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A Qualitative Study of African American Middle School Students' Perception of Low Student-Teacher Racial Match on Their Educational Experience

Tai Lynn Swift

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A Qualitative Study of African American Middle School Students' Perception of Low
Student-Teacher Racial Match on Their Educational Experience

by
Tai Swift

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
and School of Criminal Justice in Partial
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Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Tai Swift under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Mary Clisbee, EdD
Committee Chair

Gloria Kieley, EdD
Committee Member

Kimberly Durham, PsyD
Dean

Statement of Original Work

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Tai Swift
Name

July 25, 2021
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Abstract

A Phenomenological Study of African American Middle School Students' Perception of the Impact of a Low African American Teacher Ratio on Their Educational Experience. Tai Swift, 2021: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: African American, students, educators, and school

The problem that will be explored within this research is that many African American students lack the opportunity to be taught by African American teachers. Research shows that students taught by teachers with whom they identify as having similar or the same experiences may result in meaningful learning for the student. Given, African American teachers represent only 18% of all teachers, there is not an abundance of African American teachers within the school system to serve as role models for African American students.

The literature review explored included critical race theory and highlighted how race in education does not yield to African Americans. Additionally, the literature addressed the effect that African American teachers may have on African American students and their identification and understanding of the challenges they face. African American teachers are being trained to, specifically, address the needs of African American students given their personal experiences with the challenges faced.

This research is grounded in Dewey's 1938 theory of experience and education. This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research approach. The researcher interviewed five male and five female students at the research site regarding their perception of African American teachers. The data was analyzed utilizing an interpretative phenomenological analysis.

The data collected revealed the central themes of relatability and teaching style. The students participating in the survey believed they relate to African American teachers more than non-African American teachers. They believed African American teachers understood them better. The relatability of African American teachers and student underscored the central themes teaching style. The students reported that African American teachers use teaching styles and methodologies that they can relate to and understand. The students stated the African American teachers exhaust the teaching lesson to ensure they are successful opposed to non-African American teachers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study was that many African American students lack the opportunity to be taught by African American teachers. This lack of teacher diversity contributes to the achievement gap between African American students and their Caucasian classmates (Orfield, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2016). This issue also serves as a problem for African American students because students who are taught by teachers of the same background have similar or the same experiences, and therefore, may serve as role models and may be better able to understand and meet the specific learning needs of their students (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015). African American teachers can meaningfully impact African American students through academics and social success because of the unique insight into the students' specific situations and needs (Kumar et al., 2018). Research has found that African American students having an African American teacher may be core to their academic success (Pitre, 2014). Pitre found that African American teachers understand the environmental issues that affect an African American students' progress and learning.

Teachers of color are underrepresented in the field of education. The demographics of the teacher workforce are not in line with the demographics of the students. African American teachers represent only 18% of the teaching profession although African American students account for more than 40% of the school-age population (Boser, 2014). There are not enough African American teachers to meet the specific needs of African American students.

At the site where the study took place, 22% of the teachers are African American teachers and 78% of the teachers are Caucasian. The student population is 1% Asian, 21% Hispanic, 26% African American, 48% white, and 4% multi-racial. Students at the research site have only one African American teacher, if that, during their seven-period school day. Few students may have two African American teachers throughout the day. Of the 11 African American teachers, six are general education teachers and five are exceptional student education (ESE) teachers that go into the classrooms for support or for co-teaching.

Phenomenon of Interest

The phenomenon of interest lies in understanding the effects of racial matching of teachers and students and the effects this may have on their education and educational experiences. The phenomenon also lies in the perceptions and experiences of African American students who are racially matched in education. As a result of this research, students will be able to detail their experiences with African American teachers as well as non-African American teachers. The interest in this research will be the students' experiences of being racially matched to African American teachers.

Background and Justification

Brown. v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) was a trigger of the decline of African American teachers (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014). The ruling to integrate schools did not address what would happen to African American teachers once integration was implemented. The undesirable impact of *Brown* on education was unsuspected. Before *Brown*, opportunities for occupations outside of education were restricted and limited for African Americans, which maintained many capable African Americans in the field. As a

result, there was an abundance of all-African American schools that afforded African American students a superior education as well as taught them “the ways of their world” by their African American elders. The ruling in *Brown* opened more doors for different occupations for African Americans, which led to the decline of African American educators (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014).

