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Ingersoll et al., 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019; Tran & Smith, 2020).

6. *Title I* – Schools with a student body comprising more than 40% of the students living in poverty (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015; Padilla et al., 2020).

Summary

The purpose of this study is to understand teacher retention in Title I schools. This research addresses the problem of teacher turnover in the schools that are most significantly impacted, Title I urban schools in the Southern United States, by examining the lived experiences of teachers who teach in Title I schools in an urban area in the Southern United States (Achinstein et al., 2010; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Farmer, 2020; Fisher, 2011; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022b; Harrell et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2020; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Padilla et al., 2020; Sutcher et al., 2019; Torres, 2019; Tran & Smith, 2020; USNCES, 2021; USNCES, 2022). The research focused on the four elements related to teacher retention identified by the literature, beneficial teacher preparation and professional development, effective mentorship, supportive administration, and a positive school climate (Alemdar et al., 2022; Bond & Blevins, 2019; Cancio et al., 2013; Carter et al., 2022; Cawte, 2020; Chuang, 2021; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Farmer; Geiger & Pivovarova; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Gul et al., 2019; Harrell et al.; Holmes et al.; Ramanan & Mohamad, 2020; Sutcher et al.; Torres; Tran & Smith; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). The theoretical lens this research used is Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. The research examined the participants' responses to determine if their needs were being met. This research added to the literature by providing more information about the problem of teacher turnover.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Teacher turnover has been a major problem for Title I schools in the United States. A systematic literature review was conducted to explore teacher turnover in Title I schools. This chapter presents a review of the current literature related to the topic of study. First, Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs is discussed as a theory relevant to meeting the needs of teachers. The theory discussion is followed by a synthesis of recent literature about teacher attrition, the causes of teacher attrition, and actions schools can take to limit teacher attrition. Then, the literature illustrates how teacher preparation and professional development, effective mentorship programs, supportive leadership, and positive school climate impact teacher retention. Finally, the need for the current study is addressed by identifying a gap in the literature regarding implementing beneficial teacher preparation and professional development, effective mentorship programs, supportive leadership, and a positive school climate to reduce teacher attrition.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is based on Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. Maslow published *Motivation and Personality* in 1954, explaining a hierarchy of human needs (Adair, 2006; Maslow). The hierarchy is often depicted as a pyramid, with the lowest needs at the bottom and the highest at the top. The lowest needs, or deficiency needs, must be addressed and met before the higher needs, or growth needs, can be addressed (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Fives & Mills, 2016; Maslow; Schunk, 2020). The five basic needs, from lowest to highest, are physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization (Adams et al., 2015; Boogren, 2016; Cawte, 2020; Fisher & Royster; Fives & Mills; Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023; Gawel, 1997; Maslow; Navy, 2020; Schunk; Weller, 1982).

The most basic needs, the first levels of the deficiency needs, that are addressed first are physiological and safety needs (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Fives & Mills, 2016; Maslow, 1954; Schunk, 2020). Physiological needs include food, water, and air (Adair, 2006; Schunk; Maslow). Physiological needs can also refer to tangible items needed for survival in employment (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023; Riley & Mort, 1981). Once physiological needs have been met, safety needs can be addressed. Safety needs refer to security (Schunk). Security can be physical and psychological (Frei-Landau & Levin). People must feel safe in their environment from physical harm to meet physical safety needs (Frei-Landau & Levin). Maslow elaborated on safety needs being met with predictability and order (Adams et al., 2015; Riley & Mort; Weller, 1982).

Once the basic needs have been met, the next deficiency needs can be addressed. The level on the hierarchy after safety needs is belongingness. Belongingness refers to relationships (Schunk, 2020). Belongingness needs can be met through friendships and through belonging to a group (Adams et al., 2015; Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023; Navy, 2020). According to Maslow (1954), for people to move beyond the stage of belongingness, they must have the opportunity to confer with others (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Navy; Riley & Mort). People can become emotionally exhausted without the ability to discuss feelings with another person (Maslow). After belongingness needs have been met, esteem can be addressed. Maslow noted that esteem is made up of two parts: self-esteem and the esteem obtained from others (Adair, 2006; Adams et al.; Fisher & Royster, 2016; Maslow; Frei-Landau & Levin; Weller, 1982). Self-esteem is how a person feels about themselves; esteem obtained from others is how others perceive a person (Adair; Adams et al.; Fisher & Royster; Maslow; Frei-Landau & Levin; Weller).

After all the deficiency needs have been met, growth needs can be addressed (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Fives & Mills, 2016; Maslow, 1954; Schunk, 2020). The highest level of Maslow's hierarchy is self-actualization. Self-actualization is achieved when people work to reach their highest potential (Adair, 2006; Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023; Freitas & Leonard, 2011; Maslow). For teachers, this can be seen as striving for more in their profession (Adams et al., 2015; Freitas & Leonard).

Teacher preparation and professional development, effective mentorship, supportive leadership, and positive school climates work together to improve teachers' personal growth. When the teachers' needs are met, their job satisfaction increases, and teacher retention increases. On the other hand, if the needs of teachers are not met, job satisfaction decreases, and teacher attrition and migration increase (Fisher & Royster, 2016).

Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs is an appropriate framework for exploring the phenomenon of teacher retention in Title I schools. When exploring the related literature surrounding teacher retention, basic needs that are not being met are highlighted. These needs can be better understood through Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This study will enlighten the impact of meeting teachers' basic needs and teacher retention.

Related Literature

Research supports that teacher shortages can greatly affect schools. The schools impacted the most by teacher turnover are hard-to-staff schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Goldring et al., 2014; Ingersol et al., 2019). The literature consistently describes hard-to-staff schools as schools whose student body is comprised of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Sutcher et al., 2019). This describes Title I schools.

Schools are left with a large financial burden of hiring and investing in a new teacher when teachers leave, whether to teach at another school or to leave teaching altogether (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Cawte, 2020). Schools are also affected in their attempts for schoolwide initiatives and teacher collaboration. When teachers leave, schools must train new teachers on initiatives, which can slow or stop progress (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Newberry & Allsop, 2017). Additionally, when teachers leave, relationships are impacted, and new relationships must be formed for successful collaboration (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; DeMatthews et al.; Goldhaber et al.; Newberry & Allsop). Teacher turnover has a lasting impact on student achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond). Research supports that student achievement decreases when teachers leave (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; Gimbert et al., 2007; Goldhaber et al.; Newberry & Allsop).

Teacher demand depends on several factors (Harrell et al., 2019). One factor is student enrollment. The number of students enrolled in a school determines the number of teaching positions. Over the past several years, student enrollment numbers have steadily increased (Sutcher et al., 2019). Class size limits are in conjunction with student enrollment. If a school has a limit for the number of students per class, a new teaching unit may be necessary to maintain the limit. With the number of students increasing, it is even more dire to understand what causes teacher turnover.

Title I Schools

In the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement shed light on social issues. One such social issue social scientists focused on was the link between education and poverty (Griffin, 2020; Vinovskis, 2022). Lyndon B. Johnson was elected President of the United States in 1963. When

elected, he declared a war on poverty and increased the number of federal education programs (Vinovskis). In 1964, Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act, laying the foundation for the Head Start program (Vinovskis). Also, in 1964, the U.S. Department of Education commissioned James S. Coleman and Alexander Mood to survey United States public education (Griffen). The report hoped to justify increased federal school funding to provide equal opportunities for the disadvantaged (Griffen). 1965 Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed (Smith, 2020; Vinovskis). Title I provides federal funding for these higher-poverty schools (Smith; U.S. Department of Education). Johnson's goal was to create equal education opportunities for students regardless of their economic background, and the federal funding provided through the ESEA was a step in achieving that goal (Vinovskis). The *Coleman Report* found that public education was most significantly influenced by socioeconomic status and relationships with family and friends rather than external factors that create equitable educational opportunities through federal funding (Griffen). The results were challenged, prompting economic research in education, which analyzed the cost-benefit of Title I of the ESEA (Griffen). According to Waddell (2011), Title I schools cannot overcome the social and economic disadvantages of the students enrolled; however, teachers should not be held back due to a lack of resources to teach the students. Because ESEA called for federal funding, Senator Robert Kennedy required adding accountability (Rury et al., 2022). *The Equality of Educational Opportunity Report* was published in 1966, and the *National Assessment of Educational Progress* was published in 1969 (Rury et al.). These reports inspired the public to question school performance.

During his presidency (1969-1974), President Nixon supported Head Start and Title I. However, he increased the research on the long-term effects of the programs and refused to

increase federal funding until research concluded that the programs in place were the most effective (Vinovskis, 2022). In 1970, Leon Lessinger published *Every Kid A Winner: Accountability in Education* (Smith, 2020). Lessinger stated in his book that experts should run schools and that educational progress should be publicly reported (Smith). To report progress to the public, schools would utilize standardized achievement tests to measure school success or failure (Smith). After its passage in 1965, ESEA was reauthorized every five years with a focus on fiscal abuse of Title I funds (Griffen, 2022). In 1971, Nixon delayed the reauthorization because he was concerned that the funding was not appropriately allocated (Vinovskis). After Nixon's resignation, President Ford reauthorized ESEA (Vinovskis). While he did reauthorize ESEA during his presidency (1974-1977), Ford did not expand federal funding for education (Griffen; Vinovskis).

Jimmy Carter's presidency (1977-1981) resulted in the creation of the Department of Education, which resulted in an increased federal role in education (Vinovskis, 2022). Accountability of schools began to come into question, and schools utilized standardized testing. The standardized testing used for accountability was not strictly defined, resulting in multiple standardized tests being utilized (Rury et al., 2022; Vinovskis). The tests administered varied greatly in quality and content (Rury et al.). Teacher impact on student learning was questioned, as was the concept of the social promotion of students. Social promotion refers to the common practice of teachers and schools to promote students who merely attended school regardless of their academic achievement (Rury et al.). Concerns were raised about the low teacher expectations and students being held to low standards. Standardized testing was seen as a solution to raise the standards and expectations of education (Rury et al.).

Reagan's presidency (1981-1989) aimed to reduce the federal government's role in education (Vinovskis, 2022). In 1981, the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA) was passed by Congress (Griffen, 2022; Vinovskis). Title I of the ESEA was replaced by Chapter 1 of the ECIA, but many other federal educational programs were either eliminated or changed to a state grant (Vinovskis). In 1983, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was published (Griffen; Kamenetz, 2015; Rury et al., 2022; Smith, 2020). This document declared that American "schools were failing and that tests could tell us how and why" (Kamenetz, 2015, p.72). The document also called attention to the quality of teachers and accountability for student success (Griffen). In 1986, the National Governors Association called for more accountability from schools in their publication *Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education* (Vinovskis). The desire for increased scores and accountability from schools resulted in the 1988 unanimous reauthorization of ESEA, also known as the Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Act, with improvements to Chapter 1 (Griffen; Vinovskis).

Throughout the H.W. Bush (1989-1993) and Clinton (1993-2001) administrations, the focus shifted from educational accountability to the quality of instruction teachers provide that contributes to student achievement (Griffen, 2022). During the Clinton administration (1993-2001), the Department of Education readdressed that poverty impacts academic achievement (Waddell, 2011). Further, the Department of Education stated that low-achieving schools do not result from poor instruction; Title I schools have additional educational needs that can handicap academic performance (Waddell). In 1994, Goals 2000 was passed, which included state accountability (Vinovskis, 2022). Chapter 1 was then reauthorized as the Improving America's Schools Act, which also reinstated the name Title I (Vinovskis). When achievement data was

analyzed in 1999, students in Title I schools made positive gains in reading and math; however, the gap was still significant compared to students not in high-poverty schools (Vinovskis).

The G.W. Bush administration (2001-2009) saw the creation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. NCLB required states receiving Title I money to develop academic standards, and teacher evaluation systems were implemented (Griffen, 2022; Vinovskis, 2022). NCLB focused on teachers, requiring that teachers receive highly qualified status and teach using scientifically based educational research (Vinovskis). Under NCLB, students in grades three through eight and once in high school must be assessed in math and reading annually (Hutt & Schneider, 2018). The assessment results are used as a measure of educational improvement (Hut & Schneider). When the data was analyzed, it was determined that achievement trends were positive but would not meet the NCLB goal of 100% proficiency by 2013-14 (Vinovskis).

The Obama administration (2009-2017) saw a new reauthorization of ESEA, which would replace NCLB. Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law in 2015 (Griffen, 2022; Vinovskis, 2022). Where NCLB defined quality education through the lens of quality educators and held teachers accountable through students' scores on standardized tests, ESSA held schools accountable through multiple measures (Griffen). ESSA also reduced NCLB's ambitious accountability goals, such as timelines and what constitutes a qualified or effective educator (Vinovskis). Under the ESSA, Title I schools are schools with at least 40% of the student population being low-income (Smith, 2020; U.S. Department of Education).

The literature consistently cites schools with higher populations of students from low-income families as hard-to-staff schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Goldring et al., 2014; Ingersol et al., 2019). Higher turnover rates consistently disproportionately affect schools in high-poverty areas (Renbarger & Davis, 2019). Title I schools, especially in the South,

are those that are most significantly affected by teacher turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; Goldring et al.; Ingersol et al.; NCTAF, 2003; Taie & Goldring, 2020; USNCES, 2022). Teacher attrition in Title I schools is almost 50% more than in other schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond).

Teacher Turnover

Teachers leave the field of teaching for a myriad of reasons. Among these reasons are leaving the field of education for personal reasons, such as child rearing, intending to return, and leaving teaching to pursue another career (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019). However, research has highlighted that the longer a teacher is away from the teaching profession, the less likely it is for them to return (Sutcher et al.). Over half of the teachers who left the profession in 2012-13 reported a more manageable workload and better working conditions in their new profession (Renbarger & Davis, 2019). Other reasons affecting teachers' decisions to leave the classroom are due to school factors, such as school climate (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Holmes et al., 2019). Problematic behavior and the way a school addresses problematic behavior has also been addressed as a factor impacting teacher turnover (Feng & Sass, 2018; Fisher, 2011; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Holmes et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2020; OECD, 2019; Renbarger & Davis, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019).

Research shows that teacher turnover directly impacts student achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Gimbert et al., 2007; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Newberry & Allsop, 2017). Students who attend schools with higher teacher turnover rates are more likely to receive instruction from teachers who are inexperienced or ineffective (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Goldhaber et al.; Newberry & Allsop). Teacher

turnover can result in fewer class units due to the inability to replace teachers, resulting in larger class sizes that can negatively impact student achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; Newberry & Allsop).

In addition to negatively impacting student achievement, teacher turnover impacts the entire school. Research has shown that teacher turnover is disruptive to relationships in a school, which can impede school growth both instructionally and collaboratively (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Newberry & Allsop, 2017). When teachers leave a school, initiatives put forth for school growth are halted or restarted (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; DeMatthews et al.; Goldhaber et al.; Newberry & Allsop). Working relationships can be severed by teacher turnover, thus resulting in teacher isolation, which in turn can result in further teacher turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; Gimbert et al., 2007; Goldhaber et al.; Newberry & Allsop).

Teacher turnover negatively impacts the success of schools. Research supports the idea that teachers want to be in a school that supports their growth (DeMatthews et al., 2022). Research also supports that inexperienced and ineffective teachers lack the pedagogical knowledge to foster a strong professional environment that increases teacher retention (Achinstein et al., 2010; DeMatthews et al.; Newberry & Allsop, 2017). Teacher turnover can become cyclical, which can have serious impacts on schools. Goldhaber and associates (2022) elaborate that schools with higher attrition can negatively influence teachers. When teachers become aware of the higher attrition levels, it impacts their decision to remain at their school, and attrition levels continue to remain high at these schools (Goldhaber et al.).

In addition to the impact on students and the school, teacher turnover impacts school funding (Achinstein et al., 2010; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Cawte, 2020;

Newberry & Allsop, 2017). It is expensive to replace a teacher. When a school replaces a teacher, it must finance resources for recruiting, training, and developing new teachers (Cawte, 2020). Replacing a teacher in an urban school costs over $20,000 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond). Additionally, the overall bill for teacher turnover is over $2.2 billion annually (Renbarger & Davis, 2019).

Needs of Teachers

Maslow (1954) detailed human needs in his hierarchy of needs. The five basic needs are directly related to the needs of teachers. The lowest needs in the hierarchy are considered deficiency needs. These needs must be met before the highest needs, the growth needs, can influence behavior (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Fives & Mills, 2016; Maslow, 1954; Schunk, 2020). Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs can be directly applied to the needs of teachers.

Deficiency Needs: Physiological and Safety

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, the lowest levels of deficiency needs are basic needs (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Fives & Mills, 2016; Maslow, 1954; Schunk, 2020). The basic needs are physiological and safety needs. Physiological needs are the necessities needed for survival (Maslow). These needs for teachers are the tangible necessities needed to survive teaching, such as a classroom, adequate equipment, and supplies (Fisher & Royster; Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Riley & Mort, 1981).

As mentioned previously, the next basic need of teachers is the need for safety (Maslow, 1954). Teachers may express safety needs as the desire to feel safe in their school and classrooms from any reasonable threat (Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023). For leadership to effectively support this need, it must consider supporting teachers and students from threats. Leadership must consider aggressive behaviors displayed by students and provide teachers and

students the support they need to feel safe. Teachers may express mental safety needs as the desire to maintain employment. Teachers may have this need met when they are provided with job security from obtaining tenure (Adair, 2006; Fisher & Royster, 2016). Maslow explained that people feel safe with a sense of order and predictability (Adams et al., 2015; Riley & Mort, 1981; Weller, 1982). For teachers, this can come in the form of a set schedule and plans to ensure the day runs smoothly and predictably. When met with last-minute schedule changes and chaos, people can experience a deficiency in their safety needs. Often, schools lack the order necessary for safety to be met (Fisher & Royster). Teachers may then experience anxiety due to inconsistencies and perceptions of unfairness due to a lack of order (Fisher & Royster). When this occurs, the school climate is negatively impacted.

Deficiency Needs: Belongingness

Only after the basic needs have been met can the next deficiency needs be addressed. The next need is the need for belongingness (Maslow, 1954). In a school, relationships can be cultivated in multiple ways. School leadership can work to distribute leadership roles among teachers and assign teachers to work on committees to achieve a task for the shared vision of the school (Torres, 2019). Leadership can also work with teachers as a part of a joint effort to review school efforts and events (Torres; Weller, 1982). By working with teachers, leadership can foster a cohesive and positive school climate where every voice is heard and valued. This can meet the teachers' need for belongingness (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Torres; Weller).

Maslow (1954) elaborated that belongingness can be met through the opportunities to work with others (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Navy, 2020; Riley & Mort, 1981). Teachers can achieve this through teamwork and collaboration in professional development, mentorship, and

team meetings. This can also be achieved because of a positive school climate (Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023; Navy, 2020; Riley & Mort; Weller, 1982). Without the opportunity to discuss their feelings with others, teachers can experience emotional exhaustion and teacher burnout (Frei-Landau & Levin; Newberry & Allsop, 2017).

Deficiency Needs: Esteem

Once teachers have a sense of belongingness, esteem needs can be addressed. Esteem refers to feeling good and being recognized (Schunk, 2020). Maslow (1954) divided esteem into two categories: self-esteem and esteem from others (Adair, 2006; Adams et al., 2015; Fisher & Royster, 2016; Maslow, 1954; Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023; Weller, 1982). Self-esteem refers to the esteem a person feels from their confidence, achievement, freedom, and independence (Adair; Adams et al.; Fisher & Royster; Maslow; Frei-Landau & Levin; Weller). Esteem from others comes from the desire for recognition, attention, and appreciation from others and the desire for a positive reputation (Adair; Adams et al.; Fisher & Royster; Maslow; Frei-Landau & Levin; Weller). Maslow clarified that esteem can only be achieved when respect is deserved and genuinely earned (Fisher & Royster; Navy, 2020). Teachers can meet their esteem needs when they feel successful and important in their careers (Fisher & Royster; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Riley & Mort, 1981; Weller). They can also have their esteem needs met when their ideas are valued by leadership and implemented (Fisher & Royster; Riley & Mort; Weller). Another way the esteem needs of teachers can be met is from positive recognition at their schools from people at their schools as well as from their community. When the community values teachers' work, teachers gain pride in their school and profession (Holmes et al., 2019; Navy, 2020; Unda et al., 2019; Weller). When teachers do not have their esteem needs met, they can begin to feel inferior and useless, resulting in teacher attrition (Navy). Teachers experiencing burnout, such as

emotional and physical exhaustion, as well as depersonalization and anxiety, can become reinvigorated by community support (Unda et al.).

Growth Needs: Self-Actualization

After all of the deficiency needs have been met, growth needs can be addressed and met (Maslow, 1954). Self-actualization can be achieved when teachers endeavor to do more (Adams et al., 2015; Freitas & Leonard, 2011). When all the other needs have been met, people become restless unless they do what they are meant to do (Maslow). Maslow described this stage by stating, “What a man *can* be, he *must* be” (p. 46). Maslow used the example of a musician experiencing discontentment unless he makes music. When people strive for more, they strive to achieve self-actualization (Adams et al.). For teachers, this can be seen as striving for more in their profession (Adams et al.; Freitas & Leonard). It can be seen as continuing research in education, leading professional development in the school, and other activities in which a teacher feels they are contributing to their profession (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Fives & Mills, 2016; Holmes et al., 2019). Self-actualization can only be possible when teachers meet all their other needs. According to Maslow, needs can only become a motivator for a person when left unsatisfied (Cawte, 2020). When the deficiency needs are unmet, teachers become stagnant, stuck in a cycle of perpetual survival. When the needs of teachers are not met, teacher turnover increases (Navy, 2020). On the other hand, when the deficiency needs are met, teachers can strive to achieve growth needs where they can begin to flourish and extend their educational careers (Holmes et al.).

Job Satisfaction

According to Spector (2022), job satisfaction is defined as how a person feels about their job and different parts of their job. Job satisfaction can be achieved when an employee's job

needs are met. Job satisfaction is important to any job (Renbarger & Davis, 2019). Teacher job satisfaction has been linked to teacher retention (Wang et al., 2020). Teachers who experience job dissatisfaction and stress reflect those emotions onto their students and schools (Jentsch et al., 2023). They tend to support their students much less than their satisfied colleagues (Jentsch et al.). The lack of support experienced by students from teachers with lower levels of satisfaction decreases student participation and achievement (Jentsch et al.). Research indicates that teachers who experience higher levels of job satisfaction also experience lower levels of burnout and are more likely to remain in their jobs (Jentsch et al.). The federal government recognizes job satisfaction and employees through a survey per the National Defense and Authorization Act (Spector, 2022). The survey measures job satisfaction in four categories: rewards, personal growth, leadership, and work environment (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008). These four categories measured by the government's job satisfaction survey are consistent with the literature on teacher turnover (Granger et al., 2022; Harrell et al., 2019).