African American students are not always afforded the same educational experiences as their Caucasian counterparts (Vega et al., 2015). Teachers hold higher expectations of Asian American and Caucasian students when compared to African American and Latino students (Vega et al., 2015). Teachers of the same background as their students may serve as role models and may be better able to meet the specific learning needs of their students. African American teachers can meaningfully impact the academic and social success of African American students because they better understand the students’ situations and needs. African American teachers are committed to and have a deeper understanding of African American students because they understand the world in a similar fashion and have some of the same experiences (Egalite & Kisidia, 2017). Caucasian teachers occasionally have difficulty trying to identify with students who do not share some of the same background experiences (Miller & Endo, 2005). The different experiences between the Caucasian teacher and African American students may promote negativity or unnecessary issues (Dickar, 2008). Having a diverse group of teachers enriches the learning experiences of all students (Miller & Endo, 2005). When taught by educators from diverse backgrounds, all students benefit because it helps prepare them for success in a diverse world and has the capability to lessen stereotypes. Understanding

the views of students may better assist teachers with meeting the unique, individual needs of African American students.

Ledesma and Calderón (2015) highlighted the disparities in the education of white students versus their minority counterparts. These authors contended that the differences not only result in the number of African American teachers that African American students are exposed to but the discipline the minority students receive. Ledesma and Calderón (2015) stance is mirrored at the research site. At the school where the proposed study took place, there is a diverse group of students. The school's demographic make-up includes 42% Caucasian, 1.7% Asian, 24.7 African American, 21.8% Hispanic, and 4% Multiple Races. Although the school has mostly Caucasian students, African American students receive most of the discipline referrals. According to the County Schools Quarterly Discipline Report (2017), for three grading periods in the 2016-2017 school year, African American students received 58% (first grading period), 52% (second grading period), and 49% (third grading period) of the discipline referrals in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts who received 24% (first grading period), 25% (second grading period), and 30% (third grading period) of the discipline referrals.

The research site is 1 of 13 middle schools in the county and serves approximately 675 students; 326 are male and 349 are female. The enrollment by race/ethnicity is as follows: two American Indian/Alaskan, five Asian/Pacific Islander, 179 African American, 143 Hispanic, 321 Caucasian, and 25 considered two or more races. The site is a Title 1 school; 75% of the students are eligible for the free and reduced lunch program (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). African Americans are considered a minority at this mid-sized, suburban school. African American students in seventh and

eighth grade participated in this study with parental permission. There is a small number of students who are considered homeless. Based on the school's faculty and staff roster, there are approximately 34 Caucasian teachers, 11 African American teachers (including the researcher), and two Hispanic teachers. The community surrounding the research site faces some issues and challenges. The population of the surrounding community is 2,366; the poverty rate is 37.4%, and the median income is \$21,633 (City of Deland, 2014). Due to this, a Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) was formed that implements community redevelopment activities to change and revitalize the neighborhood.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

While the research literature discusses the lack of African American teachers, it does not detail the perspectives of African American students on how this affects their quality of education (Schenke et al., 2017). In addition, the research is focused on the lack of African American male teachers (2%); however, there is also a lack of African American female teachers (7%) with Caucasian women representing 76% of all teachers, showing there is a lack of African American teachers in the public school system, although since 2016, the racial breakdown of students in the United States is 48% White, 26% Hispanic, and 15% Black students (Hawkins, 2015).

Audience

The findings of this study would be of interest to urban schools, as urban school districts are being urged to put more effort into ensuring that teachers reflect the racial and ethnic backgrounds of their students (Harrington, 2015). Furthermore, school districts with high minority student populations would benefit from this study.

Definition of Terms

For this applied dissertation, the following terms are defined:

African Americans. This term refers to an ethnic group composed mainly of people of African ancestry; some have non-African American ancestors as well. Essentially, the descendants of slaves, African Americans were forcefully brought from their African homelands to work in the New World. African Americans had severely limited rights and were long denied their rightful share in the economic, social, and political progress of the United States (Lynch, n.d.).

Scarcity is defined as an insufficiency or shortness of supply (Dictionary.com, n.d.).

Racial Matching. This term refers to students whose teachers are racially matched to their ethnicity or culture (Birdsall, Gerhsenson, & Zuniga, 2018).

Culturally Responsive Teaching. This term refers to a teaching strategy that understands the importance of the student's cultural reference being included in all aspects of the students' educational learning (White, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the experiences of African American students who have had a limited student-teacher racial match in their educational program. This study will explore the perceptions of five male and five female African American students regarding their experience with an African American teacher. This study is designed to address the experiences of students and to provide educators with an awareness of how students perceive their educational experiences. This study is essential and necessary to obtain the perceptions of African Americans to evaluate the

impact on African American students. Investigating the views and perception of students can help students in providing their lived experiences and also contributing meaningfully to improving their schools and the educational system (Soumah & Hoover, 2013).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter consists of a review of literature regarding African American students who have had a limited student-teacher racial match in their educational program. The literature in this review was derived from scholarly research-based articles including academic databases and journals including ebscohost, Black Scholars, the Journal of Teacher Education, Education Psychology, dissertations, and thesis reviews. This review of literature will commence with a discussion of the theoretical framework used for this study is Dewey's theory of experience and education. Key words that were used to conduct the literature review included race theory, African American teachers, African American students, racial matching, and African American communities. This literature review will conclude with a summary of the literature review findings and the research questions that will guide the study. The literature review topics will include theoretical perspective, critical race theory, racial matching, effects of the Brown v Board of Education decision, dropout rates of African American Students, the success of African American teachers with African American students, black males, and inequitable schooling.

Theoretical Perspective

This research study will be grounded in Dewey's 1938 theory of experience and education. John Dewey's work is founded upon his lifelong beliefs and recommendations regarding students and their critical and appropriate role in their own educational experience. Supporters regard him as a major influencer and savior of American education. Dewey's perspective was that education does not discredit experience nor

unequivocally endorse education but rather identifies the strengths and weaknesses and presents a revised perspective of education (Eisner, 2017).

Dewey had concerns that the lives and wellbeing of students were oftentimes sacrificed for futuristic purposes outside of education that were beyond the scope of the present interests and purposes of students. His definition of education insisted on the premise that an experience is educative only if it results in growth or interest participating in a new experience (Noddings, 2018), which makes the exploration of racial matching and interest in education appropriate for this study.

Dewey believed that for an experience to be educative, it must be built on or relate to a previous experience. Teachers must start not only where the students are but also must have the foresight to know where these experiences will lead. Consideration into the prior experiences of students must be known for the design of new learning techniques in the acquisition of new information and must also observe students' current experiences to effectively plan future engagements motivated to propel the learning experience. This educational style builds on what the child learns in the home and extends into school practices. Linkages between school learning and home-culture can be beneficial for students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Hollins, 2015).

Therefore, subject matter must be prepared and administered in accordance with students' current level of knowledge and future needs. Continuity in the educative experience is a necessity along with current application for students in the here and now. Engagement between students and their subject matter being studied promotes interest in the material and confidence in their abilities (Clandinin, 2016). The experience of theory and education are experiences that are incorporated into one's learning process that

consistently emphasize the necessity of student engagement and activity. This perspective on learning emphasizes the central role that experience plays in the learning process and its transformation into higher-order purposeful actions. The complex intellectual operations include observation of surrounding environment and conditions, knowledge referencing a similar situation in the past for recollection, and judgment on the observation and its significance. The formation of purpose differs from an original impulse and feeling through the interpretation and translation into a plan and course of action reliant upon foresight. The skill of procuring the delay of immediate action until the intervention of observation and judgment enables higher-order method of actions (Kolb, 2014).

Dewey's 1938 theory relates to this study because the researcher will be exploring the race matching experiences of students in education. This includes the experiences of students who had African American as well as teachers of other races. The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the experiences of African American students who have had a limited student-teacher racial match in their educational program. By utilizing Dewey's theory, readers will be able to understand the role of an African American teacher in the education of an African American student. These experiences may then be utilized to assist in developing strategies and decisions regarding African American teachers and their role with African American students.