For a teacher, rewards can be reflected in appropriate pay for work done. Teachers with lower salaries experience lower job satisfaction (Wang et al., 2020). The salary for beginning teachers is often so low that they need to work a secondary job to supplement their income (Newberry & Alsup, 2017). Another group of teachers who may experience the need for additional employment are teachers without partners who are solely responsible for all living costs (Nápoles et al., 2022; Newberry & Alsup). Single-income teachers experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion, resulting in lower job satisfaction (Newberry & Alsup).

Personal growth for a teacher can be reflected in teacher preparation and professional development. Many teachers have acquired their teaching certificates through traditional means of attending a teacher preparation program. With the increases in teacher turnover, alternative

teacher certification has increased (Jentsch et al., 2023). Teachers with alternative certifications do not have the same amount of teacher preparation as traditionally certified teachers. As such, these teachers do not enter the profession with strong pedagogical knowledge. There is a strong correlation between initial teacher preparation and job satisfaction (Fütterer et al., 2023). Teachers can participate in professional development to grow their pedagogical knowledge. Quality professional development is professional development that is supportive, has a high level of participation and involvement from teachers, encourages collaboration, focuses on the development of instruction, is job-embedded, provides consistent feedback from administration, and is relevant to the teacher and school community (Ogbuanya & Shodipe, 2022; Yoon & Kim, 2022; Yoon & Kim, 2023). Quality professional development can increase teacher preparation and job satisfaction (Yoon & Kim, 2022). Professional development is not just beneficial to new or alternatively, certified teachers. Professional development increases job satisfaction for traditionally certified teachers as well (Yoon & Kim, 2023; Wang et al., 2020).

Personal growth and leadership in education can be achieved through mentorship. Mentorship is associated with higher job satisfaction (Hightower et al., 2021). When teachers have the opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues, they have greater levels of job satisfaction (Wang et al., 2020). Leadership support in a school is directly related to job satisfaction (Wang et al.). Leadership behavior is also linked to teacher job satisfaction (Dicke et al., 2020). When school leaders provide their teachers with more autonomy, the teachers tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction (Wang et al.). Additionally, when school leadership distributes leadership roles to teachers and promotes the teacher's participation in schoolwide decisions, teacher job satisfaction increases (Want et al.).

Around 20% of teachers' job satisfaction can be attributed to working conditions (Fütterer et al., 2023). Working conditions refer to a school's culture and climate and physical working conditions. A respectful and peaceful working environment increases job satisfaction (Wang et al., 2020). When teachers have their needs met, they experience lower stress levels and report higher levels of job satisfaction (Rengarger & Davis, 2019).

Salary

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the average teacher's salary in the United States in 2009-2010 was $55,370, which in constant 2021-22 dollars was $72,050, and in 2021-2022 in constant 2021-2022 dollars was $66,397. Despite a salary increase of $16,680 over 12 years, the percent change in salary from 2009-2010 to 2021-2022 is -7.8%. This means teachers' salaries have decreased over the past 12 years. The National Education Association compiled teacher salary data for the United States in 2021-2022. According to the National Education Association, in 2021-2022, the average starting teacher salary in the United States was $42,845. The highest starting teacher salary in the United States in 2021-2022 was in the District of Columbia at $56,313, and the lowest starting salary was in Montana at $33,568 (National Education Association, n.d.). A study conducted on salary raises and quitting behavior yielded that employees have lower job satisfaction and a higher potential for quitting or searching for another job when they learn they earn less than a peer (Dube et al., 2019). Teacher salaries are typically determined by a fixed salary schedule considering years of experience and education level (Feng & Sass, 2017). Teacher salary data and teacher turnover data reveal a higher incidence of teacher turnover when the highest achievable salary is lower (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2019). In 2019, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development issued a report titled *Education at a Glance 2019*. The report stated that in 2017,

primary teachers in the United States earned 45% less than similarly educated peers in other professions. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003) analyzed survey data and found that salary was one of the strongest factors influencing teacher turnover in Title I schools.

Every year, the teacher workload increases to meet the needs of the changing state and federal education standards (Granger et al., 2022). In many states, living costs also increase yearly (Granger et al.). Teachers' salaries have decreased despite the increased workload and living costs. There is abundant evidence to support the impact of teacher salary on teacher recruitment and retention (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Teacher salary greatly impacts teacher turnover (Geiger & Pivovarova; Harrell et al., 2019). Additionally, teachers' starting salary is one of the strongest predictors of teacher turnover (Miller et al., 2020).

Research supports that beginning educators are the most likely group to participate in teacher turnover (Nápoles et al., 2022; Sutcher et al., 2019). Teachers earlier in their careers and subsequently have lower salaries often need to subsidize their income with additional employment (Nápoles et al.). In addition to not being paid enough to cover the costs of basic living expenses, teachers also report not being paid enough to cover the number of hours worked and the emotional depletion associated with teaching (Newberry & Allsup, 2017).

Teacher Preparation

Teacher demand is significantly affected by how many teachers are leaving the teaching field, thus creating empty classrooms (Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a) and how many are entering the field of education to fill those spots (Harrell et al., 2019). When a teaching position opens at a school, the people who apply for the position fall into categories. These categories are new, freshly certified teachers with no prior teaching experience, teachers attempting to change

schools, teachers who stepped away from teaching and are returning to the workforce, individuals who have received alternative teaching certification, and individuals who are not certified to teach. A huge challenge in education is the need for more certified teachers available to apply for open teaching positions. Each year, enrollment in teacher preparation programs is declining. In 2014, enrollment in teacher preparation programs declined by 23% (Sutcher et al., 2019). According to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (2022), the number of bachelor's degrees awarded in education in the early 1970s was around 200,000. That number has dropped significantly to around 90,000 from 2018 to 2019 (AACTE, 2022).

With fewer college students pursuing teaching careers, there are fewer new, traditionally certified teachers. The number of teachers who did not begin their careers as teachers is increasing (Fütterer et al., 2023). One out of every three first-year teachers has had a career before pursuing teaching (Fütterer et al.). Additionally, from 1988 to 2008, the percentage of teachers who entered the teaching career from an alternative pathway doubled (Fütterer et al.).

One alternative to obtaining a traditional teaching certificate is to apply for a non-traditional teacher preparation program. Non-traditional teacher preparation programs, such as Teach for America, do not always address pedagogical content knowledge, whereas traditional teacher preparation programs do (Fütterer et al., 2023; Ingersol & Tran, 2023). Alternatively, non-traditional teacher preparation programs focus on on-the-job skills (Kraemer-Holland, 2023). Non-traditional teacher preparation programs often require less than half of the hours a traditional program requires (Fütterer et al.). Teach for America, for example, requires a five-to-eight-week summer institute (Kraemer-Holland). Sentiments from former Teach for America teachers are that teachers from Teach for America tend to teach for only two to four years before moving on to another career (Kraemer-Holland).

Another alternative to obtaining a traditional teacher certificate is to apply for emergency certification (Ingersol & Tran, 2023). Typically, the individuals applying for emergency certification are entering the career pathway of teaching as a second career. These individuals are novices to teaching but come to the career of teaching with the expertise acquired from a previous profession (Fütterer et al., 2023). These individuals are expert novices. Expert novices have little to no teaching background (Fütterer et al.; Ingersol & Tran). Additionally, they must translate their previous work experiences to the rigors of teaching in a school, which research supports can hinder their adjustment (Fütterer et al.).

Professional Development

Emergency-certified teachers have yet to benefit from teacher preparation programs and are woefully underprepared for entering classrooms (Sutcher et al., 2019). Alternative teaching certificates do not have the same requirements and do not include a formal teacher preparation program. As such, the number of teachers who still need a formal teacher preparation program is increasing. The school needs to prepare these teachers for the rigors of the classroom. One such way is to invest in teachers through professional development opportunities. Teachers with alternative teaching certificates often feel as though they are not prepared, and professional development is a valuable tool that can be used to increase their preparation (Fütterer et al., 2023).

Professional development is important for every teacher, regardless of the level of preparation when entering teaching. All teachers need to continue their professional growth to keep up with the changes and challenges of the profession (Fütterer et al., 2023). Research supports professional development as an essential step to increasing teacher retention (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Renbarger & Davis, 2019). One professional development goal is preparing

teachers to implement positive change in the school system (Bond & Blevins, 2019). These positive changes can increase the school climate and subsequently increase teacher retention.

Student Behavior

The literature consistently addresses problematic student behavior contributing to teacher turnover (Feng & Sass, 2018; Fisher, 2011; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Holmes et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2020; Sutcher et al., 2019). Problematic student behavior includes, but is not limited to, behavior that interferes with teaching, disrespect toward teachers, and apathy (Miller et al.). Some literature cites problematic student behavior as one of the leading causes of teacher attrition (Fisher; Geiger & Pivovarova; Miller et al.). Other literature takes a deeper look at the impact of problematic behavior on teacher turnover and breaks the issue down further (Holmes et al.; OECD, 2019; Renbarger & Davis, 2019). While higher percentages of student behavior are correlated with teacher attrition, some literature argues that the problematic behavior is not the underlying reason for teacher attrition (Holmes et al.; OECD; Renbarger & Davis). The argument made was that the percentage of students with problematic behaviors does not influence a teacher's job satisfaction (Renbarger & Davis). Rather, research supports that the impact on job satisfaction comes from the time necessary to handle behavior and the lack of support when difficult behaviors arise (Fisher; Holmes et al.; OECD; Renbarger & Davis). The lack of understanding of effectively managing poor student behavior contributes to frustration (Renbarger & Davis). When teachers lack the knowledge to de-escalate misconduct situations, student misconduct will continue. When teachers are provided with the appropriate professional development to teach them how to manage behavior appropriately, the self-efficacy of teachers increases, and the frustration associated with negative student behaviors decreases (Holmes et al.; Renbarger & Davis).

One effective way to increase desired behaviors and decrease problematic behaviors in the classroom is through integrating teaching social-emotional skills into lessons (Khazanchi et al., 2021). Social-emotional skills include emotional regulation, goal setting, compassion, coping strategies, constructive problem-solving, and self-control (Khazanchi et al.; Sheithauer & Scheer, 2022). The integration of teaching social-emotional skills can be difficult for teachers; however, it has been shown to decrease problematic behaviors and increase student academic performance (Khazanchi et al.; Sheithauer & Scheer).

Mentorship

Teacher attrition can be attributed to several factors, but there are things that schools can implement at the school level to try to increase teacher retention. Research supports mentorship as a tool that schools can use to increase teacher retention (Carter et al., 2022; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Gul et al., 2019; Ramanan & Mohamad, 2020; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). Mentorship, specifically for new teachers, has been shown to help build positive relationships with colleagues, which helps decrease some of the stressors associated with beginning teaching and has been shown to increase job retention (Renbarger & Davis, 2019). There are two types of educational mentorships: official and unofficial (Hightower et al., 2021). Unofficial mentorships refer to relationships formed through social interactions (Hightower et al.). Unofficial mentorships can positively impact teachers and are effective at helping teachers feel more supported (Hightower et al.). Official mentorships are the formal mentorship relationships established by the school (Hightower et al.). Official mentorships effectively improve instructional practices (Gul et al.; Hightower et al.). When a mentorship program is set up to fidelity, every person involved receives support and has the opportunity for growth (Hightower et al.; Wiens et al., 2019). A study tracked the teacher retention of new teachers who taught in

Title I schools in a large urban school district participating in an official mentorship program (Wiens et al., 2019). All new teachers were included in the mentorship program as mentees. These teachers experienced higher levels of support from mentor teachers and administration (Wiens et al., 2019). The administration saw the development of teacher leaders who served as mentors and were able to delegate leadership responsibilities effectively (Wiens et al.). The data from the study demonstrated a significant reduction, nearly double, in teacher turnover compared to the closest school group that did not participate in the official mentorship program (Wiens et al.).

A typical mentorship program in a school has formally assigned mentors who may receive an additional stipend for being a mentor. These mentors might be able to observe their mentees teaching in their classrooms but must also fulfill their roles and responsibilities as full-time teachers (Hightower et al., 2021). Mentors in typical programs are rarely trained to be mentors and lack professional knowledge regarding their role as mentors, resulting in a lack of support for mentees (Hightower et al.). For an official mentorship to be effective, mentorship programs must be well-designed (Sutcher et al., 2019). Effective mentorship programs are based on the needs of the teachers and the school (Bond & Blevins, 2020). Research indicates that effective mentorship can help support alternatively certified teachers who may be underprepared (Hightower et al.).

School leaders can effectively increase their presence and support by implementing a mentorship program. A mentorship program also allows teacher leaders to become more involved in the school (Tran & Smith, 2020). Mentorship programs are a form of distributed leadership where teacher leaders who serve as mentors can effectively guide their mentees (Hightower et al., 2021). Mentorship programs can increase connectedness and create a positive

school climate (Sutcher et al., 2019). However, the teacher mentorship program implemented in the school must be deliberate to be effective.

An essential component of effective mentorship programs is providing professional development for mentor teachers. Mid-career teachers make effective teacher mentors as they are generally looking for new challenges and professional growth (Cawte, 2020; Tran & Smith, 2020). These teachers' expertise can be leveraged to help ease the transition of new teachers into a new school (Tran & Smith). However, research supports that effective teachers are not automatically successful mentors (Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). Prospective mentor teachers still need formal professional development to be influential mentors (Gul et al., 2019; Leibel et al., 2021; Ramanan & Mohamad, 2020; Sutcher et al., 2019). Effective mentorship addresses career development and role modeling (Bond & Blevins, 2020). Research supports providing professional development to teacher mentors so they can effectively fulfill their roles.

Administrative Support

Poor administrative support is another reason given for teacher turnover (Alemdar et al., 2022; Cancio et al., 2013; Farmer, 2020; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Gul et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2010; Sutcher et al., 2019; Torres, 2019; Tran & Smith, 2020). Research supports that teachers who feel supported by their administration are less likely to leave (Geiger & Pivovarova). When teachers have higher levels of support, the retention rate is higher than it is for teachers who do not receive the same support (Renbarger & Davis, 2019). Research also supports that school leadership styles must adapt to the culture of the area and the school (Maheshwari, 2022). The reasons for attrition are interconnected and can all be addressed through effective school leadership.

Several types of leadership styles are elaborated on in the literature. Many leadership styles in literature regard leadership in business models rather than schools. While not formally labeled a business, schools are similar to businesses (Jones, 2018). On the local level, businesses have a head manager, and often, they have an assistant manager. Schools have a principal, and often, they have an assistant principal. Businesses have employees who work to provide a service or a product to their customers. Schools have teachers who provide the service of teaching their students. Because schools have a similar structure to businesses, leadership styles for leadership in businesses can be applied to leadership at schools (Jones). Additionally, school leadership positions have taken on more managerial roles over the last 30 years and have transformed into management positions (Wood, 2017).

Teachers who have left schools have cited a lack of support and a poor school climate (Parlar et al., 2022). Both reasons are present under authoritarian leadership. Authoritarian leadership has been described as rigid leadership where the leader has complete control and high expectations of employees (Alblooshi et al., 2021). Authoritarian leaders stress complete control and require the obedience of those working under them (Parlar et al.). The behavior of authoritarian leaders does not offer support for employees (Alblooshi et al.). Employees tend to feel stressed, pressured, and fearful of disciplinary actions due to poor performance (Alblooshi et al.). This results in employees who fear innovation (Alblooshi et al.; Kasalak et al., 2022). However, authoritarian leadership can be successful when utilized in areas where cultural values support it (Parlar et al.). As a result, authoritarian leadership is more prevalent and praised for its successes in China, for instance. In contrast, in America, it is perceived as a leadership style that decreases employee commitment (Parlar et al.).

Distributed leadership is also known as empowering leadership. Empowering leaders work with their employees and distribute power (Schermuly et al., 2022; Torres, 2019). Empowering leaders guide their employees to lead themselves (Schermuly et al.). This is achieved through a focus on understanding the integrated roles of teachers and leadership and the leadership roles teachers can hold (Larsson & Löwstedt, 2023). Distributed leadership recognizes schools as living systems that must constantly adapt to challenges and changes (Larsson & Löwstedt). By putting teachers in leadership positions, more people are ready to respond to the various obstacles. Research has demonstrated a positive correlation between distributed leadership and teachers' commitment to their schools, increased teacher job satisfaction, and increased teacher retention (Torres). When leadership is effectively distributed among teachers in a school, such as through a leadership team, there are positive correlations in student achievement (Torres). Because distributed leaders distribute their power and delegate leadership roles to employees, distributed leadership can have various outcomes (Torres). When distributed effectively, distributed leadership can have powerfully positive outcomes for a school (Larsson & Löwstedt; Torres).

On the other hand, when leadership roles are distributed ineffectively, there can be catastrophic effects (Larsson & Löwstedt, 2023; Torres, 2019). An example of a poor application of distributed leadership is when too many school personnel respond to an emergency incident rather than working together and taking guidance from school leaders (Larsson & Löwstedt). This causes disorganization and can lead to chaos, resulting in school personnel feeling unsupported and frustrated (Larsson & Löwstedt). The distribution of leadership roles directly and positively affects the school climate by giving teachers a louder voice and increasing administrative support, subsequently positively impacting teacher retention (Torres).

Laissez-faire leadership is also called passive leadership (González-Cruza et al., 2019). Laissez-faire leadership is also considered a nonexistent leadership style (González-Cruza et al.). The laissez-faire leader does not provide leadership to employees or take responsibility for any actions (González-Cruza et al.; Kalkan et al., 2020). Research has shown that Laissez-faire leadership results in poor trust relationships with teachers and negatively impacts school climate and job satisfaction, which results in higher levels of teacher attrition and migration (Kalkan et al.; Kasalak et al., 2019; Van der Vyver et al., 2020).

Transactional leadership is reward-based leadership (Alblooshi et al., 2021; González-Cruza et al., 2019, 2019; Kalkan et al., 2020; Kasalak et al., 2019, 2020; Schermuly et al., 2020; Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Yongping et al., 2018). Transactional leaders set clear expectations, objectives, and obligations for employees (Kalkan et al.; Van der Vyver et al.). They also check their employees often to ensure expectations are met (Kalkan et al.; Van der Vyver et al.). When employees meet the leader's expectations, they are rewarded (Kalkan et al.; Van der Vyver et al.). Transactional leadership is the traditional leadership style management utilizes (Alblooshi et al., 2021; Schermuly et al., 2020). Research demonstrates that transactional leadership results in low job satisfaction and negativity empowers employees, negatively impacting teacher retention (Kasalak et al.; Schermuly et al.).

Transformational leaders are role models and work to motivate and inspire employees positively (Alblooshi et al., 2021; González-Cruza et al., 2019; Kalkan et al., 2020; Kasalak et al., 2020; Schermuly et al., 2020; Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Yongping et al., 2018). These leaders strive to help employees reach their full potential (Alblooshi et al.; González-Cruza et al.; Kalkan et al.; Kasalak et al.; Schermuly et al.; Van der Vyver et al.; Yongping et al.). The transformational leadership style is highly supportive (Alblooshi et al.). Research demonstrates

that transformational leadership results in high job satisfaction and positively empowers employees, which results in higher levels of teacher retention (Kasalak et al.; Schermuly et al.). Studies conducted on transformational leadership have shown that transformational leadership significantly reduces the internalized stress of teachers (Grand & Drew, 2022). Additionally, research supports that teachers want to be coached by a principal and receive individualized feedback that encourages growth (Grant & Drew).

Teachers are most likely to leave the field of education when they are at the beginning of their teaching career (Sutcher et al., 2019). Research has supported less attrition in this demographic of teachers when there were higher levels of support (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Tran & Smith, 2020). School support starts with the administration but encompasses the entire school faculty. When there are higher levels of administrative support, faculty are more involved in schoolwide decisions, and the school climate improves (Holmes et al., 2019). When schools have higher levels of support, teacher retention rates are higher (Geiger & Pivovarova). Research indicates support specifically from the administration as one of the most vital improvement aspects (Gul et al., 2019).

School Climate

School climate is a broad term that encompasses many factors. Some of the factors addressed by school climate are the physical environment of the school and the relationships in the school (Grant et al., 2022). The physical environment can refer to the school's demographics, buildings, and resources (Grant et al.). One of the reasons given consistently for teacher turnover is schools whose student body consists of high poverty levels (Sutcher et al., 2019). While not all research supports this as a reason for teacher turnover, a correlation exists between higher poverty levels and working conditions contributing to teacher turnover (Geiger & Pivovarova,

2018; Tran & Smith, 2020). Even with the funding from Title I, schools in higher poverty areas may lack adequate funding for impactful physical improvements. Consequently, these schools may not have the resources to update the building. This lack of resources can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and lead to teacher attrition (Geiger & Pivovarova; Tran & Smith). Research consistently highlights teacher turnover occurring in schools with higher minority levels in the student body (Achinstein et al., 2010; Ingersol et al., 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019). It is important to note that research does not support higher levels of minority students as a cause for teacher turnover but rather as a correlation (Geiger & Pivovarova; Harrell et al., 2019; Ingersol et al.; Sutcher et al). Instead, research supports that higher attrition levels commonly attributed to poverty and demographics are due to the teachers' working conditions and student performance (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022b; Harrell et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2020; Padilla et al., 2020).

School climate regarding the school's atmosphere refers to how the school is set up (Torres, 2019). School climate is related to the connectedness of all the parties in the school (Yang et al., 2022). This can include how the teachers interact with each other, the students, and the administration (Yang et al.). This can also include how the administration delegates roles and responsibilities (Larsson & Löwstedt, 2023; Torres). School climate can also be affected by how the teachers feel their input is considered regarding instructional management (Yang et al., 2022). School climate can greatly contribute to teacher attrition because it is strongly related to how a teacher feels in their school (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Sutcher et al., 2019; Torres). This category of school climate is not limited to teachers, students, and administration. It can also refer to relationships between parents and the community (Yang et al., 2022). A study on the impact of school climate and teacher burnout found a strong association between lack of trust

and poor school climate, leading to higher levels of teacher burnout (Yang et al.). When the relationships between all the stakeholders in a school are not considered or tended to, teachers can experience emotional exhaustion, leading to burnout and, ultimately, teacher turnover (Yang et al., 2022).

Previously mentioned essential factors of teacher preparation, professional development, and effective mentorship are career development and role modeling. Another critical factor is social support (Alemdar et al., 2022; Bond & Blevins, 2020). One way to tie all the factors together is to create a cohort of new teachers and provide professional development through group mentorship (Bond & Blevins). By creating a learning community, new teachers can collaborate and work together to explore the challenges and solutions to problems encountered by new teachers and learn about school norms (Alemdar et al., 2022; Bond & Blevins; Chuang, 2021). This cohort of teachers will subsequently positively impact the school culture. Research supports that when the program is needs-driven and focuses on the priorities of the learners, in this case, the mentees, changes will occur (Bond & Blevins). Another benefit of group mentorship is that it occurs outside of classroom instruction and allows teachers to collaborate deeply and reflect without the presence of students (Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). This outside collaboration allows teachers to dig deeper and explore difficulties and solutions. Positive school climates are directly associated with higher student achievement (Grant et al.). Teachers who teach in a school with a positive school climate are reported to have higher levels of commitment, fewer absences, and higher retention levels (Grant et al.).