Critical Race Theory

Early origins of the critical race theory (CRT) commenced during the 1970's, as a multitude of scholars, lawyers, and activists around the country concluded that the civil rights era advances of the 1960's had halted and, in many ways, were digressing. Early

writers including Richard Delgado, Derrick Bell, and Alan Freeman strategized new theories to combat the infiltration of subliminal forms of racism gaining momentum. These scholars believed that because some forms of racism were not blatant, did not mean it was not happening. These scholars believed there was hidden racism, which was just as dangerous as any other forms.

The application of critical race theory in education examines how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate ethnic and racial groups by challenging the dominant discourse on race and racism. Using critical race theory as a framework, it illustrates an empirical analysis of how race and gender influence educational experiences (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015).

Due to the incorporation of race and gender, the critical race theory is applicable to the educational measures being assessed. Critical race theory provides a beneficial lens for dissecting the skewed racial representation among the teaching population and providing insight as to how it might be addressed. Regarding the teaching force, the premise is that the skewed racial representation is not merely accidental but a by-product of racist systems (Crenshaw et al., 2018).

The application of CRT in this analysis is based on four tenets as cited by Sleeter, LaVonne, and Kumashiro (2014). First, interest convergence addresses the stance that school desegregation and affirmative action policies designed to advance the interests of minorities benefited the majority. The premise that the majority advances interests of minorities if they converge with and benefit the majority's interest is useful in examining the limited attempts in the diversification of the teaching force. By making small changes in teacher education programs, (i.e., admitting a few prospective African American

teachers) Caucasian faculty can see the benefits of change to other Caucasians (i.e., believing Caucasian students will benefit from learning with the addition of African American peers to the classroom) (Sleeter, La Vonne, & Kumashiro, 2014).

The second tenet of CRT is based on claims of colorblindness, meritocracy, and neutrality in policies and practices constructed around the dominant ideology. The federal No Child Left Behind law or state teacher certification requirements are presented to all individuals equally regardless of demographic identities, impartial and neutral. While not necessarily effectively measuring good teaching, teacher certification tests disproportionately fail prospective African American teachers (Gist, 2014). Teacher education programs that require full-time enrollment by those who do not need to maintain jobs, enable certification to be more accessible to middle-class Caucasians than to African Americans. Metropolitan school districts import Caucasian teachers who already possess certification rather than preparing local community residents as teachers, making teaching as a profession more accessible to Caucasians rather than African Americans (Sleeter, La Vonne, & Kumashiro, 2014).

Thirdly, experiential knowledge is articulated through counter-stories by African Americans. Theorists of CRT postulate that individuals who understand racism best are usually victimized by it rather than its perpetrators due to dominant ideologies based on Caucasian worldviews that can negate or mask racism. Counter stories such as interviews, biographies, and stories can directly name race and racism through experiential knowledge. These modalities not only address the intricacies of racism, but usually provide insight into the development of solutions (Sleeter, La Vonne, & Kumashiro, 2014). For example, Egalite and Kisidia (2017) used counter-stories in

application to teacher education by deconstructing teacher education myths such as which universities produce the most prospective candidates for teaching (Schenke et al., 2017).

Last, the fourth tenet of CRT is the resolution and commitment to social justice equally amongst all individuals. While some theorists perceive racism as intractable, most desire that deep analyses coupled with experiential knowledge through counter-stories pertaining to those who have worked against racism, will lead to its disintegration (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). The commitment and hope devoted to working towards social justice will perpetuate equality among the education force (Sleeter, La Vonne, & Kumashiro, 2014).

The current state of CRT in education was provided by Dixson's, "Where Are We? Critical Race Theory in Education 20 Years Later" (2018). Six boundaries for CRT and education were identified including: 1) Racial inequity demonstrated in education is the logical product of an educational system of achievement founded upon competition; 2) In education, CRT investigates the role of educational practices and education policy in the development of racial inequity and the continual perpetuation of normative Caucasianness; 3) The dominant narrative regarding the inherent inferiority in African American individuals and the normative superiority of Caucasian individuals is rejected by CRT in education; 4) Ahistoricism is rejected with historical linkages examined between contemporary educational inequity and patterns of racial oppression historically evident; 5) Participates in intersectional analyses that recognizes race mediation techniques and interacts with other identity markers (i.e., sexuality, class, gender, etc.); and 6) In education, CRT advocates for meaningful outcomes in addressing racial inequity (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018). Dixson advises these recommendations

for the critical race scholarship in education on advantageous ways to move forward into the future to positively associate and impact schools and communities for African American students (Donnor, Anderson, & Dixson, 2017).

Racial Matching

Birdsall, Gerhsenson, and Zuniga (2018) asserted that racial matching has a wide range impact on students and teachers. There are some research studies that examine racial matching individually, while others examine the relationship of racial matching based on the percentage of matching and the outcomes of the student (Birdsall, Gerhsenson, and Zuniga, 2018; Egalite and Kisida, 2017; Jang and Lee, 2016). Egalite and Kisida (2017) believed that although some researchers found a positive impact of racial matching on student achievement, the research conducted has not provided specific mechanisms explaining why that effect exists. Jang and Lee (2016) argued that significant racial achievement gaps exist as evidence of black students' performance compared to their white peers.

Those concerned with the American educational system have had a long history of being concerned about the unequal educational opportunities provided to students from different cultural backgrounds. Researchers believe the achievement gap is due to racial inequality (Jang & Lee, 2016). Schools that have a higher population of low income and minority students generally employ teachers with lower qualifications compared to schools with lower areas of these marginalized groups (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Black students who are matched to Black teachers will face less discipline compared to Black students who are matched to White teachers (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Moreover, law makers can address these challenges by ensuring there are more culturally diverse and

competent teachers that identify with all students in the school system (Jang & Lee, 2016; Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Egalite and Kisida (2017) contend that minority teachers produce better academic results for minority students.

In evaluating the effects of the quality of education, a student's performance has a connection to racial identity (Jang & Lee, 2016). The academic expectations held by teachers for their students are motivated by the background similarities between that of students and teachers (Egalite & Kisida, 2017). Both Black and White children made significant achievement gains when taught by teachers of the same race (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). It should be noted that racial matching because of gender among teachers and students is less conclusive (Egalite & Kisida, 2017). Egalite and Kisida (2017) stated that a student's exposure to what they perceive as a successful mentor can increase the cultural value that students' attributes to academic success. When students have not been exposed to racial matching, they will be categorized as having disabilities, and placed in special education programs as opposed to regular education classes (Jang & Lee, 2016).

Studies that examined the effects of racial matching have limitations (Jang & Lee, 2016). Jang and Lee (2016) did highlight that their findings have mixed results. Historical researchers state there is little relationship between racial matching of teachers and student achievement (Jang & Lee, 2016). Comparatively, later scholars concluded there is some evidence that racial matching between teachers and students, especially minority teachers and students has a positive effect on student achievement (Jang & Lee, 2016). Another limitation includes not taking mixed races into account (Jang & Lee, 2016). With the increased self-identification of multiple races, when asked to identify themselves, students are forced to list only one race.

Effects of the *Brown v Board of Education* Decision

The U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* meant that Southern states were prohibited from segregating schools by race (Rothstein, 2014). The mission of undoing the segregation within the school system was unsuccessful, as this is witnessed in American public education today (Rothstein, 2014). Although the inequalities that still exist are much smaller than they were, federal requirements and programs in communities to pursue residential integration have been weak and unenforced (Rothstein, 2014). *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* impacted the number of African Americans serving in the field of education, which has also had impacts on the African American students (Sleeter, La Vonne, & Kumashiro, 2014). From 1954 through 1965, approximately 38,000 African American teachers and administrators lost their positions across 17 states (Sleeter, La Vonne, & Kumashiro, 2014). As nearly a third of the African American teaching force was laid off, the quality of African American education sparked a significant change. African American teachers are often seen as surrogate parent figures, role models, etc. for African American students (Ravitch, 2016). While providing the educational support and guidance within the school community, African American teachers also acted as advocates for the cultural, social, emotional, academic, and moral development of their students (Ravitch, 2016).