Summary

The schools that experience the highest levels of teacher turnover are hard-to-staff urban schools in the Southern United States (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Goldring et

al., 2014; Ingersol et al., 2019; NCTAF, 2003; Taie & Goldring, 2020; USNCES, 2022**)**. Literature, including the U.S. Department of Education 2020-2021 Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey, consistently defines hard-to-staff schools as schools whose student body consists of students with higher poverty levels (Smith, 2020; U.S. Department of Education). These schools are classified as Title I under the Every Student Succeeds Act (Griffen, 2022; Vonovskis, 2022). Teacher turnover can positively impact student achievement when the teacher who leaves is ineffective, or the teacher replacement is a better fit for the school (Ingersol et al.**)**. This scenario, however, is not what predominantly happens. More often, teacher turnover has a detrimental impact on schools and student achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; Gimbert et al., 2007; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Newberry & Allsop, 2017). Additionally, teacher turnover is an issue in education that can have costly consequences for a school as it is extremely expensive to replace a teacher (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond; Cawte, 2020; Renbarger & Davis, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019). Understanding job satisfaction helps identify what factors lead to teacher turnover. Using Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs can provide insight into the needs of teachers that impact teacher turnover. The literature consistently identifies salary, teacher preparation, professional development, mentorship, administrative support, and school climate contributing to job satisfaction and teacher retention (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Holmes et al., 2019; Jentsch et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2020). Research supports that these factors are intertwined, and when addressed together, teacher retention is improved (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Gul et al., 2019; Ramanan & Mohamad, 2020; Torres, 2019; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). Schools, however, do not consistently address each factor. Schools have set salary scales and cannot adjust teachers' salaries. The only way a school can guarantee a teacher has gone through a traditional teacher preparation program is to

hire only traditionally certified teachers. Because the number of individuals attending school to become a teacher has declined significantly, this is unrealistic (Fütterer et al., 2023; Harrell et al., 2019). Schools often hire alternatively certified teachers or teachers with emergency certification to fill the vacancies. Research supports teacher induction programs and ongoing professional development as tools schools can utilize to improve teacher retention (Fütterer et al.). Mentorship is another method schools can utilize to increase teacher retention (Carter et al., 2022; Geiger & Pivovarova; Gul et al., 2019; Ramanan & Mohamad, 2020; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). Effective mentorship programs have professional development for both the mentor and the mentee. The goals of mentorship are to improve practice and grow professionally (Carter et al., 2022; Geiger & Pivovarova; Gul et al.; Ramanan & Mohamad; Weisling & Gardiner). Additional goals include increased social support from school leadership and other teachers (Bond & Blevins, 2020). Research supports increased job satisfaction levels experienced by teachers with higher levels of support from their administration (Alemdar et al., 2022; Cancio et al., 2013; Farmer, 2020; Geiger & Pivovarova; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022b; Gul et al.; Holmes et al., 2010; Sutcher et al., 2019; Torres; Tran & Smith). These increased levels of job satisfaction correlate directly with decreases in teacher turnover (Kasalak et al., 2019; Schermuly et al., 2020). Research also supports a positive school climate, both physically and emotionally, as a strong factor contributing to job satisfaction (Grant et al., 2022). By examining Maslow's hierarchy of needs, researchers can explore how to work with teachers to meet their needs effectively (Alemdar et al., 2022; Bond & Blevins; Chuang, 2021; Knowles, 1970; Leibel et al., 2021; Rumjaun & Narod, 2021).

Significant research supports various factors that increase teacher turnover, such as the need for increased salary, teacher preparation, and professional development, effective

mentorship, supportive leadership, and a positive school climate (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Ingersol et al., 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019; Taie & Goldring, 2020; USNCES, 2022). Significant research also illuminates these factors in hard-to-staff schools, especially those in the Southern United States (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Goldring et al., 2014; Ingersol et al.; NCTAF, 2003; Taie & Goldring; USNCES, 2022). There is a gap in the research, however, directly addressing the elements contributing to teacher retention for teachers at Title I schools in the Southern United States. This research intends to close the gap in the research by understanding what contributes to teacher retention of K-5 teachers at Title I schools in the Southern United States through their lived experiences.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the elements contributing to teacher retention through the lived experiences of K-5 teachers at Title I schools in the Southern United States. This chapter discusses the methods used in this study. First discussed will be the research design, followed by the research questions. After the research questions are discussed, the setting and participants of the study will be addressed. Next, the researcher's positionality will be reviewed, including the interpretive framework, philosophical views, and role of the researcher. Then, the procedures and data collection plan will be outlined. Finally, the data analysis and trustworthiness will be discussed.

Research Design

This research study was qualitative. Qualitative research focuses on interpreting a phenomenon through the meaning given by the people who experience the phenomenon (Gall et al., 2007). This study examined the human element regarding the phenomenon of teacher retention in Title I schools. Phenomenological research aims to understand the experiences of several people who have all experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) stated that in a phenomenological study, the researcher steps back and approaches the study naively to make fresh discoveries when analyzing the data. The researcher collected information about the participants' experiences through an unbiased lens and created meaning from their experiences (Creswell & Poth; Moustakas). In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher examines and describes the phenomenon and then uses the data to understand the context in which the phenomenon has been shaped (Bynum & Varpio, 2018; van Manen, 1997). Hermeneutic phenomenology differs from other qualitative research in that it is interpretive and

focuses on the lived experiences of the participants, it includes the experiences of the researcher in the data collection and the analysis, and the data analysis is reflective (Bynum & Varpio; van Manen). Moustakas stated that hermeneutic phenomenology occurs when the researcher looks at the data collected and analyzes it to determine the data's intention and understand the meaning behind the data. van Manen explained that much of social science attempts to miniaturize the educational experience into small parts. He further elaborated that hermeneutic phenomenology allows the researcher to appreciate education as a whole comprising multiple parts (1997). Hermeneutic phenomenology is a personal reflection on the data in which the researcher strives to make sense of the phenomenon (van Manen; Moustakas) added that hermeneutic phenomenology provides insights into the phenomenon. Unlike transcendental phenomenology, where the researcher brackets their own experiences and biases, in hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher adds their experiences to the data collection and analysis (Moustakas). When the data is analyzed, the researcher's interpretation will provide a new perspective on the participant's experiences and the phenomenon studied (Moustakas; van Manen).

This phenomenological study examined teacher retention at Title I schools in the Southern United States by examining a phenomenon experienced by several individuals, specifically, the experiences of teachers teaching at Title I schools in Alabama. This study was hermeneutic because the teachers' lived experiences were collected and analyzed to understand better teacher retention in Title I schools. It is also hermeneutic because the researcher's experiences were reflected on and shared in addition to those collected from participants. Moustakas (1994) acknowledged that it is important to acknowledge the experiences of others, but researchers must acknowledge their understanding of reality before considering the viewpoints of others. van Manen (1997) explained that when researchers attempt to remove their

beliefs from their research, they tend to find a way back into the data unintentionally. It is advantageous to acknowledge biases and assumptions openly and deliberately hold them aside throughout the research process to avoid this (van Manen). This study would not have been effective as a transcendental phenomenological study because the perspectives and insights from the researcher would not have been included. The insights from the researcher were beneficial for the data analysis as they provided a unique insight into the teachers' experiences that resulted in retention.

Research Questions

Research highlights the experiences related to teacher turnover are lack of teacher preparation and professional development, lack of mentorship, unsupportive leadership, and poor school climate (Alemdar et al., 2022; Bond & Blevins, 2019; Cancio et al., 2013; Carter et al., 2022; Cawte, 2020; Chuang, 2021; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Farmer, 2020; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Gul et al., 2019; Harrell et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2010; Ramanan & Mohamad, 2020; Sutcher et al., 2019; Torres, 2019; Tran & Smith, 2020; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). The research sub-questions related to the central research question exploring the phenomenon of teacher retention of K-5 teachers who taught in a Title I school in the Southern United States. Each sub-question explored the experiences of teachers related to these topics.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences related to retention of K-5 teachers who teach in a Title I school?

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences of Title I K-5 teachers regarding pre-service training?

Sub-Question Two

What are the experiences of Title I K-5 teachers regarding in-service professional development?

Sub-Question Three

What are the experiences of Title I K-5 teachers regarding mentorship?

Sub-Question Four

What are the experiences of Title I K-5 teachers regarding leadership support?

Sub-Question Five

What are the experiences of Title I K-5 teachers regarding school climate?

Setting and Participants

This study explored teachers' experiences in Title I schools in the Southern United States and how their experiences have affected their retention. Title I schools are schools whose student body consists of more than 40% of the students living in poverty (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015; Padilla et al., 2020). Title I schools are identified as schools that face extra challenges (Padilla et al.). Two reasons research does not support teacher turnover are teachers leaving schools based on student poverty levels or a school having a higher percentage of minority students (Achinstein et al., Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; 2010; Ingersol et al., 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019). These reasons are often discussed in relation to teacher turnover; however, the data supports high-poverty and higher percentages of minority students as a correlation to teacher turnover rather than a causation (Geiger & Pivovarova; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Harrell et al., 2019; Ingersol et al.; Sutcher et al.).

Setting

This study took place in a city in Alabama. The two target schools examined were urban schools. These schools were being used as a setting because of the convenience of the proximity to the researcher. The researcher worked at both target schools, and they met the criteria being researched. These schools were starting points for the researcher. Additional sites were considered so long as they met the criteria of being a Title I school in the Southern United States. I utilized snowball sampling to reach additional teachers at different sites.

The two targeted sites were each a Title I elementary school with one principal and one assistant principal. Demographic information for the schools had been obtained from the U.S. Department of Education CCD Public school data 2021-2022 school year. The schools have between 400 and 500 students spread across preschool (age 4) to fifth grade. Oakridge Elementary School has a student-teacher ratio of 16/1 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The student body comprises 61% Black students, 31% Hispanic, and 6% White (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). 86% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Gunston Elementary School has a student-teacher ratio of 18/1 (U.S. Department of Education). The student body comprises 73% Black students, 24% Hispanic, and 2% White (U.S. Department of Education).

Of the student body, 91% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Each school has special classes for the students. The students attend these special classes for 30 minutes once a week. The special classes are technology, library, and counseling. The students attend music for 30 minutes daily for one quarter, and they attend physical education classes daily for 30 minutes. In addition to the special classes attended outside of the classroom, classroom teachers are responsible for providing their students with

visual arts and health education. Different procedures are implemented when special class teachers are absent at each school. Grade-level teachers were required to hold their classes and provide specialized instruction, or they were allowed to have a different teacher take over their class for the special class instruction.

Participants

The study participants were teachers teaching at Title I elementary schools in the Southern United States. To qualify as a participant, the teachers must have taught at least one full year in the Title I elementary school. Moustakas (1994) suggested that phenomenological research studies should have between one and 25 participants. This study had 10 participants to have a robust data pool. The participants selected for the study were purposefully selected to ensure a diverse pool of participants.

Recruitment Plan

The type of sampling for my research study was convenience sampling. I began recruiting potential research study participants at one of the two targeted Title I schools in the Southern United States. The participants were conveniently located for me to work with (Gall et al., 2007). I also utilized snowball sampling. Snowball sampling occurs when participants are asked to recommend another potential participant (Gall et al.). So long as the criteria of working in a K-5 Title I school in the Southern United States for at least one complete school year was met, the participant was considered. As participants were recruited, the demographics of the participant pool were considered to ensure that the participant pool was diverse. Moustakas (1994) stated that an effective participant pool for a phenomenological study is between one and 25 people. I wanted between 10 and 15 participants to give myself grace if a participant left in the middle of my study. I had 10 participants.

Because I was not expecting every potential participant to accept my invitation to participate in my study, I invited more than my targeted 10 participants. After I obtained IRB approval, I began to recruit my participants. I spoke with teachers at the two target schools in person or over the phone to garner interest in participating in my study. Because I have taught at the two targeted schools used for the study, the potential participants were either former or current coworkers and individuals I knew personally. Additionally, I have not been in a position of authority over potential participants. If the teacher expressed interest in participating, I obtained their email address. If the participant informed me of another potential participant, I requested that they send me the potential participant's email address. Once I had the email addresses, I formally invited the potential participants via email to participate in my research study (see Appendix B). I explained what I was researching, my expectations, and their role. Consent was obtained after participants were screened and determined to be a good fit for the study. Screened potential participants were sent a consent form (see Appendix C) to sign, acknowledging their understanding of the study and ability to recuse themselves at any time. No data was collected until I obtained the signed consent form. Once participants returned the signed consent form, they were sent a questionnaire (see Appendix D). This questionnaire enabled me to collect demographic and background data about their experience and education before scheduling interviews.

Researcher's Positionality

In this section, I discuss my positionality as a researcher. I discuss my interpretive framework as well as my philosophical assumptions. The three philosophical assumptions discussed are ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions. I acknowledged my ontological assumptions to analyze each participant's experience without bias, my

epistemological assumption that teachers are experts in their experiences but may not know the official terminology used to describe their experiences, and my axiological assumption that I am a teacher who has taught formerly or currently at the Title I schools being studied. I believe that teachers want to teach and see their students succeed. I believe that external factors drive teacher attrition and migration. Finally, the researcher's role is addressed.

Interpretive Framework

Creswell and Poth (2018) identified social constructivists as researchers who strive to make meaning of their work world. I focused on researching teacher retention at Title I schools to understand better and analyze the experiences of others, which falls under the social constructivism framework (Creswell & Poth). Creswell and Poth stated that social constructivists interpret the data they collect through their lens, shaped by their life experiences. Being a teacher who has taught at multiple schools has provided me with a unique lens of teacher migration. I wanted to examine the experiences of other teachers to make meaning of what is and is not effective regarding teacher retention.

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions are made by researchers throughout the qualitative research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These assumptions guide qualitative research studies. Three philosophical assumptions will be addressed in this dissertation. These assumptions are the ontological assumption, epistemological assumption, and axiological assumption.

Ontological Assumption

The ontological assumption is the beliefs surrounding reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ontological assumptions are made when the reality is described (Moon & Pérez-Hämmerle, 2022). Creswell and Poth further added that ontological assumptions are made up of the multiple

realities of the people who share an experience. Hebrews 6:18 states, “Therefore, by these two unchangeable acts in which it was impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge in his protection have been strongly encouraged to grasp firmly the hope that has been held out to us” (New Catholic Version, 2019). From this verse, I know there is one actual reality under God. While I acknowledge the existence of one reality, I also acknowledge the existence of multiple perspectives. It is beautiful that we can read different stories in the Bible through different lenses to gain different insights from different perspectives. We can read passages and focus on the ethical implications, then reread the passage and focus on theological doctrines. Reading passages to gain insight from different perspectives does not mean that there is more than one reality, nor does it mean that the different perspectives contradict each other. Just the opposite occurs. Reading passages from different perspectives provides a deeper understanding of passages. Similarly, gaining insight and perspectives from different teachers' experiences provides a depth of understanding. My research aimed to examine different teachers' experiences in a Title I school setting and gain insight and understanding from their perspectives. I wanted to understand how my participants' perspectives came together under God’s singular reality.

Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption is the identification of what constitutes knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative researcher acknowledges that the evidence collected from participants is subjective and that participants are not likely experts in the field being studied (Creswell & Poth). There are limitations to the knowledge expressed by participants (Walsh & Koelsch, 2012). Epistemology is the justification for the knowledge obtained from participants (Carter & Little, 2007). Knowledge comes from the various experiences people have. These experiences include lived events as well as research conducted. I was acutely aware

that the participants in my research may not have been experts on the various themes that emerged from the data. The participants in my research may not have known the correct terminology, but they have good teaching experiences and can provide rich descriptions that I could analyze. Proverbs 27:18 says, “Whoever tends a fig tree eats its fruit, and whoever looks after his master will be honored” (New Catholic Version, 2019). As a Christian, I believe it is essential to acknowledge that we can learn valuable lessons if we listen. It is essential to understand the different knowledge of each participant to understand how to lead a school effectively. While the teacher participants may not have been experts in the field of leadership, they are experts in their positions in the school and have valuable insights and knowledge to give.

Axiological Assumptions

The axiological assumption acknowledges that researchers will have personal values and biases related to the research topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Axiology is the science of values (Audebrand & Pepin, 2022). I am deeply invested in my research. As a Christian, I believe strongly in cultivating a positive atmosphere that people do not want to leave. One way to do this is through servant leadership. Ezekiel 34:2-10 is an excellent example of servant leadership. These verses elaborate on how we are called to participate in work rather than stand aside. Mid-career teachers are teachers with seven to 18 years of experience (Tran & Smith, 2020). These teachers actively seek new challenges (Tran & Smith). I am a mid-career teacher, and I am actively pursuing teacher-leader roles within my school. As a special education teacher, I have worked in several self-contained classrooms and gained leadership experience leading multiple teams of paraprofessionals. I have gained experience as a teacher leader by leading school committees and clubs. I have taught in four schools. Two of the schools were high schools, and

two were elementary schools. Each school had different dynamics and provided me with vastly different experiences. I have firsthand experiences that are attributed to my teacher retention and migration. I know my values and biases toward various factors affecting teacher retention and will acknowledge them so they do not affect my research investigation.

Researcher's Role

van Manen (2014) explained that there are six components that must be followed for a hermeneutic phenomenological study. The first is identifying a phenomenon that resonates with the researcher (van Manen). The second is investigating the phenomenon as we live, not how we conceptualize it (van Manen). There is a large distinction between the lived experience and the conceptualized experience. The investigation is to understand the phenomenon, not to have participants analyze the phenomenon. The third component is reflecting on the central themes present in the phenomenon (van Manen). The researcher must reflect on and analyze the data to determine the central themes. The fourth component is to describe the phenomenon through writing and rewriting (van Manen). The fifth is for the researcher to remain committed to the studied phenomenon (van Manen). van Manen wanted the researcher to keep their dedication to learning about the phenomenon throughout the research process. The sixth component is to analyze the phenomenon in parts and as a whole (van Manen). The researcher must examine each component of the phenomenon and see the big picture (van Manen).

Teacher attrition, specifically in Title I schools, was an important phenomenon to me personally. I am motivated to understand what drives teacher retention in Title I schools. I have taught at four different schools. Each time I have migrated to another school, it has been fueled by reasons derived from my personal experiences at the school. I identify with the social constructivism framework because I want to understand the world I work in, the Title I school.

My experiences have molded my teacher migration. I will acknowledge my experiences with teacher migration. I have left each school I have taught at for a reason. I had a wonderful mentor at the first school I worked at, but she left my second year, and I lost all my mentorship support. She was not the only teacher to leave, and the school climate changed.

Additionally, my second year at that school saw the introduction of a new administration that did not adequately support teachers. When I left the second school I taught at, I had patronizing mentorship that did not prepare me to be effective in the school I was teaching. The school climate was very segregated, and the administration was split, with some providing adequate support and others providing no support. My third school had no mentorship for teachers, but the veteran teachers took it upon themselves to assist newer teachers. The school was divided into two buildings, and the school climate was divided among the two buildings. The administration provided no support to teachers. These experiences molded my reasons for changing schools. I was acutely aware of my experiences and acknowledged them as I conducted my research. I did not let my experiences influence the data I collected or analyzed; rather, I used my experiences to help me interpret the data.

To investigate the phenomenon, I collected data from participants who teach in Title I schools and analyzed their lived experiences. Participants included current and past coworkers. I do not hold a supervisory role over any of the participants. My relationships with the participants did not impact the data collection. I also incorporated my experiences with teacher attrition in Title I schools into the data and analysis. By reflecting on and analyzing my experiences, I identified commonalities and themes among the data. I then wrote and rewrote about the phenomenon, describing each component. While investigating the phenomenon and collecting and analyzing data, I remained committed to learning about the causes of teacher attrition in Title

I schools. As I analyzed the data, I looked at each part of the phenomenon and combined the parts to examine the causes of teacher attrition in Title I schools.

Procedures

Before the research study was conducted, approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB approval letter is located in Appendix A. After IRB approval, I formally solicited my participants. First, I had a conversation in person or over the phone with a potential participant to gauge their interest. Potential participants at the two schools being studied were current or former colleagues over whom I have never held a position of authority. If the potential participant seemed interested, I obtained their email address. I also asked if they knew of any other participants who might be interested, and if they did know another potential participant, I would ask if they would give me their email address. I followed up with a formal email (see Appendix B) inviting them to participate in my study. If the potential participant responded to the recruitment email expressing interest in participating, I sent them the consent form (see Appendix C). After obtaining consent, I sent the participant the demographic and background information questionnaire (see Appendix D). Once I had confirmed participants, I scheduled individual interviews. After the individual interviews, participants were sent journal prompts. Data from the demographic and background information questionnaire and the individual interviews were utilized to form diverse and robust focus groups. Focus group interviews were scheduled after participants had completed individual interviews and were given the journal prompts.

I conducted my interviews and focus groups via Microsoft Teams or Zoom. Utilizing Microsoft Teams or Zoom enabled me to record and transcribe each interaction through Microsoft Teams or Zoom. I also had a backup recording of each interaction on my cellular

phone. By conducting the interviews over Microsoft Teams or Zoom, I eliminated the need for an interview space and maximized the flexibility necessary for scheduling around busy schedules. Additionally, by conducting focus groups over Microsoft Teams or Zoom, I enabled participants to maintain confidentiality by allowing them to remove their names and turn their cameras off. Participants were sent journal prompts with a two-week deadline for completion. Journal prompts were completed online through GoogleForms or handwritten. I had access to the GoogleForms, which enabled me to view the document at any time.

Once data was collected, it was analyzed. Data from individual interviews were analyzed first. By analyzing the data from the individual interviews, I began to identify preliminary themes. This enabled me to use data collected from focus groups as a member check to verify and confirm the data (Erdmann & Potthoff, 2023; Riazi, 2016). van Manen (2014) noted that the data must be analyzed for commonalities and themes. This was done by reading all the data as a whole, then rereading it one section at a time, and then again as a whole. This way, I saw the big picture and the individual parts of the research (van Manen). Another step in analyzing the data was to focus on the intention behind the data and the actual data. I was not subjective with the data collected. A third step in analyzing the data was carefully balancing the data in the written descriptions. A final step in analyzing data was being mindful that in hermeneutic phenomenology, I created a written analysis of a human experience (van Manen).

Data Collection Plan

There were three methods for collecting data. It was important to utilize more than one method to collect data to ensure the data collected provided depth into the topic. I demonstrated triangulation by showing that the data collected from the three methods were similar (Carter et al., 2014; Riazi, 2016). This enabled me to demonstrate the credibility of the data collected

(Carter et al.; Riazi). The three data collection methods used were individual interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups. Individual interviews were conducted first. This allowed me to establish a rapport with the participants. It also enabled me to understand the phenomenon experienced by the participants without the possible influence of others in the focus group data collection. Once data was collected through the individual interviews, it was coded and analyzed for themes. After the initial individual interview, I sent the participants journal prompts. The journal prompts had a deadline so I could ensure I would receive a response promptly. Still, the prompts provided the participants time to formulate a detailed response they may not have had the opportunity to in an individual interview or focus group. Once the journal prompt responses were received, they were coded and analyzed for themes. The third type of data collection used was focus group interviews. The focus group interview occurred after the individual interview so that the participants were comfortable with the general format of interview questions. Focus group interviews also occurred after individual interviews so the focus group participants could member check the data from the individual interviews to ensure the credibility of the data (Riazi). I posed as the moderator and ensured the participants stayed on the topic of the question asked. After the focus group, the responses from the participants were coded and analyzed for themes.

Individual Interviews

Participants in the study were interviewed one-on-one with me. Interviews occurred online via Microsoft Teams or Zoom to best meet the varied needs of the participants' complex schedules. Interviews occurred at the best time for the participant and me. van Manen (2014) explained that the phenomenological interview explores and gathers narratives and anecdotes I could use to reflect and analyze. The interviews helped me to develop a much deeper knowledge

of the phenomenon experienced. van Manen noted that getting participants to open up and share their experiences can be difficult. Still, it tends to be much easier for a participant to tell of the experiences that they have lived through rather than those they have reflected upon. All participants were asked about their experience with retention at a Title I school (Moustakas, 1994). If participants had not completed the demographic questionnaire (Appendix D), they were asked the questions at the start of their interviews.

Table 1

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please discuss your career as a teacher and, if you have taught at more than one school, your career as a teacher in a Title I school. CRQ
2. How did your teacher preparation prepare you for teaching at a Title I school? SQ1
3. Please elaborate on the professional development your school has provided. SQ2
4. Explain the mentorship you have experienced at your school. SQ3
5. What is your current experience with leadership at your school? SQ4
6. Please describe an interaction with your school principal regarding a problem you encountered. SQ4
7. How would you describe the relationships between teachers at your school? SQ5
8. What has your school done to foster collaborative relationships with your coworkers? SQ2
9. Please describe a time when you needed assistance from your coworkers. SQ5
10. Please tell me about a time you considered changing schools. CRQ
11. Please tell me about a time you considered leaving teaching. CRQ
12. If you have applied for another job outside of teaching, please describe the events that led to your decision. CRQ

13. If you have left a school, please describe in as much detail as possible the events that caused you to leave your school. If you have not left a school, please describe in as much detail as possible the events that have caused you to stay. CRQ
14. Is there anything else you want to share about teacher retention in Title I schools? CRQ

Questions 1 and 10-14 related to the central research question. They each prompted the participant to talk about their experiences related to retention. The questions asked the participant to provide their thought process regarding remaining in the teaching career, migrating to another school, or leaving altogether. None of these questions asked the participant to analyze their responses. Questions 2 and 3 pertained to the first and second sub-questions. Their purpose was to prompt the participants to elaborate on their experiences with pre-service teacher preparation and in-service professional development provided by their school. Questions 4 and 8 pertained to the third sub-question and asked the participants about mentorship. These questions allowed the participants to explain their experiences with mentorship in their school and elaborate on whether the school provided them with mentorship opportunities or if they cultivated the mentorship relationship on their own. Questions 5 and 6 pertained to the fourth sub-question. These questions were about leadership support and asked the participant to elaborate on experiences that told of the leadership support they had received. Questions 7 and 8 pertained to the fifth sub-question about school climate. These questions allowed the participant to talk about the culture and climate of the Title I school, specifically regarding the nature of the relationships among teachers that lead to a positive or a negative climate. Each question in the interview prompted the participants to become more comfortable talking about their experiences in Title I schools related to the primary topics of teacher retention highlighted in the literature.

When conducting interviews regarding what affects teacher retention, participants were asked to recount specific lived experiences regarding teacher preparation, mentorship, leadership, and school climate. They were asked to recount times they considered changing schools or leaving the teaching profession altogether and to recount times they did change schools or leave the teaching profession. Participants were asked what events led to their ponderings of attrition. The participants were not asked to analyze their experiences but to tell of specific circumstances only. I analyzed this data to derive themes and make connections about what contributes to teacher retention.

Journal Prompts

The journal prompts were used to complement the individual interview questions. They were not the same questions being asked but on the same theme. These questions were designed to get a more in-depth response related to the teaching experience that could provide deeper insights into potential causes of teacher retention. These questions focused more on the central research question and sub-questions 4 and 5. Sub-questions 4 and 5 focused on leadership as well as school climate. Both topics may had been uncomfortable to answer in a one-on-one or focus group interview. The journal prompts enabled the participant to provide insights into these sub-questions in a more comfortable setting. The first prompt focused on sub-question 4 and asked about leadership support. The second prompt focused on sub-question 5 and asked about school climate. Prompts 3 and 4 focused on the central research question of experiences of K-5 teachers in a Title I school.

Prompt 1: Write a description of a time you went to your school's principal for support. SQ4

Prompt 2: Describe when you needed assistance in your classroom and asked coworkers for help. SQ5

Prompt 3: Write a description of an event that led to high job satisfaction. CRQ

Prompt 4: Write a description of an event that led to low job satisfaction. CRQ

The purpose of this journal prompt is for you to describe your specific experiences at your school. You are not being asked to interpret how you think people should have interacted with you or one another or to analyze how you acted in specific situations. The objective is to pick a specific moment. You can choose an experience that occurs regularly; the experience chosen does not have to be an "aha!" moment. Once you have your moment in mind, consider these writing guidelines (adapted from van Manen, 2014):

1. Think of your event in chronological order. What happened first? What happened next? Describe your event in the order it occurred.
2. Describe your event using your senses. What did you see? What did you hear/what was said? What did you feel? What were your thoughts?
3. Describe your event as if you are an audience member watching it unfold.
4. Describe your event as you experienced it. Avoid explaining why it occurred, interpretations of the event, and generalizations.
5. Keep your description as straightforward as possible.
6. Use pseudonyms if you need to use names in your description.
7. Read the example prompt response for guidance. The example prompt is on a different topic, so please remember to follow your prompt when answering.

Example Prompt: Describe an instance where you recognized a student needing additional classroom behavior support. What did you do to respond to the situation?

I noticed Calvin was not paying attention in class. He was constantly out of his seat and running around the classroom. I tried multiple things to try and support Calvin. First, I attempted

proximity seating and sat next to Calvin. Calvin got back on task at first but got up and started to roam around the classroom. I felt frustrated that Calvin did not recognize that I was sitting closer to him to try and keep him on track. I tried another approach of verbally redirecting him to sit down. The verbal redirection did not work, and Calvin told me, “No.” I was mad that he talked back to me but did not show my frustration; I remained calm yet firm. I told him not to talk to me that way and verbally redirected him again. The second redirection worked, and Calvin sat back down. He was still not paying attention, though. He tapped his pencil on his desk and stared off. I asked him a question to check if he was paying attention, and he could not answer. I knelt down so that I was on the same level as Calvin and put my hand on his arm to engage his attention as I spoke. I explained the lesson slowly and asked him many questions as I explained things. When I broke things up into smaller pieces, Calvin answered my questions.

Focus Groups

Focus group interviews were used as a final method of data collection. Focus groups effectively add depth to the data collected (Rivaz et al., 2019). Focus groups were effective because the participants from the group agreed or disagreed with each other, thus providing direct evidence of the different opinions and experiences (Morgan, 1997). This strengthened any of the similarities and differences derived from one-on-one interviews. Because focus groups have multiple people, they effectively complement interviews. The participants were able to interact with one another as they reflected on their experiences. The focus groups were broken up into groups of three to four participants. Data from the participant questionnaire were utilized to create the focus groups, ensuring that the groups were diverse.

Additionally, to increase participation in focus groups, the availability of the participants was also considered when creating the groups. Like individual interviews, focus groups occurred

online through Microsoft Teams or Zoom at the best time for the participants and me. Before joining the focus group, participants were informed that they could maintain their confidentiality among other focus group members. They were informed they did not have to turn on their cameras and that they could use a pseudonym as their name on Microsoft Teams or Zoom to maintain anonymity within the group. When I discussed confidentiality before the focus group interviews, I intended to collect any pseudonyms being used for data collection purposes and to ensure group participation. However, no participants opted to maintain anonymity within the group.

Table 2

Focus Group Questions

1. If you could eliminate one thing from your daily teaching routine, what would it be and why? CRQ
2. Describe how in-service professional development has impacted you. SQ2
3. Elaborate on any mentorship opportunities you have had at your school by being a mentor or a mentee. SQ3
4. What advice would you give to a new teacher, and why? CRQ
5. Please tell me about a time you experienced socio-economic differences at your school. CRQ
6. Elaborate on a time you experienced cultural differences at your school. CRQ
7. What events have made you want to remain a teacher? CRQ

The focus group questions were designed to provoke conversations from the focus group. I was the moderator to ensure participants stayed on topic. Question 1 served a dual purpose as an icebreaker question to help participants feel more comfortable talking openly, and it related to the central research question. Questions 4-7 also pertained to the central research question. They

were designed to gain an understanding of the events related to teacher retention at a Title I school. Question 2 pertained to the second sub-question and asked the participants to talk about their experiences with in-service professional development. Question 3 pertained to the third sub-question and prompted the participants to talk about their experiences with mentorship. At the end of the focus group interviews, I provided participants with the data collected and the emerging themes from the individual interviews. Participants were then asked to member check for accuracy and missing information. I ensured I was not influencing the focus group responses by completing the member check at the end of the focus group interviews.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were conducted, I reviewed the recordings and simultaneously reviewed the automatic transcription generated through Microsoft Teams or Zoom. I went through the transcription again line by line and ensured the transcriptions were accurate. Once accuracy was established, I conducted a thematic analysis of the transcriptions with open coding (see Appendix H) (Bennett et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2008). Open coding means analyzing the transcripts without preconceived codes that I am attempting to fit the data into (Gibbs). I analyzed the data to determine the codes (Gibbs). To do this, I went through each transcription one sentence at a time and broke the transcriptions into shorter units of text whenever there was a shift in the topic (Saldaña, 2021). I then assigned each section a descriptive code (Bennet et al., 2018; Saldaña). Next, I looked beyond descriptive coding and determined categorical or analytical codes that better fit the interview answers (Gibbs). I interpreted the codes I amassed through coding and sorted them to identify any overarching themes (Bennett et al.; Saldaña). I analyzed the overarching themes to understand the phenomenon better. I made sure that each

interview was coded separately. When I analyzed the data from multiple interviews, I began to see common theme trends from separate participants.

Journal Prompt data was analyzed using thematic analysis with open coding (Bennett et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2008). Because the participants were physically typing or writing their responses to prompts, I did not need to review a transcript for accuracy. If the participants handwrote their journal prompt responses, I typed their responses. I then took all the typed responses, analyzed each sentence, and separated the text into topic sections (Saldaña, 2021). Each section was assigned a descriptive code (Bennett et al.; Saldaña). I examined the descriptive code further to generate categorical or analytical codes (Gibbs; Saldaña). Once codes were generated, I analyzed them and sorted them into overarching themes (Bennet et al.; Gibbs; Saldaña). When I analyzed the data from multiple journal prompts, I saw common theme trends from separate participants.

After the focus group interviews, I reviewed data in a similar way to how I did with the individual interviews. I reviewed the recordings at the same time as I reviewed the automatic transcription generated through Microsoft Teams or Zoom. I meticulously reviewed the transcription to ensure accuracy, paying close attention to who was speaking. After confirming the accuracy, I thematically analyzed the transcripts with open coding (Bennett et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2008). Then, I assigned descriptive codes to each transcript section (Bennet et al.; Saldaña, 2021). After collecting descriptive codes, I determined analytical codes (Gibbs). Finally, I interpreted and sorted the codes into themes (Bennet et al.; Saldaña). Each focus group interview was coded separately. Once all the focus group interviews were coded and sorted into their themes, I analyzed them to see common themes.

As I collected my data, I acknowledged my experiences so that I could make sure I was effectively bracketing my presumptions through journaling (see Appendix I) and not allowing my experiences to impact the data while simultaneously using my experiences to aid in my understanding of the data (van Manen, 2014). Because I have taught in Title I schools, I have experience with the phenomenon I am studying. van Manen (2016) explained that researchers must utilize epoché and reduction to make meaning of the data. I looked for overarching themes in responses as I analyzed my data. I ensured that codes were coded accurately, ensuring that one code had not accidentally been used for two separate phenomena (Gibbs, 2008; Saldaña, 2021). van Manen (2016) also stated that when researchers begin to analyze data, they must ask how the data applies to the central phenomenon. As I began to analyze and code data, I frequently reflected on how the data related to teacher retention in Title I schools. I analyzed my data as I obtained it but noted which participant and retrieval method was used for each piece of data (Gibbs). As I analyzed my data, I looked for patterns to see if responses were consistent with a participant's demographical features, such as age or gender. I looked for outliers in my coded data, as well, and analyzed why they may be outliers so that I could explain them (Gibbs). As I analyzed data separately by data collection source, I also looked across the data collection methods to analyze if there were commonalities (Saldaña). By analyzing the data from the three separate data collection sources together, I synthesized the data collected. All the codes that were generated were examined to understand the phenomenon better.

Trustworthiness

Because I am the human instrument interpreting the data collected, I ensured my bias was acknowledged and did not affect the interpretation of the data. To do this, I established the trustworthiness of the data collected. Trustworthiness was established through the four concepts

laid out by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These concepts were created as the qualitative counterparts of quantitative concepts (Riazi, 2016). Each concept for this section will elaborate on each concept and further explain how trustworthiness will be created.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the accuracy of what the research has found (Riazi, 2016). The participants' perceptions establish the truth elaborated on through credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I demonstrated credibility through peer debriefing, member checking, and the triangulation of data collection.

Peer debriefing supports the credibility of data collected through qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba; Spall, 1998). Peer debriefing occurs when the researcher discusses the research findings with an impartial peer (Spall). Discussions are extensive and regard every part of the research investigation, data collection, findings, and analysis (Lincoln & Guba; Spall). During the discussions, the peer questions the researcher to ensure the researcher understands how their biases may impact the research findings (Spall). I used peer debriefing throughout my study as I discussed my research with my colleagues while taking extra measures to ensure confidentiality. When I used peer debriefing, I utilized the input from my colleagues to check that my biases were acknowledged during every step of my research.

Member checking is a method of checking data credibility by asking the participants to check the data (Erdmann & Potthoff, 2023; Riazi, 2016). There are two levels of member checking: descriptive and interpretive (Riazi). In descriptive member checking, participants check the researcher's description of the data (Riazi). In interpretive member checking, participants check the researcher’s interpretation of the data (Riazi). To appropriately utilize

member checking, I provided the participants with the data collected and the emerging themes at the end of the focus group interviews. I asked the participants to check for accuracy and missing information. This allowed participants to fill in any missing gaps from our interviews (Erdmann & Potthoff, 2023). I approached the focus group interviews similarly and offered each focus group the opportunity to read the transcriptions to check for accuracy and elaborate on any missing information (Erdmann & Potthoff).

Data triangulation is used as a method of credibility. In triangulation, multiple methods of data collection that have been collected separately from one another are joined to show that the results from each data collection method are similar (Riazi, 2016). I utilized data source triangulation for my research (Carter et al., 2014). I collected data from individual interviews, journal prompts, and focus group interviews. After collecting data, I analyzed the data and compared the results from each data collection method. The comparison of the data strengthened the credibility of the results (Carter et al.).

Transferability

Transferability is the ability of the research study to be applied to similar contexts (Riazi, 2016; Singh et al., 2021). I achieved this by providing extensive, thick descriptions of my research findings, participants, setting, and data collection methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Riazi, 2016; Singh et al., 2021). The detailed descriptions I provided increase the transferability of my study because they will enable another researcher to determine if they can recreate the conditions of my research study and apply it to another similar context (Lincoln & Guba; Singh et al.).

Dependability

Dependability is the consistency of the data collection and analysis procedures (Singh et al., 2021) and demonstrates the ability for the study to be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve dependability, I elaborated on who my participants were without jeopardizing their confidentiality. I explained the setting of my study without jeopardizing the participants' confidentiality. I described the procedures I used to collect data from all my participants by providing thick descriptions of interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts. Dependability was also achieved through an inquiry audit with my chair, committee member, and methodologist review.

Confirmability

Confirmability is achieved when the researcher's biases are effectively bracketed away from the study so that the results accurately reflect the data collected from research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Riazi, 2016). I achieved confirmability through an audit trail, triangulation, and reflexivity. I conducted an audit trail (Appendix E) where I documented the research study's details (Riazi). I also documented the research process and my decisions (Riazi). I utilized triangulation of data collection methods. I achieved confirmability through reflexivity. Throughout my research study, I maintained a journal where I continuously reflected on my biases and my decisions throughout the research process (Riazi). Since I am a teacher affected by factors attributed to teacher migration, I was mindful not to allow my biases and perspectives to influence my research. By maintaining a journal and consistently reflecting, I ensured continued acknowledgment of my biases so that the participants' voices were heard through the data rather than my voice.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an integral part of developing a qualitative research study. I paid close attention to several details before I began my study and addressed ethical issues as they arose throughout my study. Before my study, I obtained permission to conduct my study. First, I submitted it for approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Due to the nature of my study, working with teachers whose school affiliation is not relevant to my study, I did not need to gain permission from a particular school before my study. When I began my study, I contacted potential participants. I disclosed all the information when I contacted them to ask them to be a part of my study.

Permissions

I obtained approval from the IRB before I began my study. The IRB approval letter is in Appendix A. Due to the nature of my study, no site permission was necessary. The participants in my study are former and current colleagues, and I have never been in a position of authority over them. Individual and focus group interviews were held virtually, and journal prompts were delivered virtually, or they were handwritten and physically given to me. After obtaining approval from the IRB, I began to speak with potential participants in person or over the phone to gauge interest in participating in my study. In my conversations, I obtained the potential participants' email addresses. I then contacted potential participants via email (see Appendix B). After screening potential participants and concluding they were a good fit for my study, I emailed a consent form for participation in my study (See Appendix C). I ensured this was understood by having my participants sign informed consent documents before collecting data. My consent form included potential risks and benefits my participants may have experienced. My participants could expect to experience minimal risks, equivalent to risks they may

experience in everyday life. The risks involved may include encountering psychological stress when asked to recount experiences that have caused trauma and psychological stress from the potential of focus group members sharing with others what has been shared in focus groups. Participants did not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study.

Other Participant Protections

My participants knew I was researching what affects teacher retention in Title I schools. I was transparent with my participants. I also informed my participants that should they decide to discontinue participation, they were welcome to do so. Their participation in my study was voluntary (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When I began to collect my data, I utilized an interview space when our interview would not be interrupted. I continued to disclose the purpose of the study and how the data collected from the interviews would be used. When I conducted my interviews, I used the questions that had already received approval from my committee, and I ensured that none of the questions asked would lead the participants to a certain response. I also did everything to ensure my participants were comfortable and knew that I wanted their genuine responses.

When I obtained my data, I stored it securely. Electronic data, such as video and voice recordings, were stored on a password-secured device. Physical evidence, such as notes taken, were stored in a locked file box at my residence. No one except myself has access to the raw data. After three years have passed, the data will be destroyed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After collecting data, I ensured that I was ethically analyzing my data. I reported the data I had obtained and did not skew the data to show a falsehood. Because I am studying issues related to teacher retention, a participant could have felt uneasy about reporting events that have led to actions of attrition or migration, such as applying for another job, for fear of repercussions from

their principal. Therefore, when reporting the data, I ensured that I was not using the names of my participants or the schools in which they worked. I used pseudonyms to protect their identities and the identities of the schools. To further maintain the confidentiality of the identities of my participants, when I reported my data, I ensured that I did not report anything that was a defining characteristic. I also ensured my participants knew how the data they were giving would be used to help inform future leaders.

Summary

This research is a hermeneutic phenomenological study to understand teachers' experiences at Title I schools relating to teacher retention. Participants were a convenience sampling of teachers who teach at K-5 Title I schools in the Southern United States. There were 10 participants. Data was collected through interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts. Individual interviews and focus groups were conducted through Microsoft Teams or Zoom, and journal prompts were collected through GoogleForms or handwritten by the participant. The data was analyzed through systematic coding of the responses given. The codes were analyzed to determine themes and commonalities across all data obtained. I acknowledged my biases, so they did not affect the data analysis. I established the trustworthiness of my data.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the elements contributing to teacher retention through the lived experiences of K-5 teachers at Title I schools in the Southern United States. In this study, I examined the lived experiences of K-5 teachers with at least one full year of experience teaching in a Title I school in the Southern United States. Elements impacting teacher retention are generally defined in literature as beneficial teacher preparation and professional development, effective mentorship, good administrative support, and a positive school climate (Alemdar et al., 2022; Bond & Blevins, 2020; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Harrell et al., 2019; Ramanan & Mohamad, 2020; Torres, 2019). This chapter includes rich participant descriptions, data in the form of narrative themes, outlier data, and responses to research questions.

Participants

Participants were purposely selected through convenience and snowball sampling. Potential participants recruited through convenience sampling were teachers conveniently located for me to work with. When potential participants were contacted, they were asked if they could recommend another potential participant. All participants who met the criteria of working in a K-5 Title I school in the Southern United States with at least one full year of experience were considered potential participants. Participants were drawn from one school district in central Alabama. When potential participants expressed interest in participating, I requested their email address. If they informed me of another potential participant, I requested they send me the other potential participant's email address as well. After obtaining their email addresses, I emailed my potential participants to formally invite them to participate in my research study (see

Appendix B). Potential participants were informed of what I was researching, my expectations, and their role as participants. After formally inviting the potential participants to the study and screening them to determine they would be a good fit for my study, they were sent a consent form (see Appendix C). The potential participants were required to sign the consent form prior to scheduling individual interviews. When participants were sent the consent document, they were also sent a questionnaire (see Appendix D) that was used to collect demographic and background data. If the participant did not complete the questionnaire prior to the individual interviews, they were asked the questions from the questionnaire at the time of the individual interview but before individual interview questions were asked. Ten K-5 teachers from Title I schools in Alabama with various experiences agreed to participate in my research study. Tables 3 and 4 outline demographic and background information of the participants.