After *Brown*, African American teachers were not treated well, which resulted in a disconnection and imbalance in the African American community, and, consequently, African American students suffered as a result. The ramifications of *Brown* were arguably more detrimental than the initial problem of desegregation. While it set in

motion a broad-based policy agenda of equality, the larger system of racial oppression and lack of equal opportunities continued (López & Burciaga, 2014).

In efforts to assess the trends in multiracial segregation within the last two decades, Reardon et al. (2000), Stroub and Richards (2013), and Fiel (2013) assessed racial distribution among schools. All three studies reported findings that segregation between Caucasians and non-Caucasians remained stable or slightly increased during the 1990s, whereas, during this same time segregation among minority groups declined (Reardon & Owens, 2014). Contrastingly, segregation between Caucasians and minorities experienced a moderate decline, from 1998 to 2009. During this time, segregation among minority groups also demonstrated a decline, resulting in a 10% decrease in multiracial segregation in 2009 from 1993 (Stroub & Richards, 2013).

The racial composition of area schools was significantly impacted and shaped by demographic shifts. Notably, Caucasians moved from the city to the suburbs (Caucasian flight), creating segregated metropolitan areas across the country. In attempts to promote desegregation, busing and magnet schools were devised to contribute to racial integration programs in suburban school districts. The program, titled Chapter 220, went into effect in the school year 1976-1977. This program, which transpired in many metropolitan areas including Milwaukee, allowed minority students to be transferred to certain suburban school districts. Additionally, Caucasian suburban students were transferred to Milwaukee Public Schools. While the program included free transportation for families, it didn't last long. As years went by, the busing budget was reduced, and the district tried neighborhood schools in attempts to implement an education reform concept (Richards & Mulvany, 2014).

While schools have been regarded as the Great Equalizer in American society, there are factors other than race that mitigated African American students' educational equal opportunity around this time. For example, socio-economic factors can have an impact on African American families and communities. Approximately 64% of African American students are residing in single-parent households. Additionally, there are a significant number of single-race African American grandparents living with their own grandchildren under 18 years old. Nearly half of the grandparents in these households are also serving as guardians and primary caregivers. Teachers and schools are oftentimes frustrated by the economic conditions and family structures of their students, although they do not have the power to influence changes in these factors. However, change in the family and community in African American youth can lead to school success (Edwards, McMillon, & Turner, 2015).

Although African American students were supposed to benefit from the *Brown* ruling, they now represent the most underachieving group of students in U.S. schools. Statistics claim that 86% of African American students are reading below grade level, and by fourth grade, only 14% of students read at grade level or above the proficient level. With 14% reading proficiency at fourth grade in African American students, reading proficiency in Caucasians is 43%, 46% of Asians, 18% of Native Americans, and 17% of Latinos. By eighth grade, 13% of African American students read at grade level or higher in comparison with Caucasians (40%), Asians (41%), Latinos (15%), and Native Americans (18%). These staggering statistics illuminate the claims of education disparities (Edwards, McMillon, & Turner, 2015).

Drop Out Rates of African American Students

An additional educational disparity among African American students contributes to a higher high school dropout rate. An article published in California reported that 42% of African American students dropped out of high schools in California, a higher percentage in comparison with Native Americans (31%), Latinos (30%), Pacific Islanders (28%), Caucasians (15%), or Asian Americans (10%). African American students remaining in school can experience tremendous difficulties, and after graduation, they realize that they have not obtained the knowledge and skills in preparation for a successful professional life. While the statistics are alarming, African American students who graduate from high school and enroll in college desire to be successful learners and yearn for more opportunities. Some educators attribute the low-achievement of African American students to low-socioeconomic backgrounds. However, if afforded the opportunities received by middle- and upper-class students, the achievement of African American students may increase (Ravitch, 2016).

Some African American students who decide to enter academic studies lack the proper college preparation and high school guidance in navigating through the application and admission process. While some prospective candidates would serve as excellent teachers, gatekeeper tests such as the SAT and ACT function as roadblocks disproportionately wiping out many prospective teachers. These basic skills tests that determine whether a candidate can enter a teaching preparation program have been considered as culturally biased. At the university level, some African American students are deterred from the completion of their teaching degree by the overwhelming racial

disparity within the teaching population, as well as the lack of teacher education programs available to them (Sleeter, La Vonne, & Kumashiro, 2014).