Table 3

Teacher Participants Demographic Information

Teacher Participant	Race/ Ethnicity	Age Range	Highest Degree Earned	Total Years Taught	Years Taught in a Title I School	# of Schools Taught
Allison	Black/ African American	26-30	Master's	6	6	2
Brittany	Black/ African American	26-30	Bachelor's	4	4	3
Christina	Black/ African American	31-39	Master's	9	9	5
Daniella	White	31-39	Master's	9	9	1
Elizabeth	Black/ African American	31-39	Master's	8	8	3

Frankie	Black/ African American	26-30	Master's	5	5	3
Georgia	Black/ African American	31-39	Master's	10	10	3
Heidi	White	40-49	Master's	16	16	6
Isabella	Black/ African American	26-30	Master's	5	4	4
Jennifer	Black/ African American	31-39	Master's	7	6	2

Table 4

Teacher Participants Grades Taught

Teacher Participant	Grade Level (Lower=K-2, Upper=3-5)	Content Area
Allison	Upper	Mathematics, Reading/English Language Arts
Brittany	Upper	Mathematics
Christina	K-5	Specialist Area (P.E./Fine Arts/Counseling/STEM/ Technology)
Daniella	K-5	Reading/English Language Arts
Elizabeth	Lower	All Content Areas
Frankie	Upper	All Content Areas
Georgia	K-5	Specialist Area (P.E./Fine Arts/Counseling/STEM/ Technology)
Heidi	K-5	All Content Areas

Isabella	Lower	All Content Areas
Jennifer	K-5	Specialist Area (P.E./Fine Arts/Counseling/STEM/ Technology)

Allison

Allison has been an educator in her school district for six years. During those six years, she taught in two different schools in the same district and three different grade levels: three years in first grade, one year in second grade, and two years in third grade. After Allison graduated from college, she accepted a position at a school near where she had grown up. She taught at the school for two years before seeking employment elsewhere. She gave multiple reasons for leaving, including "[the school] wasn't very welcoming," "the principal wasn't involved," "the leadership was so bad," and she stated she "was micromanaged a lot." Allison's primary reason for leaving was that she "wanted different leadership." Allison also said about the leadership, "They had a lot of the behavior problems, but they didn't do anything about it…and that put a strain on everybody jobs." The year she left; Allison stated a lot of other teachers left as well.

Allison was hired at another school in the same district after leaving her first school. The second school is her current school, and Allison plans to continue teaching at her current school. Allison stated the leadership is much more supportive at her current school, especially regarding behavior. She gave a specific example stating that there is a "child in our class having severe behavior problems, and the parents don't see nothing wrong. So, I will say [principal] has and [assistant principal] had to step in a lot." She also stated she enjoys the work environment at her current school. "I think people at [redacted] have good relationships. They bounce ideas off each other, and everybody pretty much get along."

Brittany

Brittany has been teaching for four years. After graduating from college, Brittany accepted the first teaching position that was offered to her. She began teaching upper elementary students math, science, and social studies. She taught at that school for one year before moving her teaching career to another school district nearby. In the new position, Brittany continued to teach upper elementary students math, science, and social studies. She did not like her new position's leadership but stated that was not her reason for leaving. Brittany discovered she was pregnant. Not living close to family and having a husband whose work schedule did not allow him to participate in drop off or pick up or be readily available during the day if needed led Brittany to conclude that she needed to be close to their chosen daycare. The daycare Brittany and her husband chose for their child was close to their home and the first school district Brittany worked for. While at her first school, Brittany had a mentor with whom she maintained contact. After Brittany determined she needed to return to the school district, she contacted her former mentor. Regarding that interaction, Brittany stated, “So I text her and I was like, listen, I'm not thinking of any other school, but to come wherever you are. And so that's how I ended up at [redacted].”

Brittany has worked at her current school for two years. She teaches math to upper elementary students full-time. While she teaches full-time, she is also a full-time student working to earn her master’s in business administration. She stated she is unsure if she will change careers after finishing her degree but wants to keep her options open.

Christina

Christina has taught for nine years in six different schools. Each time she changed schools, she had a different reason. Christina began her career as a teacher in a small town in

Alabama. She had just completed college and wanted to ensure she could start her career as an educator immediately. The position she accepted was the first position offered to her. She stayed at that school for two years before deciding to leave for another school. She did not enjoy her first teaching position. She stated, “My first teaching position like the dawning realization that I would have to do that job more years than I've been alive so far. I was like, I don't think I can do that. It was like staring down the tunnel. I was like, wow, that's a long time to be doing this job.”

She changed school districts for her third teaching position but continued to teach the same grade and content areas. She experienced a negative school environment in the new school that made her question whether teaching was the right choice for her. Of the new school, she stated, “I frequently, like by the middle of the year, would hit the exit off the interstate that I worked off of, and it would be instant tears every single day of not wanting to go and calling my Mom and saying can I move home and work anywhere else and her tell me, Yeah, no. You can move in if you have to, but you probably don't need to quit your job in the middle of the year. So stuck it through but just made it the one year there.” She stuck it out for the entire year but made a huge change the following year. She decided to move to another state and teach there. She continued to teach the same grade level and content areas. Christina experienced a positive teaching climate in the third school but only stayed for one year. Her significant other was still in Alabama, so she decided to move back to Alabama. The fourth school Christina taught at was in the district next to her second school. She taught the same grade level and content areas in which she had previous experience, but she worked on her master’s degree in a specialty area simultaneously. After working for two years, she changed schools again. She left the school she was at to pursue a specialty position. She stated that leaving her school for a new school was “Not that I necessarily was wanting to leave the school I was at; I just wanted the position that

I'm currently in." Christina has taught happily in her current school and specialty position for the last three years and plans to continue to teach in the position.

Daniella

Daniella has taught for nine years, all at the same school. While she has taught at the same school for her entire teaching career, she has taught different grades. Daniella began as an upper elementary teacher. While most of her classroom teacher experience was in the upper levels, she also taught as a lower elementary teacher. Daniella always knew she was destined to work in a school. "My mom was a teacher. And my grandparents are teachers. So, I always knew I was going to be in education." She also knew she did not want to be a classroom teacher. "I knew I wasn't going be in a classroom forever. That never was my goal." After teaching for several years, she returned to school and received her master's degree in a specialty area. She chose a master's degree that would open doors for her, "If I get tired of being in the elementary level, I can always go to secondary, or I can go to work in like college or university." After obtaining her degree, she was hired in a specialty position at her school, teaching reading and English language arts to every grade level.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth has taught for eight years in three different schools. Her first school was a small county school. She stayed at that school for three years and taught lower elementary students in all content areas. Elizabeth changed school districts for her fourth year of teaching and continued to teach lower elementary students in all content areas. She taught at her second school for four years. During her fourth year, she was moved from teaching lower elementary students to teaching upper elementary students. Elizabeth was not asked before being moved, and she did not appreciate it, nor did she want to teach upper elementary students. She stated that her passion

was in teaching lower elementary students. After teaching upper elementary students for a year and expressing her desire to return to teaching lower elementary students, her leadership informed her that she would be teaching upper elementary students again the following year. That interaction led Elizabeth to transfer to another school in the same district. She said, “I just knew for a fact I had to go. I just, I had to leave. Did I really want to leave? No, I was there for four years. I've been at [redacted] five. Yeah, I was there for four years. And this is my fifth year in [redacted]. But changing grade levels, for me, was a no. I do not like being changed to a higher grade level. I've always said I never wanted to teach [upper elementary], and this really prove why I'd never want to teach there.” Elizabeth taught lower elementary students at her new school.

Frankie

Frankie has taught for five years in three different schools, all in the same school district. Frankie did not have her teaching certification at the start of her teaching career. She began teaching lower elementary school students in all content areas. Her first year of teaching was the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, and she experienced schools shutting down and moving to teaching virtually. Frankie and many other non-certified teachers were let go from their positions at the end of their first year. At that time, she determined she did not enjoy teaching lower elementary students and began applying for teaching positions teaching upper elementary or middle school. She accepted a position at a middle school in the same district where she taught mathematics for three years. While teaching full-time at the middle school, Frankie also took classes to become a certified teacher. At the end of her third year at the middle school, Frankie had not yet finished her teacher certification courses and was let go again. Frankie began the application process again. She applied for upper elementary and middle school positions. She

accepted a position as an upper elementary school teacher in the same district, teaching all content areas. During her fifth year of teaching, Frankie finished her teacher certification courses and became a fully certified teacher.

Georgia

Georgia began her teaching career ten years ago. Regarding her teaching career, she stated, “I mean, I love teaching. I never wanted to do anything other besides teaching.” She also stated she aspired to do another job on the side, but she had always wanted teaching to be her primary career. After graduating from college with her teaching certificate, she accepted a job at a rural elementary school close to her hometown. She spent two years teaching all content areas to lower elementary students. She was also actively involved in extracurricular activities at the school. After two years, she was let go from her position. Georgia accepted a teaching job at a rural school in the neighboring district, teaching all content areas to upper elementary students. Georgia explained the district was incredibly remote. She stated, “There's like nothing there.” After one year, Georgia moved to an urban school district, where she spent the next seven years of her teaching career. She taught upper elementary students in all content areas. Her first three years were spent teaching the same students, looping grade levels with them as they advanced until they graduated elementary school. After her looping experience, she taught all content areas to the same upper elementary grade level for two years. Georgia then became a subject teacher focusing on teaching science and social studies to the same upper elementary grade level. At the end of her ninth year of teaching, her administrative team asked her if she would like to teach a specialty area class, and Georgia accepted. She stated, “I felt like I could make a big impact being a [specialty area] teacher versus anybody else, and apparently, they felt that way too because they asked me.”

Heidi

Heidi has taught for sixteen years. She credits her college counselor for becoming dual certified. She stated, “I didn't want to do it, and she kept telling me that's what God called you to do. You need to do it. And I was like, I'm not doing it, and she's like, do me a favor. Just humor me and get the dual degree. Now, years later, I'm still friends with her, and I still thank her.” After graduating from college with a dual elementary and special education certification, she applied for different positions and accepted a position in a large city. She taught all content areas for one year to upper elementary school students. Due to miscommunications between her college and the state department regarding how transcripts for dual certification needed to be posted, Heidi’s certification was called into question. As a result, she was let go after her first year of teaching. Heidi applied for teaching positions with no luck for several months when her family experienced an accident. As a result, Heidi and her family decided to move to be around extended family for support. Shortly after they settled in their new home, Heidi accepted a teaching position at a small rural middle school over an hour away. She commuted and taught at the school for three years before being let go. Even though she had been let go again, she stated she “would not trade that experience for anything in the world.”

Heidi decided to go back to school for her master’s degree. After she graduated with her master’s degree, Heidi applied for new teaching positions. She was interviewed by a panel of 11 principals for an elementary teacher position in the teaching district she lived in. Heidi fondly recalled the phone call she received shortly after the interview:

> She said, ‘I need a teacher for it. I think you would be perfect,’ and it wasn't, do you want it? It was, ‘Is that good enough for you?’ And I said, ‘Wait, what?’ And she said, ‘Is that

good enough for you?' She said, 'I see all this experience you've already had; you got your master's; you got all your undergrad stuff.' She said, 'Is that good enough for you?' Heidi happily accepted the position to teach all content areas to upper elementary students. After teaching in the position for seven years, the school lost the unit she taught, and she was transferred to another elementary school in the district. She taught all content areas at her new school to K-5 students. After three years, Heidi transferred to another school in the district. Heidi taught all content areas to upper elementary students in her first year at her new school, and she taught all content areas to K-5 students during her second year.

Isabella

Isabella has been a teacher for five years. Isabella began her teaching career at a private middle school. She taught math and science there for one year before moving to the public sector. She stated, "It's a big difference going…from a private school to a public school." She decided to move to public education because of the benefits offered. Isabella accepted a position teaching all content areas to upper elementary students at a public school in the same town as the private school she had left. After teaching for one year, Isabella transferred to a middle school in the same district. She taught science for one year and English language arts for one year. Isabella became pregnant during her second year of teaching at the middle school. Her pregnancy and future family became the driving force behind her decision to change schools again. Isabella stated, "I just know I wouldn't be able to be as hands-on, I wouldn't be able to manage my class as I could not being pregnant." At the end of her fourth year of teaching, Isabella transferred to an elementary school in her same district and started teaching lower elementary students in all content areas. She said, "I felt like it will be a lot easier since they were babies, but it's not easier."

Jennifer

Jennifer has been a teacher for seven years. Jennifer struggled to find a teaching position after she completed college with her teacher certificate in an educational specialty area. After searching for months, she was hired as a long-term substitute teacher at a small rural school in the middle of the school year. That long-term substitute position became a full-time teaching position. At the end of the school year, Jennifer's administration came to her and told her the school was potentially going to be closed the following year, and they no longer had a teaching unit available for her. Jennifer stated of the interaction with her administrator, "She said, 'Cancel your classes. Come to my office, and we're gonna find your job.'" The two were only able to find a position that was not located close to Jennifer, and she was hesitant to accept it due to the commute. Shortly after that interaction, Jennifer was contacted by a teacher with whom she had done a mock interview when she was in college. The teacher was getting ready to move, and her position was about to open. Jennifer stated the teacher contacted her and said, "Hey, I'm moving to [redacted], do you want my job?" And Jennifer happily accepted. She was hired at her second school, where she taught all grades in her specialty area. After teaching for three years, Jennifer returned to school for a master's in a different specialty area. After she completed her degree, the position for her specialty area became available at her school. She applied for the position and was hired. Jennifer spent the last two years teaching all grade levels in the specialty area where she has her master's degree. While teaching, Jennifer has also been actively involved in extracurricular activities with the students in her school.

Results

The study's results were obtained by analyzing individual interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, and journal prompt responses to allow for triangulation across the data sources.

Interviews and focus group recordings were transcribed using Otter.ai and uploaded to Taguette.com. The journal prompt responses were submitted through GoogleForms or written by the participant. If they were handwritten, I typed the responses into a Word Document. Digital journal prompt responses were uploaded to Taguette.com.

Coding was conducted using *in vivo* and process coding. Focused coding was used to organize the data into themes. The individual interview transcripts produced 142 codes, focus group interviews produced 50 codes, and journal prompts produced 57 codes (see Appendix H). No new codes were developed in the focus group interviews or journal prompts that had not already been developed from the individual interviews. This section outlines the study's findings and responses to the research questions. The answers to the research questions align with the current literature on teacher retention and the theoretical framework for the study. The themes that emerged from this study are A Life of Good Works, Bear One Another's Burdens, and Peace and Mutual Edification. Table 5 summarizes the themes and contributing codes.

Table 5

Themes and Contributing Codes

Theme	Contributing Codes
A Life of Good Works	calling (from God), encouraged, enjoyment, great experience, benefits, resilience, hope, familiarity, safety/stability, love of job, opportunities, role, current position, previous work experience, experience in Title I, purposeful professional development, prepared, learning (as a teacher), teacher preparation, certified, ability to teach, students benefit, involvement from the outside community, manageable, surprised (did not expect to become a teacher), retention, relevance
Bear One Another's Burdens	assisted by administration, respect, leadership from administration, leadership from fellow teachers, official mentorship, unofficial mentorship, trust, structure, helpful, supplies, trickled down, trying, focused, grounded, understanding

Peace and Mutual Edification	fostered relationships, active listening, positive relationships, fixing things, collaboration, work through it, communication, getting along, interaction with a coworker, positive teacher behavior, climate and culture, positive work environment, events

A Life of Good Works

The first theme to emerge was A Life of Good Works. As participants shared their experiences, it was obvious they each had a true love for teaching. Ephesians 2:12 reads, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for a life of good works that God had prepared for us to do" (New Catholic Bible, 2019). The participants consistently shared the ways God had prepared them to teach and, through teaching, live a life of good works. Participants acknowledged a sense of purpose regarding being in Title I schools. Heidi commented, "I'm called to be in the trenches. Like Jesus was the hands and feet, this is my chance to be the hands and feet." This theme expands on teachers feeling the positive impact of their work. This theme also addresses the deficiency need: esteem and the growth need: self-actualization as outlined by Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. This theme outlines teachers having their esteem needs met through encouragement and the joy they experience. It also outlines teachers having their self-actualization needs met through encouragement and love. Table 6 outlines the theme and subthemes. Tables 7, 8, and 9 outline participant participation in the theme in individual interviews, focus group interviews, and journal prompts.

Table 6

A Life of Good Works: Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
A Life of Good Works	Encouraged Joy Love

Table 7

A Life of Good Works: Individual Interviews

Participant	Allison	Brittany	Christina	Daniella	Elizabeth
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Participant	Frankie	Georgia	Heidi	Isabella	Jennifer
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Total	10/10	100%			

Table 8

A Life of Good Works: Focus Group Interviews

Participant	Allison	Brittany	Christina	Daniella	Elizabeth
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Participant	Frankie	Georgia	Heidi	Isabella	Jennifer
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Total	10/10	100%			

Table 9

A Life of Good Works: Journal Prompts

Participant	Allison	Brittany	Christina	Daniella	Elizabeth
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Participant	Frankie	Georgia	Heidi	Isabella	Jennifer
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Total	10/10	100%			

As is depicted in the tables, triangulation of the data was achieved. There was 100% participant contribution across all data collection methods. The participants reported that a significant reason for retention was being reminded why they had become teachers in the first place. Participants acknowledged that teaching has changed throughout the past years, but the changes have not swayed their love. They credited leadership support and a positive school climate as reasons for retention.

Encouraged

Participants conveyed their experiences with teaching evolving. Heidi stated, “So education is kind of like a pendulum, right? It gets really good, and then you get up to that top, and then it goes really down, and then it stays like this. It’s like a roller coaster up and down.” Heidi continued to elaborate that even though teaching continuously changes, she remains encouraged by her school climate. She went on to say:

> Even with as crazy and exhausting as this year has been to get texts in the last three weeks from more than one parent, ‘Thank you so much for everything you've done for

my child this year.' That makes it worth it, even when I don't feel like I've done anything. That's God sending me a God wink going, 'See, you really are doing something.' Elizabeth recalled being in a previous school and never being recognized for her hard work. She moved to a new school and was quickly recognized by her administration. She said, "Even though I have not been at this school a long time, I felt valued and appreciated for the hard work I was putting in."

Joy

Participants relayed feeling joyful about teaching. Brittany discussed enjoying spending quality time with her coworkers at lunch. She commented, "I think a lot of people got along better because of that." Frankie discussed her school's positive climate and the joy she experienced. She remarked, "I like everything about it." Isabella discussed the joy she derived from her students. She said, "I love to hug on them. And they love to hug on me."

Love

Most participants commented on their love of teaching and their students. Despite being frustrated with how overwhelmed she gets with professional development, Isabella stated, "I do get upset with how education is nowadays, but I don't think I would ever just quit it until I retire because I do love teaching so much." Participants credit their love of seeing their students learn and interacting with them with their desire to stay in education. Jennifer stated, "I really love those children." Brittany said, "I, and a lot of teachers I talk to, we stay because the students." Elizabeth commented, "I know this is something that I really love to do."

Bear One Another's Burdens

Galatians 6:2 declares, "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (New Catholic Bible, 2019). Participants' experiences reflected receiving support.

Their experiences reflected bearing one another's burdens to lift one another up and carry any challenges they faced together. This theme also expands on the physiological and safety needs, as well as the belongingness needs from Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs being met. Participants had their physiological and safety needs met through administrative assistance and they had their belongingness needs met through administrative assistance and help from coworkers. Table 10 outlines the theme and subthemes. Tables 11, 12, and 13 outline participant participation in the theme in individual interviews, focus group interviews, and journal prompts.

Table 10

Bear One Another's Burdens: Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
Bear One Another's Burdens	Administrative assistance Help from coworkers

Table 11

Bear One Another's Burdens: Individual Interviews

Participant	Allison	Brittany	Christina	Daniella	Elizabeth
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Participant	Frankie	Georgia	Heidi	Isabella	Jennifer
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Total	10/10	100%			

Table 12

Bear One Another's Burdens: Focus Group Interviews

Participant	Allison	Brittany	Christina	Daniella	Elizabeth
Theme Present	X		X	X	X
Participant	Frankie	Georgia	Heidi	Isabella	Jennifer
Theme Present	X		X		X
Total	7/10	70%			

Table 13

Bear One Another's Burdens: Journal Prompts

Participant	Allison	Brittany	Christina	Daniella	Elizabeth
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	
Participant	Frankie	Georgia	Heidi	Isabella	Jennifer
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Total	9/10	90%			

The data demonstrated in the tables shows that triangulation was achieved. Of the participants, 100% contributed to the theme in individual interviews, 70% contributed to the theme in focus group interviews, and 90% contributed to the theme in the journal prompts. The participants' experiences illuminated high levels of support from leadership, a positive school climate, and mentorship relationships as contributing factors to teacher retention. Their experiences embodied bearing one another's burdens.

Administrative Assistance

The participant responses highlighted support from the administration as one of the top reasons for remaining a teacher at their school. Heidi shared a personal situation that she had shared with her administrator. When her administrator greeted teachers at the start of the day, they checked on Heidi regarding her personal situation. Heidi stated that the administrator took the time to ensure she was taking care of herself. She stated, “You can tell by the way he's talking to me that that's a deep relationship.” Heidi continued, “That personal connection through leadership is so super important because if people don't feel like you're on their side, they're always going to feel like you're against them.” Multiple participants explained how they feel comfortable approaching their administration and requesting assistance. Christina stated, “If we need anything that's specific to our particular role in the school, she's always willing to help you brainstorm how to work through your situation.” Allison stated of her leadership, “They're full knowledge, and if you don't know something, they'll find the answer for you.” Elizabeth, having experienced different types of leadership at two different schools, explained how her leadership at her current school has supported her. She stated:

> As far as my leadership, where I am now, it has been fantastic. They're very understanding, which I think is very important in any job because things happen. They're very compassionate, caring, and they will work with, they will work with you when you need to work with instead of just reprimanding you every time.

Help from Coworkers

The participants also highlighted how support from fellow coworkers has helped validate them and create a positive school climate. Isabella stated, “My coworkers are always willing to lend a helping hand.” Georgia admitted to not starting her teaching career with the best attitude and credits her coworkers for helping support her growth. Brittany stated that she is forgetful,

and her fellow teachers help her stay on track, so she does not forget important things. Allison commented about her coworkers' willingness to help her, "They're welcoming, and they're knowledgeable. If I have a question, they have no problem answering it."

Participants commented on their experiences with mentorship. Jennifer did not have an official mentor when she first began teaching but received mentorship from her coworkers. Now that she has more experience, she tries to help newer teachers. Of the newer teacher whose classroom is across the hall from hers, she said, "I have been able to be there to help him. And, you know, he's asked questions, and I'm there to answer them to the best of my ability, and I'm there to help him." Brittany stated of her mentor, "So that has helped me a lot just having somebody in that building that's teaching alongside with me that I can go to." Georgia expressed how important the relationships she fostered through her mentorship experience were, even though they are no longer at the same school. She said, "My mentorship here, they're gone. They're not here anymore. But they do keep in touch." Some of the participants struggled to develop mentorship relationships. Christina stated, "It's hard to find a mentorship role within the school building." Heidi shed light on a possible reason why. She asserted, "I think it also depends on your personality and what you lend it to. Because the reason why I've had help over the years has been because, not because there was a mentorship in place, but because I'm one of those people, I don't have a problem creating those connections."

Peace and Mutual Edification

The third theme that emerged from the data was Peace and Mutual Edification. This theme embodies Romans 14:19, which reads, "Let us then pursue the ways that lead to peace and mutual edification" (New Catholic Bible, 2019). Participants' experiences reflected working together in harmony with open communication, learning relationships, and environments where

coworkers could work together for the betterment of one another and the students. This theme also addresses the belongingness need outlined in Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. Participants felt they belonged through open communication, collaboration, and positive environments. Table 14 outlines the theme and subthemes. Tables 15, 16, and 17 outline participant participation in the theme in individual interviews, focus group interviews, and journal prompts.

Table 14

Peace and Mutual Edification: Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
Peace and Mutual Edification	Open Communication
	Collaboration
	Positive Environments

Table 15

Peace and Mutual Edification: Individual Interviews

Participant	Allison	Brittany	Christina	Daniella	Elizabeth
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Participant	Frankie	Georgia	Heidi	Isabella	Jennifer
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Total	10/10	100%			

Table 16

Peace and Mutual Edification: Focus Group Interviews

Participant	Allison	Brittany	Christina	Daniella	Elizabeth
Theme Present	X		X	X	X
Participant	Frankie	Georgia	Heidi	Isabella	Jennifer
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Total	9/10	90%			

Table 17

Peace and Mutual Edification: Journal Prompts

Participant	Allison	Brittany	Christina	Daniella	Elizabeth
Theme Present		X	X	X	X
Participant	Frankie	Georgia	Heidi	Isabella	Jennifer
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Total	9/10	90%			

The data demonstrated in the tables shows that triangulation was achieved. 100% of the participants contributed to the theme in individual interviews, 90% of the participants contributed to the theme in focus group interviews, and 90% of the participants contributed to the theme in the journal prompts. Communication and learning through collaboration were heavily present in the participants' experiences. The participants experienced leadership support through open communication, which resulted in teacher retention. The participants experienced a positive school climate, mentorship, and professional development from learning opportunities experienced by collaborating with their coworkers.

Open Communication

Many participants commented on their need for communication and being informed. Jennifer expressed her desire for more communication by saying, “I feel that the school could be a little bit better if we just had some communication.” Frankie recalled her experience at a previous school where there was no communication between teachers and leadership. Instead, communication followed a chain of command where teachers communicated with the head of their department, who then passed the communication on to the administration. She discussed being frustrated. She said, “If anything was wrong, they wouldn't really know unless someone else told him.” Frankie appreciated her administrative team’s communication. She stated, “As far as them managing the school and the way they communicate with us as a faculty, I do think they're doing an amazing job. And I wouldn't trade them for anything because they've been working with it.” Elizabeth discussed the level of comfort she has at her current school:

> Here at the school I'm at now I really don't have as many issues. But if I did have an issue, [the administration] have an open-door policy, I can go express how I feel, without any without it feeling like it's going to be a messy situation or feel like they're going to go back and tell the person what I said. I can be open and honest about anything that's going on or that I'm unhappy about. And if there was a solution for them, they would really deal with it accordingly without it being a big mess. They will address the entire instead of addressing one or two individuals.

Collaboration

Jennifer discussed professional development opportunities that allowed her to collaborate with her coworkers. She said, “They have us collaborate in the groups that we're in to do activities for whatever they have us doing.” She elaborated that she appreciated the opportunity

to learn from her fellow teachers. Frankie commented on collaborating with her coworkers during professional development opportunities. She stated she has learned, “to basically be able to take constructive criticism and everything that you know, someone tells you as far as maneuvering in the classroom, it’s to actually help. It’s probably something that'll help you in the long run.” Isabella commented on professional development provided by her school, saying, “The reading coach tries a lot to pull us into the conference room so that we can collaborate and kind of plan together.” Daniella remarked despite not having much pre-service training, she is comfortable collaborating with her coworkers when she needs help. She said, “They were real nice, honestly, they showed me how to do lesson plans, how to handle discipline concerns.”

Positive Environments

Heidi recalled an experience with a positive climate where she felt comfortable working with her coworkers. She stated, “I literally went in and had teachers that we would plan lessons together and we would tag team on teaching.” Georgia added to the sentiment of a positive school climate and wanting to work with her coworkers by saying, “I'm not a follower, you know, I'm a team player.” Jennifer exclaimed that she knew she could depend on her coworkers whenever she needed help. She stated, “If I ask anybody, ‘Hey, I need help with this. Do you mind helping me?’ I know that they will.” Daniella stated of the culture and climate of her school:

> I feel like we have a pretty good culture and climate. I know I do. Like I tried to make sure I speak to everybody when I see them. And most the time, everyone, you know, speaks back and stuff. So, like I just try to be upbeat and cheerful at school. And not no negative Nancy, but it seems like, for the most part, I haven't had any negative interactions with anybody at school.

She later added, “When there’s a good environment, yeah, you do want to stay.” Christina recalled her decision to leave a previous school. She stated multiple other teachers decided to leave the same year she left. When elaborating on what could have encouraged her to stay, she stated, “If you don't have [a positive climate], that's when you have frequent turnovers…In my experience, [teacher retention] goes hand in hand with the climate and culture at the school.”

Outlier Data and Findings

The outliers found did not answer the central research question. Two outlier themes emerged from the data: adversity and natural reasons. Rather than answering what experiences contribute to teacher retention, the outliers answered what experiences contribute to teacher attrition.

Adversity

The first outlier that emerged from the data was adversity. Throughout the study, it became apparent that the participants had experienced difficulties that had led to thoughts or actions to leave the school they taught at. Adversity was broken up into two sub-themes: emotional discord and frustration. Table 18 summarizes the themes, subthemes, and contributing codes.

Table 18

Outlier Theme 4-Adversity

Theme	Sub-Theme	Contributing Codes
Adversity	Emotional Discord Frustrations	defeated, alone, separate, confused, hurt (emotions), overwhelmed, don't want, ignored, dread, heartbroken, distracted, stifled, upset, scared, uncomfortable, stagnant, tricked, unprepared, stressed, tired, hardships, trauma, minimal leadership, no leadership, unfairly reprimanded, not helping, lack of communication, close minded, inconsistent, chain of command, mandated, micromanaged, unsupported, inconsiderate, student behavior ignored, no official mentorship, denied no time, overloaded with paperwork, time outside of contract hours, too much testing, low paycheck, extra roles, not structured/unorganized, uninvolved parents, negative experience, negative relationship, negative work environment, downtime not spent teaching, understaffed, non-certified teachers, high turnover, virtual, unprofessional, outside of base school, disconnected, lack of funding, redundant, irrelevant, emotions (of students), cultural differences, academic struggles, student behavior, violence, incentives for students, consequences for students, expectations of students

Emotional Discord. The first sub-theme is emotional discord, comprised of codes related to inner conflict. Examples of these codes are defeated, overwhelmed, and heartbroken. Tables 19, 20, and 21 outline participant participation in the theme in individual interviews, focus group interviews, and journal prompts.

Table 19

Outlier-Adversity; sub-theme 1-Emotional Discord: Individual Interviews

Participant	Allison	Brittany	Christina	Daniella	Elizabeth
Theme Present	X	X	X		X
Participant	Frankie	Georgia	Heidi	Isabella	Jennifer
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Total	9/10	90%			

Table 20

Outlier-Adversity; sub-theme 1-Emotional Discord: Focus Group Interviews

Participant	Allison	Brittany	Christina	Daniella	Elizabeth
Theme Present	X			X	X
Participant	Frankie	Georgia	Heidi	Isabella	Jennifer
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Total	8/10	80%			

Table 21

Outlier-Adversity; sub-theme 1-Emotional Discord: Journal Prompts

Participant	Allison	Brittany	Christina	Daniella	Elizabeth
Theme Present	X	X		X	X
Participant	Frankie	Georgia	Heidi	Isabella	Jennifer
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Total	9/10	90%			

The data demonstrated in the tables shows that triangulation was achieved. Of the participants, 90% contributed to the theme in individual interviews, 80% contributed to the theme in focus group interviews, and 90% contributed to the theme in the journal prompts. The participant responses attributed negative feelings of being overwhelmed and stressed to reasons for teacher turnover. Regarding being prepared to teach in Title I schools, Heidi stated, “And the reality is when you enter the classroom, you have so many things being thrown at you from different directions that you can't do what you actually went to school to do.” Elizabeth elaborated on part of her reasoning for leaving a previous school being an overwhelming feeling of defeat. She stated, “I currently moved to a new school after being at a school where the principal did not acknowledge the hard work I was putting in on the grade level.” Regarding attempts to stay encouraged at her school, Brittany stated, “Despite my best efforts, I couldn't shake off the feeling of disappointment and frustration.”

Many of the participants commented on trauma they had experienced in previous schools and how it still impacts them. Christina stated, “I still almost have like a trigger response when my intercom would go off in my classroom because I thought it was the principal calling me up

to the office for me to get in trouble." Frankie spoke of the amount of violence at a previous school. She said it didn't feel like a school. She stated, "That's like kind of felt like a prison in a sense." Isabella told a story of a parent who followed her out of a conference with her and the administration. The parent attempted to get into a physical altercation with her, but Isabella, noticeably pregnant at the time, continued to walk away to avoid any altercation. She stated that her administration spoke to her about the incident later. She stated, "Instead of my principal at the time trying to support me, he kind of flipped it back and made it seem as though I was the issue when I was walking away the whole time."

Elizabeth relayed how, at a previous school, she had been written up twice. She explained that both incidents were cleared up, but the administration did not eliminate the write-ups. She stated, "I had to leave that environment due to just no compassion, not understand anything. Things like that. Especially with getting two write-ups, knowing that that's not my personality, my character." The impact of having her character called into question truly impacted Elizabeth. Elizabeth further stated, "You get worst classes still won't make you leave. It can be everything else that's added to that and feeling unappreciated, unwanted, no sympathy. That that cause a lot of turnover."

Frustrations. The second sub-theme is frustrations, comprised of codes related to lack of compensation, expectations beyond teaching, and difficulties in the teaching environment. Examples of these codes are low paycheck, understaffed, and overloaded with paperwork. Tables 22, 23, and 24 outline participant participation in the theme in individual interviews, focus group interviews, and journal prompts.

Table 22

Outlier-Adversity; sub-theme 2-Frustrations: Individual Interviews

Participant	Allison	Brittany	Christina	Daniella	Elizabeth
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Participant	Frankie	Georgia	Heidi	Isabella	Jennifer
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Total	10/10	100%			

Table 23

Outlier-Adversity; sub-theme 2-Frustrations: Focus Group Interviews

Participant	Allison	Brittany	Christina	Daniella	Elizabeth
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Participant	Frankie	Georgia	Heidi	Isabella	Jennifer
Theme Present			X		X
Total	7/10	70%			

Table 24

Outlier-Adversity; sub-theme 2-Frustrations: Journal Prompts

Participant	Allison	Brittany	Christina	Daniella	Elizabeth
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	
Participant	Frankie	Georgia	Heidi	Isabella	Jennifer
Theme Present	X		X	X	X
Total	8/10	80%			

The data demonstrated in the tables shows that triangulation was achieved. Of the participants, 100% contributed to the theme in individual interviews, 70% contributed to the theme in focus group interviews, and 80% contributed to the theme in the journal prompts. The participant responses showed overwhelming frustrations from being overwhelmed and not making enough money for the job expectations.

Jennifer recalled a time from the beginning of the school year when she contacted her principal for guidance and assistance. She stated, “I was overwhelmed with that and just trying to get everything together. And I went and I told her that I was overwhelmed. And she told me that I would just have to be overwhelmed and get it done.” Jennifer elaborated that that experience stuck with her, and she was bothered by it for the remainder of the school year. Heidi said that she has been teaching two classes full-time over the past school year. She stated, “When you have that many kids in our job, it's like, I'm not being effective. I just know I'm not being effective.”

Every participant commented on the lack of pay for teachers. Allison stated, “Just when you get that check. It's not even worth what you go through.” Jennifer stated, “They don't pay us

enough money.” After making the statement, Jennifer turned to me and exclaimed, “Make sure you put that in there!” Heidi elaborated that the work required as a teacher could not possibly be completed during the school day. She said:

> Teaching is the only profession in the entire world of professions where we expect our teachers to teach outside of their contracted hours or to work outside of their contracted hours. There's no other profession in the world where we expect that but then we're not paying them what they're worth.

Allison said, “We don't get paid that much, and then when we do it, it's like 2% or the insurance go up, and it takes the 2%.” When elaborating on reasons for teacher retention, Georgia asserted, “It’s definitely not the pay.”

Natural Reasons

Another outlier theme that emerged from the individual interviews was natural reasons for turnover. This aligned with the literature on teacher turnover, which notes that natural reasons for leaving teaching include relocating (Tran & Smith, 2020). While this aligned with the literature, the data was not triangulated, and the theme only emerged from individual interviews. The codes that comprised this theme were out of the participant's control or unrelated to school factors. Example codes are moving addresses, family, and extra education. Table 25 outlines the theme and contributing codes. Table 26 outlines the presence of the theme in individual interviews. The theme was not present in any focus group interviews or journal prompts.

Table 25

Outlier Theme 5-Natural Reasons

Theme	Contributing Codes
Natural Reasons	commute, change, downsizing, wanting to go back home, moving addresses, family, applying, extra education, need for teachers, other jobs, pink slipped

Table 26

Outlier Theme 5-Natural Reasons: Individual Interviews

Participant	Allison	Brittany	Christina	Daniella	Elizabeth
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Participant	Frankie	Georgia	Heidi	Isabella	Jennifer
Theme Present	X	X	X	X	X
Total	10/10	100%			

All participants contributed to the theme of natural reasons for teacher turnover. However, 0% of the participants contributed to the theme in focus group interviews and journal prompts. As a result, the data could not be triangulated for this theme. The participant responses highlighted getting extra education as the top reason for changing jobs. Of the participants, nine have continued their education and received a master's degree to further their careers. Six of the participants received a master's degree in a specialty field in education. Isabella stated, "But I think now that I actually am teaching, I kind of want to move more so into administration and being able to run my own school one day." Heidi returned to school to get her master's degree "because it's 10 grand more a year automatically." Christina realized she wanted to do more than

be in one classroom all day. She said, “After that first or second year teaching, I was like, I got to come up with something because this isn't for the rest of my career.” Daniella also knew she wanted to get out of the classroom. She asserted, “I knew I wasn't gonna be in a classroom forever that never was my goal.” Of the participants who pursued additional education, all but one pursued an additional degree in education. Brittany is the only participant who pursued an additional degree outside of the field of education. When discussing the next steps, she explained she does not know if she will leave the field of education. She elaborated, “I love children, and I love working with children because I feel like, you know, they're just learning; they don't know, so you know, shaping and shaping them, and now you can really honestly shape their minds because they're just children.” She explained that she does not know if she will ever walk away from the classroom because she loves working with children.

Research Question Responses

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the elements contributing to teacher retention through the lived experiences of K-5 teachers at Title I schools in the Southern United States. The study used individual interviews, focus group interviews, and journal prompts to explore the participants' lived experiences. Research questions and sub-questions were developed based on current literature and theories surrounding teacher retention in Title I schools. This section will address the research questions and sub-questions that guided the study.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences related to retention of K-5 teachers who teach in a Title I school? The data illuminated three major themes: A Life of Good Works, Bear One Another’s Burdens, and Peace and Mutual Edification. All the themes that emerged from the data

contributed to the central research question. Participants reported they truly love working with students and seeing them learn and grow. Isabella said, “And I just love being able to be around kids and just help them and see that light kind of flash when you know that they finally get what you're saying to them.” Georgia stated, “A lot of teachers, for my opinion, that I talk to those teachers, stay because the students.” Participants reported experiences where they were supported by their administration and fellow teachers. Participants consistently reported harmony, where coworkers coexisted peacefully, respected each other, and worked together for the common goal of student achievement.

Participants also reported experiences of adversity they had faced in previous schools. These experiences did not result in complete attrition from teaching, but they did result in turnover. When the participants were faced with adversity, such as an unsupportive administration, the participants changed schools. Christina recalled a negative school environment she experienced and made the connection that the experience molded her into the teacher she is now. She stated, “I would not trade that experience for anything in the world.”

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences of Title I K-5 teachers regarding pre-service training? The collaboration subtheme under the Peace and Mutual Edification theme answered this question. Participants had mixed experiences with pre-service training. Some participants expressed not having pre-service training at all. Other participants explained that pre-service training is unrealistic, ascertaining that it prepares teachers for the idealized classroom, not the realities of the Title I school. Elizabeth stated, “Honestly when I first started teaching, there was no teacher preparation program.” Heidi commented that the pre-service training she received was not specific enough for her specialty. Most participants reported a disconnect between pre-service

training and the reality of teaching in Title I schools. Georgia explained, “But it didn't [prepare me] because the school systems were so different.” Isabella said, “They didn't really give us a full picture of what we'd be dealing with if we were to be put in a situation like what I'm in right now.” Brittany said:

> But I really don't see the correlation between like the classes I took and then me teaching. It’s like a whole different ballgame, me, and my own classroom, than me sitting in a college class learning about what it might be. And you really don't really take a lot of classes in college that just prepares you for like a Title I school. I think they do like the overall just as a teacher, you know, but you know, when you graduate, everybody goes to like different areas. And so I wouldn't say that they prepared me for being at a Title I school because it's something totally different than what I learned.

Participants who did not feel prepared by their pre-service training expressed they were able to gain support through collaboration with their coworkers.

Sub-Question Two

What are the experiences of Title I K-5 teachers regarding in-service professional development? The collaboration subtheme under the Peace and Mutual Edification theme answered this question. Participants found professional development beneficial as long as the professional development was purposeful, and the teacher went in prepared to learn. Participants also commented how there is an overabundance of professional development in a Title I school that it can be overwhelming and redundant. Brittany elaborated, “So, I will say that those professional developments is really, if you do it the right way, if you really go to learn something, it really does help.” Allison commented on the importance of professional

development for teachers, “If you teach reading, it'd benefit you. If you never taught reading, it does benefit how to work with a struggling reader.”

Allison expressed the importance of purposeful professional development, stating, “Leadership don't believe in just doing random professional development.” Daniella discussed how her principal encourages professional development: “My principal, and now she's very good about telling me and letting me do stuff, too, that I want to do to help better myself, like conferences.” Jennifer added, “I have gone off to different conferences for those expertise.”

Participants explained that it can become redundant when professional development is not purposeful. Elizabeth expressed frustration at having to sit through professional development that was not geared toward her. She conveyed, “It's mostly for those new teachers who need to learn programs, instead of the older teachers.” Allison added, “You will see a lot of the programs are the same.” Georgia stated, “It’s kind of irrelevant to me.” Brittany commented, “Some of it is just to check a box so the school can say they told you.” Christina corroborated that statement by saying, “[Place redacted] does the online professional development training type of things, just kind of catching you up on policies and whatever.”

Participant responses also revealed that professional development can be overwhelming. Elizabeth stated, “Some of it doesn't because it's, it's so overwhelming, and there's so much information being given.” Allison added:

> I believe [place redacted] take on so much in this. Everybody wants so much and they're all the same, but they want you to try it this way. This program, do it this way, this program do it this way, but they want you to do all the programs, use all the strategies and mix them up.

Sub-Question Three

What are the experiences of Title I K-5 teachers regarding mentorship? The help from coworkers subtheme under the Bear One Another's Burdens theme and the collaboration subtheme under the Peace and Mutual Edification theme answered this question. Participants had mixed experiences with having an official mentor. Most participants had not been assigned an official mentor and had to search for a mentor on their own. They networked within their schools independently to form relationships and cultivate a learning environment. When mentors were assigned, participant experiences varied again. If the participant received a motivated mentor, they had a good experience. However, if they were assigned a mentor who did not care, they did not have a positive experience. Less outgoing participants struggled more than teachers who were willing to foster relationships.

Christina asserted, "I don't think I have or have been part of an official teacher peer mentorship program now." Isabella was given a mentor because of her master's program. She explained she did not think she would have been assigned a mentor had she not been in the program. Regarding having a mentor, she said, "I will say the mentorship program works if you're placed with someone who's actually willing to sit down with you and explain to you how the district works." Allison had interned under a teacher who had been extremely helpful. She commented how she tries to cultivate the same helpful environment, saying, "I try to do the same jams that [name redacted] did for me." Georgia commented, "I have seen one example of it here, but I don't know if it's official or if it's that person made it officially upon themselves." Jennifer received a mentor at a previous school. She recalled:

> We worked that's how we know each other from my very very first one, and she was my mentor. And so, I really do feel like she prepared me for, you know, what it's like teaching in [place redacted]. And then, even when I left, I still will be contacting her.

Jennifer's experience demonstrated that mentorship helps create a long-lasting network of support.

Participants' experiences demonstrated a desire for an official mentorship program. Heidi mentioned in her position, there isn't a mentorship program in place. She asserted:

> I almost wish that with some of our new teachers, and I've even offered this before, like, either have some of your experienced teachers that have done it for as long as I have to go into the classrooms and help these new teachers, even if it's just for a day or two. Or let them come and shadow a day in one of the experienced teachers' classrooms, and not everything is going to be the same but at least then they would have some kind of experience, you know, at least they would be able to go oh, that's how she does that… so I almost wish we had like a mentorship set up like that.

Frankie said, "If you want this kind of mentorship in [place redacted], you have to create them yourself." Christina added that it is up to the teacher to create mentorship opportunities. She stated, "You just gravitate towards them and kind of put yourself in their path to learn from other educators that you see." Jennifer commented on her struggle as a new teacher, and another teacher stepped up to help her. She said, "She showed me how to do things, and she really took me on. I would say, try, and you know, with helping me with grades and things that I should know of that nature."

Sub-Question Four

What are the experiences of Title I K-5 teachers regarding leadership support? The encouraged subtheme under the A Life of Good Works theme, the subtheme administrative assistance under the Bear One Another's Burdens theme, and the open communication subtheme under the Peace and Mutual Edification theme answered this question. Most of the participants had experienced some level of poor leadership support. When participants discussed poor leadership support, they also discussed how it contributed to their decision to leave school. When participants discussed positive leadership support, they elaborated on how happy they were at school. Most participants reported feeling secure when their leadership supported them, and that the leadership support fostered a sense of belonging in the school. The participant experiences highlighted that strong leadership support is a leading factor in teacher retention in Title I schools. Brittany said of her current leadership:

> I think at [place redacted], the leadership is pretty good. They're very hands-on. If you need them, you know, you can always reach out to them and ask for help, and they'll make sure you get the help you need. So, I feel like I have a pretty good leadership at this school.

Daniella added, "My experience with my administration has been a good experience." Christina said, "I find both of the people in leadership positions at our school to be knowledgeable, professional, and easy to work with." Heidi said of her leadership, "It is amazing to have that support."