There is a need for more African American teachers in education as this will benefit African American students (Pitre, 2014). The education policy proposed by President Obama was designed to provide jobs more adequately for teachers (Pitre, 2014). Offering higher pay for expert teachers acting as mentors and coaches, the Obama-Biden education plan provided for more incentives and opportunities for teachers to expand their skill set and knowledge base. The plan also included more pay and funding for highly qualified teachers to serve underprivileged schools. While the plan adequately addressed more opportunities and training for teachers, it did not mention preparing teachers culturally. Developing a population of teachers with deep, authentic cultural awareness and understanding of minority groups is vital in the education community (Edwards, McMillon, & Turner, 2015).

The structure of the earlier African American schools for African American students still needs to be investigated to determine how to best meet the needs of the African American students so that all of them can succeed. Students who experienced both racial and poverty segregation experienced double segregation and additional educational challenges. To ensure that education works for all students, interventions and programs need to be developed that address some of the issues in public schools such as equal academic opportunities. With more focus on federal government involvement, prioritizing diversity in grant competitions, and an increase in budget proposals, the focus to create school environments where the talent of all students is developed would produce

a society of mutual respect and integration (Orfield, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2016).

The Success of African American Teachers With African American Students

There is a significant body of literature that contests that a match between the race/ethnicity of teachers and students contributes to more successful student outcomes, particularly regarding significant at-risk youth populations and high-poverty environments (Goldhaber, Theobald, & Tien, 2015). A racial/ethnic match between teacher and student, referred to as teacher “role models,” has been demonstrated to have positive educational benefits for minority students (Goldhaber, Theobald, & Tien, 2015).

Three theoretical rationales are commonly cited for the explanation of teacher role model implementation. First, minority students living and attending schools in disadvantaged areas respond well when seeing adult role models in an authoritative position. Second, there is evidence supporting the claim that minority teachers maintain higher expectations for minority students than majority teachers. This can greatly impact student outcomes because minority students, especially African American students, demonstrate more sensitivity to teacher expectations than middle-class Caucasian students. Lastly, important cultural differences regarding interpretation of students’ behavior and instructional methods may exist between teachers of different backgrounds and their students. These factors can have long-term consequences relating to academic achievement and student success. For example, findings report that African American students are more likely to experience disciplinary action than other students, even with the consideration pertaining to the nature of the misconduct. Teacher interpretation of student behavior can lead to disparities in disciplinary actions, which can be informed by

negative stereotypes perpetuating poor performance (Goldhaber, Theobald, & Tien, 2015).

The relationship between an African American teacher and an African American student is beneficial. Egalite and Kisidia (2017), stated that students of color with low achieving performance demonstrated the most beneficial effects from relationships with teachers of color (Schenke et al., 2017). The academic success of African American students is promoted by the relationship that teachers establish with their students. Teachers who create positive relationships with their students influence successful teaching by facilitating an open and constructive learning environment (Pitre, 2014).

Egalite and Kisidia (2017) contended that African American perspectives on the experiences, impact, and success of African American teachers with African American students in public schools is necessary. Egalite and Kisidia (2017) stressed the importance of having African American teachers and an increase of African American teachers in education. They also believed that although it is important to recruit teachers of color, it is equally important for teacher education programs to prepare all teachers in the meantime.

Egalite and Kisidia (2017) also believed that all the attention cannot be focused on recruiting African American teachers, a refocus needs to be on the education of teachers, in general. African American teachers are role models for their students, but there are roadblocks and barriers that prevent African American teachers from entering the educational field. Factors that have skewed the racial representation in the teaching population include relatively low salaries, negative public perceptions regarding teaching as a profession, as well as the increase in alternative job prospects. These factors serve

not only as deterrents for teaching professionals currently in the field of education, but also influence African American university students to select or consider alternative careers (Sleeter, La Vonne, & Kumashiro, 2014).