Frankie recalled an experience with leadership at a previous school, "We went through maybe four or five interim principals. And they wouldn't stay for longer than a month because of the violence, and it had got to the point where no one was really leading us. We're just there."

She went on to discuss her current experience with leadership, stating, “The assistant principal at [place redacted] has been nothing but amazing… I actually love the leadership at my school.” Elizabeth compared her current experience with leadership to her previous experiences. She stated, “As far as my leadership, where I am now, it has been fantastic. But this year's a better leadership team than I've had the past two years.”

Georgia had experienced a new administration coming into her school. When asked about how that impacted her relationships with her coworkers, she stated, “They bummed out. They left me here.” Georgia continued to comment that she felt neglected by her leadership. She stated, “It’s like no care for my class, period. The entire school year between the both of them. They've probably been in here once maybe twice the entire school year.” She elaborated on how she felt picked on by her administration, stating, “You always singling me out about something about the smallest of stuff. It get on my nerves. It really get on my nerves.” Georgia explained, “So that's why I stay in my classroom. That's why nobody sees me because everything I need is in there.” Georgia’s experience highlighted how important leadership support is. Without the support of her leadership, she had negative feelings and isolated herself from the rest of the school.

Sub-Question Five

What are the experiences of Title I K-5 teachers regarding school climate? The encouraged, joy, and love subthemes under the A Life of Good Works theme, the subtheme help from coworkers under the Bear One Another’s Burdens theme, and the positive environments subtheme under the Peace and Mutual Edification theme answered this question. Participants’ experiences of school climate were mostly positive. They explained how they lean on coworkers for support and how everyone fosters a community like a family. Frankie stated she loves “the

community that schools kinda produce. It's a good healthy community." Jennifer explained that she had been having "a hard year" and noticed her fellow teachers were "having a hard year" as well. She said of her coworkers, "They really don't have the energy to stay when school is over. It's been such a long day that by the time three o'clock hit, they're ready to go home, and I don't blame them." However, she further explained she and her coworkers come together after school. Jennifer said:

> We've been working out after school. A group of us, we decided to do, and whoever else wanted to join, they could join…Everyone was so stressed, and us working out and having fun together was a big stress reliever.

Heidi emphasized the family-oriented nature of her school climate, saying, "We are a family. We…love on each other and fight with each other, and you know, it's a true-knit family."

Participants' experiences also illuminated that supportive climates in K-5 Title I schools are helpful. Heidi told her coworkers, "They've never batted an eye to help me." Isabella said of her fellow teachers, "My coworkers are always willing to lend a helping hand." Frankie piggybacked on Isabella, saying her coworkers are willing to "come in and model lessons, or if I ever need any help, I can always email them, and they'll, you know, try to assist me right away, even with manipulatives and things like that." Their experiences highlighted a truly collaborative environment where people can work together seamlessly. Of her climate, Jennifer said, "I absolutely love the people that I work with." Heidi stated of the climate at her school, "I'm at home."

Summary

In this chapter, I represented the findings from my analysis of the lived experiences of K-5 teachers in Title I schools in the Southern United States related to teacher retention. A detailed

description of the participants was given. Three themes were identified: A Life of Good Works, Bear One Another's Burdens, and Peace and Mutual Edification. Two outlier themes were also identified: Adversity and Natural Reasons. Central research questions and sub-questions were answered by triangulating the data collected through individual interviews, focus group interviews, and journal prompts.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the elements contributing to teacher retention through the lived experiences of K-5 teachers at Title I schools in the Southern United States. This chapter discusses the research findings, including connections to the literature and Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs. The implications for policy and practice are also addressed, followed by empirical and theoretical implications. Limitations and delimitations for the study are examined. Finally, recommendations are made for future research.

Discussion

This hermeneutic phenomenological study aimed to understand what contributes to teacher retention by exploring the lived experiences of K-5 teachers at Title I schools in the Southern United States. Ten participants were interviewed individually, in focus groups, and using journal prompts to collect data. Three themes emerged from the data: A Life of Good Works, Bear One Another's Burdens, and Peace and Mutual Edification. This section will discuss the study's findings.

Summary of Thematic Findings

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the thematic findings derived from the qualitative analysis. Three themes, A Life of Good Works, Bear One Another's Burdens, and Peace and Mutual Edification, were identified by carefully examining participant responses from individual interviews, focus group interviews, and journal prompts. These findings offer valuable insights into teacher retention in Title I schools and illuminate the participants' diverse perspectives and experiences.

The first theme was A Life of Good Works. This theme was developed from the overwhelming incidences of codes related to teaching being a calling and the love of teaching in Title I schools. Teachers relayed experiences of joy working with students and seeing student growth. Research supports job satisfaction directly impacting teacher retention (Wang et al., 2020). The participants' experiences included large levels of job satisfaction when they relayed a sense of purpose.

The second theme that emerged from the data was Bear One Another's Burdens. Although participants stressed the importance of support from the administration, support came from leadership and fellow teachers. Research supports teacher retention when teachers have higher levels of support (Tran & Smith, 2020). Participants discussed the importance of knowing they could do their jobs without being questioned.

The final theme was Peace and Mutual Edification. Participants elaborated on the importance of a harmonious work environment, which refers to a workplace with a positive atmosphere characterized by cooperation and respect. Participants discussed experiences of open and respectful communication, active listening, and constructive feedback, including successful collaboration with other teachers. Research supports creating learning communities within schools to support teachers and increase teacher retention (Alemdar et al., 2022; Bond & Blevins, 2020; Chuang, 2021).

Interpretation of Findings

The aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of K-5 teachers in Title I schools to understand what contributes to teacher retention. The literature highlights a lack of or poor pre-service training, professional development, mentorship, leadership, and climate contributing to teacher turnover (Alemdar et al., 2022; Bond & Blevins, 2019; Cancio et al.,

2013; Carter et al., 2022; Cawte, 2020; Chuang, 2021; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Farmer, 2020; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Gul et al., 2019; Harrell et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2010; Ramanan & Mohamad, 2020; Sutcher et al., 2019; Torres, 2019; Tran & Smith, 2020; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). As a result, those factors were investigated in relation to teacher retention.

Pre-Service Training and Professional Development

The study's participants did not feel prepared with their pre-service training. They often commented how it was not aligned with the realities of teaching in a Title I school. Some participants elaborated that pre-service training prepares teachers for classrooms with only one or two students struggling and needing interventions. Still, the reality of teaching in a Title I school is that the whole class is likely struggling and needs intense interventions. Despite not being prepared by pre-service training, the participants did not leave teaching altogether. Instead, they asked for help and support from coworkers and administration. Lack of pre-service training did not directly result in teacher turnover for any participants.

The study's participants had mixed emotions regarding professional development. Many were tired of repeatedly having to do similar professional development, and some expressed frustration at having to do professional development that was not relevant to them in their specialty field. All participants expressed frustration at professional development during their planning block because it took away from the time they needed to prepare for their classes. Multiple participants expressed happiness at being in a Title I school because their school had the funding to send them to professional development conferences outside of their base school. Participants also expressed job satisfaction when they participated in purposeful professional

development. Poor professional development did not directly result in turnover for any participants.

Mentorship and Climate

Most of the study participants had not experienced official mentorship. Rather, they created their unofficial mentorship by fostering relationships and networking. Some participants took it upon themselves to assist new or struggling teachers. All the participants wanted to participate in some form of mentorship. Fostering their mentorship opportunities directly created a collaborative and positive school climate. The participants who did not have the personality type to ask for help from other teachers consistently were isolated from the rest of the school. The participants who struggled to create unofficial mentorships and separate themselves did not feel included in the school community. The feelings of isolation resulted in those participants not experiencing a positive school climate. Lack of mentorship did result in teacher turnover.

On the other hand, teachers who developed mentorship relationships with their coworkers felt connected to their school community. Participation in mentorship contributed to teacher retention. Participants expressed feeling supported by their coworkers and leadership, leading to a positive school climate. They also felt comfortable in their school climate to collaborate with their coworkers and grow in their profession. Positive school climate contributed to teacher retention.

Leadership Support

Participants' experiences with support from leadership were mixed. Some experienced low levels of support. Those experiences resulted in the participants feeling stressed and fearful of making a mistake. Some participants relayed the experiences of not being supported, which resulted in dreading coming to work. The participants' experiences of not being supported by

leadership resulted in turnover. Unfortunately, some of the participants expressed the experience had a lasting impact. Even though they were no longer in an unsupportive environment, they still had moments where they were fearful of their actions due to the consequences they had faced in the past.

Participants' experiences with supportive leadership resulted in increased feelings of empowerment and purpose and reduced feelings of stress. Participants were grateful when they knew their leadership had an open-door policy. Participants were also more innovative and demonstrated growth when they knew their leadership was supportive.

Another common sentiment reiterated by multiple participants' experiences with supportive leadership was student behavior. When participants had a student with extreme behaviors and supportive leadership, they felt more prepared to handle the behavior. The participants expressed that they knew they could call on their leadership if they needed assistance, and the leadership would help them with their behavior. When participants did not have supportive leadership, and a student displayed extreme behaviors, the participants expressed feeling defeated. Those experiences indicated that the participants felt more prepared to deal with adversity when they had the support of their leadership. Supportive leadership contributed to teacher retention.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This section explores the practical applications of the study's results for policy and practice. Policy implications explore how the findings can inform legislature to address teacher retention in K-5 Title I schools. The exploration of implications for practice focuses on actionable insights for schools. Recommendations derived from the study's results were highlighted to enhance teacher retention in K-5 Title I schools. These subsections aimed to

bridge the gap between research and application, offering practical guidance and informed strategies for stakeholders invested in teacher retention in K-5 Title I schools.

Implications for Policy

Considering inflation, the average teacher's salary in the United States has decreased by 7.8% over the past 12 years (National Education Association, n.d.). Literature indicates a high correlation between teacher attrition and lower salaries (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2019; Feng & Sass, 2017). Every participant in the study reported dissatisfaction regarding their salary. Participants also reported frustration that whenever they did get a pay increase, the insurance cost also increased, resulting in no net income. Legislature in the Southern United States should invest in teachers, especially those in Title I schools. Considerations should be made to increase teacher salaries and provide stipends to teachers in Title I schools.

Implications for Practice

The study's results offer recommendations for improving school practices. The results indicated that teachers want to be recognized. The participants' experiences with being told they were doing a good job by a parent or administration were uplifting and positively impacted job satisfaction. To improve job satisfaction, schools could publicly recognize teachers' superb work, such as a teacher or a grade level of the month that highlights all the great things the teachers are doing and thank them for their dedication and excellence.

The study's results showed that participants appreciated opportunities to come together with their coworkers and do something fun. Schools should consider implementing events to create opportunities for teachers. These opportunities curated by the school can help foster a positive school climate. An example of an event schools can regularly participate in is a duty-free lunch for teachers to enjoy eating a meal with their coworkers during the school day.

The study's results indicated that pre-service teacher preparation programs are ineffective in preparing teachers for teaching in Title I schools. Research indicates that mentorship can be an effective tool for helping prepare teachers for the rigors of teaching (Carter et al., 2022; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Gul et al., 2019; Ramanan & Mohamad, 2020; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). The study results showed that official mentorship programs are largely absent, and not all teachers make effective mentors. The study results also indicated that more introverted teachers struggled to network with other teachers and develop unofficial mentorships. To prepare new teachers for teaching in Title I schools, improve the culture and climate of the school, provide support from teachers and administration, and provide the opportunity for growth for all teachers, schools could implement an official mentorship program. The official mentorship program would require professional development for prospective mentor teachers and must be well-designed to focus on the needs of the teachers and the school (Bond & Blevins, 2020; Hightower et al., 2021; Sutcher et al., 2019). The implementation of an official mentorship program should increase teacher retention.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

Empirical implications provide practical insights based on the observed data, while theoretical implications advance theoretical understanding. Both are crucial in research as they bridge the gap between empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks, driving the evolution of knowledge and informing future research. This section will discuss the study's empirical and theoretical implications.

Empirical Implications. According to the literature, the primary experiences that lead to teacher turnover are lack of teacher preparation, lack of mentorship, unsupportive leadership, and poor school climate (Alemdar et al., 2022; Bond & Blevins, 2019; Cancio et al., 2013; Carter et

al., 2022; Cawte, 2020; Chuang, 2021; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Farmer, 2020; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Gul et al., 2019; Harrell et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2010; Ramanan & Mohamad, 2020; Sutcher et al., 2019; Torres, 2019; Tran & Smith, 2020; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018). The central research question and sub-questions aimed to explore the phenomenon of teacher retention. The sub-questions focused on the specific experiences of teacher preparation, mentorship, leadership, and school climate.

Teacher Preparation. The number of teachers enrolled in traditional teacher preparation programs has decreased roughly 45% in the last 50 years (AACTE, 2022). The number of teachers who entered the classroom through alternative certification doubled from 1988 to 2008 (Fütterer et al., 2023). Of the participants in this study, eight entered teaching after a traditional teacher preparation program, and two were alternatively certified and later obtained master's degrees in education. The study results indicated that teacher preparation programs do not prepare teachers for the challenges of teaching in a Title I program. Literature supports that traditional teacher preparation programs focus on pedagogy, whereas non-traditional teacher preparation programs focus on on-the-job-skills (Fütterer et al.; Kraemer-Holland, 2023; Ingersol & Tran, 2023). Participants expressed frustration at the disconnect between what they were taught in college and what they experienced first-hand in the classroom. Participants in more specialized classrooms expressed frustrations about teacher preparation programs not preparing them for their specific classroom types, such as fine arts, counseling, STEM, and dpecial education. Teacher preparation programs should focus more on student teaching experiences in the classroom to better prepare teachers for the rigors of teaching in Title I schools. Additionally, student teachers should be required to complete hours in a Title I classroom.

In-Service Professional Development. Professional development is vital for teachers to increase their professional growth and ensure they are prepared for the rigors and challenges of teaching (Fütterer et al., 2023). Schools can utilize professional development as a means of increasing teacher retention (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Renbarger & Davis, 2019). The study results indicated that professional development is useful if it is purposeful. The participants' experiences indicated that professional development can feel redundant and irrelevant if not purposeful.

Additionally, the participants indicated that when they were subjected to too much professional development at one time, they became overwhelmed and were ineffective at implementing the new teaching strategies they learned. The feelings of the participants aligned with the literature. For professional development to be effective and beneficial, it must be aligned with the teacher's needs (Ogbuanya & Shodipe, 2022). Research indicates that professional development aims to prepare teachers to implement positive change (Bond & Blevins, 2019). Participants' experiences also pointed to the advantage of teaching in a Title I school regarding professional development because the schools had additional funding to send teachers to professional development outside their base school. Participants found it beneficial to attend conferences specific to their specialty field, such as counseling or fine arts. The study's results indicated teachers had higher satisfaction levels because of the additional professional development opportunities. Professional development should continue to be purposeful to be impactful for teachers. One way that schools can ensure their professional development is purposeful is by providing teachers with a menu of choices so they can pick the professional development opportunities that are most suited to them. This also allows teachers to be more in control of their professional growth.

Mentorship. According to research, there are two types of mentorship: official and unofficial (Hightower et al., 2021; Wiens et al., 2019). Official mentorship refers to a mentorship relationship or program established for employees, whereas unofficial mentorship refers to the relationships employees establish by themselves (Bond & Blevins, 2020; Gul et al., 2019; Hightower et al., 2021; Sutcher et al., 2019; Wiens et al., 2019). Research supports mentorship positively impacting teachers, resulting in feelings of support and higher job satisfaction (Hightower et al.; Wiens et al.). Only two of the participants in the study had experienced official mentorship, and one of the two only experienced official mentorship because it was a requirement established by her master's program. That participant also experienced official mentorship for two years from two different teachers. One of the mentors she was assigned was ineffective and uninvolved, whereas the other mentor worked with her and tried to support her. Her experience supports the research that not every teacher should be a mentor and that the choice of a mentor teacher should be intentional (Cawte, 2020; Tran & Smith, 2020; Weisling & Gardiner, 2018).

The study's results demonstrated that official mentorship programs are not being utilized, but participants want an official mentorship program. Participants expressed a desire to mentor other teachers and be mentored by established teachers. The study's results indicated that the participants created unofficial mentorships on their own, but personality type played a large part in the success of the unofficial mentorships. The results indicated that less outgoing participants struggled to establish and maintain supportive relationships with their coworkers, leading to isolation. More outgoing participants were more successful at establishing and maintaining supportive relationships. Literature on mentorship indicates that teachers in official mentorship programs experience higher levels of support (Wiens et al., 2019). The results of the study could

offer a possible reason why teachers who do not participate in official mentorship programs do not feel as supported. The results of the study indicated that official mentorship programs should be established in schools to increase the level of support teachers receive (Gul et al., 2019; Leibel et al., 2021; Ramanan & Mohamad, 2020; Sutcher et al., 2019). Schools should implement official mentorship programs. Official mentorship programs should be purposeful and include professional development for the mentors first to ensure they know how to be effective mentors. Administrators should have a specific role in the mentorship program to support the mentor and the mentee. The mentorship program should be implemented at the base school as well as the district so teachers in more specialized classrooms, such as the fine arts, counseling, and special education, that may not have another teacher teaching the same thing in their school can have additional mentorship supports in their content area.

Leadership Support. A strong theme in research on teacher turnover is turnover levels are higher when there is less support from the leadership (Alemdar et al., 2022; Cancio et al., 2013; Farmer, 2020; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Gul et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2010; Sutcher et al., 2019; Torres, 2019; Tran & Smith, 2020). There are multiple styles of leadership. However, research indicates that the most effective leadership style depends on the culture and the school (Maheshwari, 2022). The study results showed that participants had experienced multiple leadership styles.

According to the literature, authoritarian leadership is characterized by stringent control and high employee expectations (Alblooshi et al., 2021). Participants who experienced authoritarian leadership had both positive and negative experiences. The study's results indicated that authoritarian leadership resulted in a school culture where every classroom had the same expectations and students and teachers were all on the same page. The participants indicated they

learned high levels of structure under authoritarian leadership. However, the participants' experiences also resulted in high levels of stress and fear of disciplinary action for minor mistakes, which aligns with the literature on authoritarian leadership (Alblooshi et al., 2021; Parlar et al., 2022). All the participants' experiences with authoritarian leadership resulted in turnover. Authoritarian leadership can be effective as long as it is partnered with another leadership style that supports teachers.

The literature describes laissez-faire leaders as leaders who refrain from providing guidance to employees or assuming accountability for their actions (González-Cruza et al., 2019; Kalkan et al., 2020). Participants who experienced laissez-faire leadership experienced high levels of frustration. The study's results indicated that participants under laissez-faire leadership did not trust their leadership and harbored negative feelings toward their leadership. Participants expressed a school climate of employees who were always tired and had low job satisfaction. This aligned with the literature on laissez-faire leadership (González-Cruza et al.). The participants under the laissez-faire leadership did not indicate that the lack of leadership would result in future turnover; however, they expressed low levels of job satisfaction and high levels of feeling defeated. This aligns with the literature on laissez-faire leadership, which indicated that laissez-faire leadership results in poor trust relationships and has a negative impact on job satisfaction (Kalkan et al., 2020; Kasalak et al., 2019; Van der Vyver et al., 2020). One participant stated, "The grass is brown over here, and it might be brown over there, too!" The study's results supported the literature that is not effective in fostering a positive work environment where teachers can grow. Laissez-faire leadership should not be utilized as a leadership style. Teachers need leadership who is present, supportive and provides guidance.

Transformational leaders are noted in the literature for serving as role models, aiming to positively motivate and inspire employees, and actively supporting them in achieving their full potential (Alblooshi et al., 2021; González-Cruza et al., 2019; Kalkan et al., 2020; Kasalak et al., 2020; Schermuly et al., 2020; Van der Vyver et al., 2020; Yongping et al., 2018). They are recognized for their commitment to fostering growth and development among employees (Alblooshi et al.; González-Cruza et al.; Kalkan et al.; Kasalak et al.; Schermuly et al.; Van der Vyver et al.; Yongping et al.). A lot of the participants experienced transformational leadership. They expressed experiencing supportive leadership who positively recognized their contributions to their classroom and the school. They noted they had been encouraged to grow as an educator. The study's results indicated that participants who experienced transformational leadership had higher levels of job satisfaction. The participants' experiences showed they were comfortable communicating with their leadership and felt empowered to innovate in the classroom. The participants revealed they felt coached and encouraged by their leadership team, resulting in individual growth and higher levels of job satisfaction. The study's results supported the research on transformational leadership (Grant & Drew, 2022; Kasalak et al., 2020; Schermuly et al.). The study results revealed that all participants under the transformational leadership style expressed high levels of job satisfaction by stating how pleased they were with their leadership and elaborating that the leadership they experienced fueled their desire to remain at their current school. School leadership should utilize transformational leadership. Schools experience teacher retention when leadership is supportive. Transformational leadership inspires teachers to try new things and think outside the box, leading to growth which also results in teacher retention. School leaders who utilize transformational leadership enable teachers to meet Maslow's (1954) growth need for self-actualization.

School Climate. Research indicates school climate encapsulates the school's physical elements and atmosphere (Grant et al., 2022; Sutcher et al., 2019; Torres, 2019; Yang et al., 2022). The literature supports that teachers will feel inadequate in Title I schools due to the lack of resources available, which results in higher attrition levels (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Tran & Smith, 2020). Only one participant in the study indicated frustration at the lack of supplies in the classroom; however, that did not result in feelings of inadequacy or turnover. Another part of the physical elements of a school is the demographics of the student body, both culturally and socio-economically (Grant et al.). The study's results indicated that the participants respected the many cultures that made up their student body. The study's results also showed that participants understood that their students came from various backgrounds and socio-economic statuses.

Research indicates a strong correlation between the poverty level of students and low student performance and a strong correlation between low student performance and higher levels of teacher attrition (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022a; Harrell et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2020; Padilla et al., 2020). The study's results did not support the literature. Rather, the participants' experiences indicated they harbored no resentment toward the students for circumstances beyond their control. One participant stated, "We have to remember to view with compassion because nobody chooses to go without."

Additionally, the study's results indicated that participants had higher levels of job satisfaction when their struggling students made academic gains. The study's results did not indicate higher levels of attrition due to physical elements of the school. Title I schools should continue to utilize their funding to ensure that their classrooms have the supplies necessary for teaching. Even though the study's results did not indicate participants would consider turnover because of the student body, it was important for schools to be proactive and ensure that

sentiment remains. Schools should continue to encourage compassion and understanding among the teachers for the students who comprise the student body. One way to acknowledge student cultural differences is by celebrating different cultures throughout the year. Schools can also offer professional development opportunities for teachers to learn more about their student body. For example, schools with a higher population of English as a second language students can provide the opportunity for teachers to attend professional development for teaching students whose first language is not English and for students who do not yet speak English. To address socioeconomic differences, schools can provide professional development opportunities for teachers to understand the impact of poverty.

The atmosphere aspect of the school climate refers to the social interactions in a school (Larsson & Löwstedt, 2023; Torres, 2019; Yang et al., 2022). The study's results indicated that participants who felt a strong sense of community in their school were more likely to be retained. Literature supports the school climate as strongly related to how a teacher feels in their school, which strongly correlates to turnover or retention (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Sutcher et al., 2019; Torres). The participants' experiences of being isolated, ignored, and not included resulted in turnover. The study's results also indicated that the participants bonded in unfavorable situations, creating a strong climate when they struggled with school leadership. Participants' experiences with authoritarian and laissez-faire leadership and climate resulted in the teachers coming together and strengthening their support of one another. The study's results supported a favorable school atmosphere positively impacting teacher retention. The school should consider implementing an official mentorship program to encourage a favorable atmosphere. An official mentorship program will reduce the incidences of teachers being isolated and ignored because teachers will have a trained mentor who will work to include them. While participants did form

bonds under shared unfavorable circumstances, the unfavorable circumstances contributed to teacher turnover. The school can create positive opportunities for teachers to bond by hosting events for teachers, enabling them to come together and socialize. When the teachers are more comfortable interacting with one another personally, they are more likely to interact positively and professionally, and retention will increase.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretical implications link the issue of teacher retention in Title I schools to Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, which served as the guiding framework for this study. The study's findings supported the theoretical framework. In the following section, I will expound upon the correlations between the study's results and Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs.

Deficiency Needs: Physiological and Safety. Teachers ' physiological needs are the tangible items necessary for surviving teaching (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023; Newberry & Allsop, 2017; Riley & Mort, 1981). One participant in the study did not have her physiological needs met. When she entered her classroom for the first time, there were no supplies, and she needed to become innovative to supply her classroom. While she struggled at first because her physiological needs were not met by her school, she was able to meet her own physiological needs. When this participant moved to her next school, the school met her physiological needs, and she elaborated on how much easier it was. Participants in the study had their physiological needs met. They each had their classroom and supplies. When they did not have supplies, they could ask their leadership or fellow teachers for assistance and were provided supplies. The theme Bear One Another’s Burdens from the study's results supports that physiological needs must be met for teacher retention. Title I schools should continue to utilize the funding provided by the government under Title I to ensure that classrooms have the supplies

necessary for success. Leadership should ask teachers each year for a list of needed supplies and a wish list of supplies. Leadership can use the two lists to make sure the necessary supplies are being purchased and, if any funding remains, to purchase supplies from the wish list. When leadership becomes aware of a new unit specialty unit coming to the school, such as fine arts, they can use Title I funding to purchase specialty supplies and ensure the new unit is successful.

Safety needs for teachers can be met when teachers feel safe from any reasonable threat (Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023). Participants in the study reported experiences where their safety needs were not met. One participant reported that the level of violence in her school made it feel like a prison. Participants' experiences with not having their safety needs met resulted in turnover to leave the unsafe environment. Participants also relayed experiences where they sent students with extreme behaviors to the administrative team. Those participants knew the administrative team would handle the extreme behaviors, and those participants knew they and their students were safe. The theme Bear One Another's Burdens from the study's results supports that safety needs must be met for teacher retention. Leadership needs to take responsibility for ensuring teachers feel safe in their classrooms. They can do this by communicating with their faculty and staff. Leadership can also do this by providing appropriate professional development training to at least one teacher in each designated location of the school, such as one teacher per hallway and teachers who work with extreme and violent behaviors. Leadership should also be transparent regarding who has training. This way, all teachers are aware of who is certified to provide assistance in violent and extreme behavior situations, and all teachers will feel safer in their school.

Deficiency Needs: Belongingness. According to Maslow (1954), the need for belongingness can be met by working with others (Fisher & Royster, 2016; Navy, 2020; Riley &

Mort, 1981). Research supports belongingness can also occur when there is a positive school climate (Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023; Navy; Riley & Mort; Weller, 1982). Participants discussed negative school climates that resulted in isolation. Those experiences stifled teacher growth and resulted in the participant leaving the school. Participants also detailed experiences in which they collaborated with their coworkers, experienced unofficial mentorship, and participated in team meetings. The themes Bear One Another's Burdens and Peace and Mutual Edification from the study's results support that belongingness needs must be met for teacher retention. Schools can implement official mentorship programs to make sure that teachers are immersed in a network of support. Official mentorship programs can foster collaboration, subsequently leading to an increased sense of belongingness.

Deficiency Needs: Esteem. Maslow (1954) breaks esteem into two parts. The first part is self-esteem, and the second is esteem from others (Adair, 2006; Adams et al., 2015; Fisher & Royster, 2016; Maslow, 1954; Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023; Weller, 1982). Self-esteem comes from how a person feels about themselves, their freedom, and their independence (Adair; Adams et al.; Fisher & Royster; Maslow; Frei-Landau & Levin; Weller). Participants reported experiences of being micromanaged and being reprimanded unfairly. Participants attributed these experiences to deciding to find another teaching position. Participants also reported being supported by their school and given the autonomy in their classroom to teach confidently. These experiences resulted in teachers making the decision to remain at their school. Esteem from others comes from being recognized and appreciated (Adair, 2006; Adams et al., 2015; Fisher & Royster, 2016; Maslow, 1954; Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023; Weller, 1982). Participants reported experiences of being recognized for the work they did in the classroom and the validation they received from being recognized. The theme A Life of Good Works from the study's results

supports that esteem needs must be met for teacher retention. Schools can acknowledge their teachers by recognizing their effective teaching with a teacher or grade level of the month that is publicized throughout the school. This will increase esteem from others and self-esteem.

Growth Needs: Self-Actualization. According to Maslow (1954), growth needs can be addressed only once all the other needs have been met. Self-actualization is the growth need to do more (Adams et al., 2015; Freitas & Leonard, 2011). For teachers, self-actualization can mean taking the next steps in the field of education, such as taking leadership roles in the school or conducting research that contributes to the field of education (Adams et al.; Freitas & Leonard). Nine of the 10 participants in the study went back to school to further their education and continue their growth. The participants reported their desire to do more as teachers. The theme A Life of Good Works from the study's results indicates that teachers strive to reach self-actualization. Leadership should always encourage the continued growth of their teachers. An effective way to do this is by utilizing the transformational leadership style. Leadership can also encourage teachers to continue their education through professional development and by taking additional higher academic classes. Schools can then encourage teachers to turn over what they have learned in their professional development or higher education courses to the rest of the teachers. Schools can encourage teachers to take leadership roles throughout the school. By assigning teachers specific roles, teachers can continue to grow as educators.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations are important research concepts that help define a study's scope and boundaries. Limitations refer to the constraints or weaknesses of a study that may affect the interpretation or generalizability of the findings. These factors are beyond the researcher's control but may impact the results or conclusions of the study. Delimitations are the

boundaries or scope conditions the researcher sets for the study. The researcher made deliberate choices to narrow the focus and defined what would and will not be included in the study.

Limitations. One limitation was that all the participants were female. I utilized snowball sampling to recruit additional participants from more schools but was largely unsuccessful. I also attempted to recruit participants from additional K-5 Title I school systems in the Southern United States but did not receive a response from those potential participants. As a result, all the participants in the study are from the same school district, and 80% of the participants are from one school.

Another limitation was that most of the data was collected at the end of the school year. Teacher participants were busy collecting end-of-year data and wrapping up teaching for the year. It was easier to collect data before teachers became distracted with all of the tasks they needed to complete for closing up the school year.

The number of years teachers had experience was a limitation of the study. Most of the participant pool were mid-career teachers. I did obtain valuable insight from the beginning-career teachers and mid-career teachers. However, the teachers who had been teaching the longest had more experiences they were able to elaborate on.

Delimitations. The decision to take a hermeneutic phenomenological approach enabled me to personally reflect on the data to make sense of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1997). The hermeneutic phenomenological approach was well suited for this study. It was purposefully decided to limit the study to the experiences of K-5 teachers in Title I schools in the Southern United States. I wanted to focus on the specific region of the Southern United States because research supports the highest level of turnover is experienced in hard-to-staff urban schools in the Southern United States (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Goldring et al., 2014;

Ingersol et al., 2019; NCTAF, 2003; Taie & Goldring, 2020; USNCES, 2022). I focused on K-5 schools because they are the first schools that students will experience. There is also a stark difference in how K-5, middle, and high schools are run. I wanted to ensure that all my participants taught in K-5. I also made the decision to exclude teachers who had taught at one time but were no longer teaching. This decision was made to ensure the experiences relayed were current. Also excluded were teachers who did not have at least one full year of teaching experience in Title I schools. This decision was made to ensure that the participants had experiences to share.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should be conducted to understand teacher retention in Title I schools further. This study's participants were all from the same school district, and most were in the same school. The first recommendation for future research is to have participants from multiple K-5 Title I schools and different school districts to determine if the experiences align. Additionally, future participants should include males to ensure a well-rounded participant pool.

Another recommendation for future research is to focus on teachers' different experience levels. The teacher career journey can be split into three categories: beginning teachers, mid-career teachers, and late-career teachers (Tran & Smith, 2020). While this study ensured that all participants had at least one full year of experience teaching in Title I schools, it did not focus on what level of their teaching career each teacher was in. Future research should investigate this phenomenon among teachers at different stages of their careers. Additionally, while I made the distinct decision to focus on K-5 Title I schools, a recommendation for future research is to do a similar study focusing on a different grade level. The study could focus on middle or high school teachers. Additionally, the study could focus on upper- or lower-elementary teachers.

Conclusion

This qualitative phenomenological study delved into the experiences of 10 teachers within K-5 Title I schools across the Southern United States, aiming to uncover factors influencing teacher retention. Employing individual interviews, focus group interviews, and journal prompts, comprehensive data was collected, transcribed, and meticulously analyzed. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954) served as the foundational framework guiding this investigation. Through rigorous analysis, three central themes emerged: purpose, support, and harmony, complemented by two outlier themes: adversity and natural reasons. These findings were synthesized with existing literature and aligned with Maslow's (1954) theoretical framework, offering valuable insights into strategies to bolster teacher retention within Title I schools. This research underscored the potential for policy development and strategic initiatives aimed at fostering positive change and enhancing teacher retention in Title I schools.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 18, 2024

Jessica Cain
Christine Saba

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-1081 TEACHER RETENTION IN TITLE I SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL QUALITATIVE STUDY

Dear Jessica Cain, Christine Saba,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Appendix B

Participant Recruitment Email

Dear Potential Participant,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. The purpose of my research is to understand the elements contributing to teacher retention through the lived experiences of K-5 teachers at Title I schools, and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be K-5 teachers who have taught for at least one year at a Title I school in the Southern United States. Participants will be asked to participate in an individual one-on-one audio- and video-recorded interview (no more than 60 minutes), a focus group interview (approximately 45-60 minutes), and four journal prompts (no more than 20 minutes each). Member checking will ensure all information provided is reviewed and approved by participants before use in the research report. 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 by email at [redacted]@liberty.edu. If you meet my participant criteria, I will work with you to schedule a time for an interview.

A consent document will be provided via email if you express interest in participating in my study. 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 before our first scheduled interview.

Sincerely,

Jessica Cain Doctoral Candidate

Special Education Facilitator

[redacted]@liberty.edu

Appendix C

Consent

Title of the Project: TEACHER RETENTION IN TITLE I SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL QUALITATIVE STUDY

Principal Investigator: Jessica Cain, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a teacher in the Southern United States. You must have taught for at least one year. You must have taught for at least one year in a K-5 Title I school. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study will be to understand the elements contributing to teacher retention through the lived experiences of K-5 teachers at Title I schools.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in a virtual, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than one hour.
2. Participate in a virtual, audio-recorded focus group interview that will take no more than one hour.
3. Complete four journal prompts electronically, which will take no longer than 20 minutes each to complete.

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 providing valuable insights into the phenomenon of teacher retention in Title I schools.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted virtually, and the interviewer will be in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Efforts will be made for confidentiality in focus group interviews; however, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other focus group members may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and 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.
- Electronic data will be stored on a password-locked computer, and hardcopy data will be stored in a locked file cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, 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 Jessica Cain. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted] or [redacted]@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Christine Saba, at [redacted]@liberty.edu.

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

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, [redacted]; our phone number is [redacted], and our email address is [redacted]@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 D

Teacher Retention Study: K-5 Title I School Questionnaire

Thank you for signing consent to participate in my study, Teacher Retention in Title I Schools: A Phenomenological Qualitative Study. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to understand the elements contributing to teacher retention through the lived experiences of K-5 teachers at Title I schools in the Southern United States. The study's participants should reflect the demographics of the teachers at the schools in the study. The following is a questionnaire designed to obtain demographic and background information. Email the completed survey to Jessica Cain at [redacted]@liberty.edu. Upon completing this questionnaire, I will contact you to schedule an interview. Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study!

1. How many years have you been a teacher?
2. How many schools have you taught at?
3. How many years have you taught at a Title I school?
4. Do you currently hold state teaching licensure?
5. Please indicate your race or ethnicity.
    a. Black or African American
    b. Asian
    c. White
    d. Hispanic or Latino
    e. Not Hispanic or Latino
    f. American Indian or Alaska Native
    g. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

h. Other (please specify)

6. Please indicate your age.
    a. under 25
    b. 26-30
    c. 31-39
    d. 40-49
    e. 50-55 180
    f. 56 or older
7. What is your highest degree earned?
    a. Bachelor's
    b. Master's
    c. Educational Specialist
    d. Doctorate
    e. Other (Specify)
8. What content areas do you currently teach? Select all that apply.
    a. Mathematics
    b. Science
    c. Social Studies/History
    d. Reading/English Language Arts
    e. Physical Education
    f. Fine Arts
    g. Other (Specify)

Appendix E

Audit Trail

Action	Date
IRB Approval Received	1/18/2024
Sent email request to two potential participants	2/3/2024
First interview scheduled	2/7/24
First interview conducted	2/8/2024
Sent email request to two potential participants	2/20/2024
Second interview scheduled	2/21/2024
Second interview conducted	2/22/2024
Transcribed first interview	2/25/2024
Began to reread transcription and code data	2/25/2024
Sent email request to two potential participants	3/1/2024
Third interview scheduled	3/1/2024
Sent email request to three potential participants	3/3/2024
Continued to code data from first interview transcription	3/3/2024
Transcribed second interview	3/3/2024

Third interview conducted	3/4/2024
Fourth interview scheduled	3/4/2024
Fourth interview conducted	3/6/2024
Fifth interview scheduled	3/13/2024
Received first completed journal entries	3/14/2024
Fifth interview conducted	3/14/2024
Sent email request to two potential participants	3/15/2024
Sent email request to potential participant	3/17/2024
Began to write participant profiles	3/17/2024
Transcribed third interview	3/17/2024
Scheduled sixth interview	3/18/2024
Sixth interview conducted	3/19/2024
Received second completed journal entries	3/19/2024
Transcribed completed interviews	3/26/2024
Began to code journal entries	3/26/2024
Sent email reminder to complete journal entries to participants who had not yet completed journal entries	3/26/2024
Transcribed completed interviews	3/27/2024
Continued to write participant profiles	3/27/2024
Finished transcribing completed interviews	3/28/2024
Continued to write participant profiles	3/28/2024

Scheduled seventh interview	4/2/2024
Conducted seventh interview	4/3/2024
Coded data from one-on-one interviews one through six	4/13/2024
Began transcribing seventh interview	4/13/2024
Continued writing participant profiles	4/13/2024
Scheduled eighth interview	4/15/2024
Scheduled first focus group interview	4/16/2024
Sent email requests to potential participants	4/17/2024
Scheduled ninth interview	4/18/2024
Rescheduled eighth interview	4/18/2024
Rescheduled ninth interview	4/19/2024
Continued to transcribe seventh interview	4/19/2024
Conducted eighth interview	4/20/2024
Finished transcribing seventh interview	4/21/2024
Began transcribing eighth interview	4/21/2024
Scheduled tenth individual interview	4/22/2024
Conducted ninth interview	4/22/2024
Conducted first focus group interview	4/23/2024
Member Checking for first focus group conducted	4/23/2024
Rescheduled tenth individual interview	4/24/2024

Continued to transcribe individual interviews	4/23/2024
Conducted tenth individual interview	4/23/2024
Finished transcribing eighth and ninth interviews	5/3/2024
Transcribed tenth individual interview and first focus group interview	5/4/2024
Coded data from individual interviews 7-10	5/5/2024
Conducted second focus group interview	5/6/2024
Member Checking for second focus group conducted	5/6/2024
Conducted third focus group interview	5/8/2024
Member Checking for third focus group conducted	5/8/2024
Received completed journal responses	5/10/2024
Received completed journal responses	5/14/2024
Received completed journal responses	5/24/2024
Received completed journal responses	5/28/2024
Continued to write participant profiles	5/30/2024
Continued to write participant profiles	6/1/2024
Continued to write participant profiles	6/2/2024
Transcribed second and third focus group interviews	6/3/2024

Coded focus group interviews	6/4/2024
Received completed journal responses	6/4/2024
Continued coding focus group interviews	6/5/2024
Continued coding focus group interviews	6/6/2024
Received completed journal responses	6/7/2024
Began rereading interviews	6/7/2024
Received completed journal responses	6/8/2024
Coded journal responses	6/8/2024
Continued coding journal responses	6/9/2024
Began sorting codes into themes	6/11/2024
Continued sorting codes into themes	6/11/2024
Second member-checking email sent to participants	6/11/2024
Began writing Chapter 4 results	6/11/2024

Appendix F

Meeting Norms/Ground Rules to be read before Focus Group Interviews

Meeting Norms/Ground Rules

- Discussions will remain confidential within the focus group.
- Silence all communication devices.
- Outside of my recording for data purposes, no video or audio recording during the meeting.
- Use respectful language and actions toward one another.
- Listen and consider all points of view.
- Give attention to the person speaking (No sidebar conversations during the discussion).

Appendix G

Verbal Script: In person or on the phone

Verbal Script: In person or on the phone

Potential Participant,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand teacher retention in Title I schools better, and if you meet my participant criteria and are interested, I would like to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be a teacher with at least one year experience and at least one year experience in a Title I K-5 school. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an individual interview that will take no longer than 60 minutes, four journal prompts that will take no longer than 20 minutes each, and a focus group interview that will take no longer than 60 minutes. Participants will also participate in member-checking data, which will include participants reviewing their transcripts to ensure accuracy of their information. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

Would you like to participate?

[Yes]

Great, could I get your email address so I can send you the consent form?

[No]

I understand. Thank you for your time. [Conclude the conversation.]

A consent document will be provided via email or in-person before the individual interview, journal prompts, and focus group interviews. 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 before the time of the individual interview.

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions?

Appendix H

Open Coding

Table 25

A Life of Good Works Open Coding

Code	Individual Interviews	Focus Group Interviews	Journal Prompts
ability to teach	54	7	10
benefits	7		
calling (from God)	29	12	1
certified	11		
current position	13		
encouraged	17	20	28
enjoyment	6	7	2
experience in Title I	7		
familiarity	6	1	
great experience	13	1	2
hope	2	1	
involvement from the outside community	1		
learning (as a teacher)	31	1	10
love of job	49	12	1
manageable	2		
opportunities	15		
prepared	8	1	
previous work experience	66	1	1
purposeful professional development	47	12	2
relevance	8		
resilience	9		1
retention	17	4	
role	15	1	1
safety/stability	5		
students benefit	9		
surprised (did not expect to become a teacher)	5		1
teacher preparation	24	1	1

Table 27

Bear One Another's Burdens Open Coding

Code	Individual Interviews	Focus Group Interviews	Journal Prompts
assisted by administration	45	14	22
focused	3		
grounded	3		
helpful		6	17
leadership from administration	21	12	
leadership from fellow teachers	6	6	
official mentorship	28	5	
respect	1		4
structure	15	4	1
supplies	7		
trickled down	4		
trust	3		1
trying	9	7	6
understanding	6	5	
unofficial mentorship	20		7

Table 28

Peace and Mutual Edification Open Coding

Code	Individual Interviews	Focus Group Interviews	Journal Prompts
active Listening	3		1
climate and culture	11		
collaboration	87	11	28
communication	104	13	13
events	32	4	4
fixing things	6		
fostered relationships	28	15	
getting along	4		
interaction with a coworker	3		
positive relationships	35	4	1
positive teacher behavior	2		
positive work environment	23	12	
work through it	14		1

Appendix I

Sample Journal Entries

2/8/2024

I conducted my first interview today. I was nervous going into it, but after I started, things started flowing smoothly. I was excited to ask all my questions and hear the responses from my participants. I kept wanting to add to what they were saying and give my input, almost like a flowing conversation, but I knew that I could not do that, or I would skew my data. Instead of saying anything, I bit my tongue and asked my participant to elaborate more on what they told me. This interview has filled me with excitement going forward!

2/22/2024

I conducted my second interview today. I was happy this participant agreed to participate. I had the same struggle again of wanting to give my input and have the interview be more conversational, but I continued to keep true and not add my own input. I found telling my participant to remind me to talk to them about it later, rather than saying anything during the interview, possibly skewing the data, helpful. I was able to acknowledge their experience without tainting it with my experiences.

2/25/2024

I started transcribing my first interview today. It was not easy at all. Even though I had the generated transcription from Zoom, it was not accurate, and I had to fix a lot. My participants have Southern accents and regional dialects, which auto transcriptions don’t fully understand. I played the audio from the recorded interview on my computer and phone several times to ensure

I was transcribing accurately. I was very careful to ensure I transcribed exactly what my participant said. After I finished transcribing my first interview, I began to code it. I am so grateful to Taguette. I went line by line and assigned each line a code. I focused acutely on what the responses said and coded based on the data.

3/4/2024

I conducted my third interview today. I was nervous conducting this interview. I knew the first two participants better and was comfortable talking to them. I am glad that I chose this participant because I do not know them as well and I wanted to make sure that my participant pool is robust and not just made up of colleagues who are good friends of mine. I want to make sure the data is full of diverse participant experiences. When I did this interview, I noticed the participant did not expand much in their responses. I found myself asking them to explain further a few times. That helped me to have them tell the full experience.

3/6/2024

I conducted my fourth interview today. I learned a lot about this participant that I did not know. I also learned that we possibly crossed paths a few times in the past unknowingly. She and I had worked in a neighboring school district in the past. When I interviewed her, her responses were very professional and quick. I leaned on my experience with the previous interview and asked her to explain some of her responses more. After doing that, I was able to get a clearer response. I mentioned that she and I had worked in a neighboring school district, and she opened up about her experiences in her previous school. Having the commonality seemed to make her more comfortable with disclosing those experiences.

I am beginning to notice commonalities among the interview responses. I know that I need to sit down and transcribe all of the interviews I have thus far and code them. After I transcribed the first interview, I realized I will need to dedicate a lot of uninterrupted time to transcribing.