Louque, Greer, and Balogun (2017) believed that a fundamental reason to increase the number of African American teachers is the cultural connections between African American teachers and their African American students. Louque, Greer, and Balogun (2017) continued by stating that African American teachers' understanding of what it means to be African American in America equips them to connect with their students. Teachers from any ethnic background can effectively teach African American students; however, there are important features of successful African American teachers of African American students that can be useful to teachers of any ethnic background (Egalite & Kisidia, 2017). These features should be used when thinking about preparing teachers. The characteristics, philosophies, and insights of African American teachers should be shared to improve the experiences and impact of all teachers with African American students (Egalite & Kisidia, 2017).

White (2009) stated that there are three most culturally responsive strategies utilized by highly skilled and qualified African American teachers with predominantly African American students: culturally communicative, holistic, and skill building. The teachers who generated the best results with African American students demonstrate cultural relevance and genuine sincerity and respect for their students. These teachers also maintained high expectations for all learning within the classroom. Caucasian studies also advocated the inclusion of techniques utilized by teachers in their lesson plans that

allow for African American students to use their language, communication, and discussion skills (White, 2009).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

In the United States, the teaching force is predominantly Caucasian accounting for 83% of the teaching population (Sleeter et al., 2014). However, 45% of the nation's K-12 students are culturally and linguistically diverse (Sleeter et al.). This contrasting racial representation signifies that most public-school teachers come from significantly different cultures than of their student population. To address the racial gap within the education community between the teaching and student populations, all teachers should be prepared with multiple strategies to work with diverse students (Sleeter et al.).

A strong emphasis has been placed on student perceptions and beliefs in relation to the academic accomplishment of African American students (Webb & Thomas, 2015). Findings suggest that students who feel a sense of belonging in the school community demonstrate a significant academic improvement (Webb & Thomas, 2015). The students who felt a stronger sense of connectivity within the academic community may display characteristics associated with higher self-esteem and demonstrate more positive educational experiences in the classroom. In environments where the differences of African American students were respected and appreciated, the feeling of student acceptance was cultivated. When students feel more accepted within the school community, they are also more involved in school activities, are more likely to report feelings of belonging, and demonstrate stronger engagement in classroom practices (Webb & Thomas, 2015).

Individuals from diverse disciplinary backgrounds such as sociology, anthropology, sociolinguistics, psychology, and teacher education collectively participated in the culmination of knowledge regarding the components of developing this teaching approach. Five essential elements were identified of culturally responsive teaching including: establishing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including culturally and ethnically relatable content integrated in the curriculum, demonstrating supportive and building learning environments, communicating with ethnically diverse student populations, and responding with the appropriate delivery of instruction considering ethnic diversity (Kumar, Zusho, & Blondie, 2018).

Culturally responsive teaching is referred to as the conduit for teaching ethnically diverse students through cultural characteristics, perspectives, and experiences. This teaching theory is based on the premise that when academic knowledge and skills are incorporated within the frames of reference and life experiences of students, they have higher interest appeal, are more personally meaningful, and demonstrate a more thorough and effortless learning. As a result, teaching ethnically diverse students through their own cultural and experiential filters will perpetuate academic achievement (Larson et al., 2018). Three efforts to improve the preparation of teachers for African American students include: The African American Independent School movement, proactive attempts in preparing teachers for cross-cultural communication, and lastly, several courses and programs demonstrating positive results with teachers of culturally diverse students (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015).

The Institute for Independent Education (IIE) and the Council for Independent African American Institutions (CIBI) both report that outside of the public-school

community, there are schools and programs that successfully meet the needs of African American students (i.e., Chicago's Westside Preparatory School). Reports suggest that even in economically compromised communities, African American students in Catholic schools outperform their peers in public schools. Although, arguments can be made that independent schools already serve a population of students with higher motivation to achieve than public schools expect. Interestingly, many independent and religious schools do not require the same level of professional preparation that is required for public school certifications. This suggests that factors other than conventional teaching preparation are necessary for teachers successfully working with African American students (Banks, 2015).

Effective cross-cultural communication is pivotal in preparing teachers working with African American students. As communication serves as the vehicle for the meeting of ideas and community interaction, communication within the classroom is critical to learning. Determining what ethnically diverse students can know and do and what they do know and can do is an indicator of how well teachers can communicate with them. Student expression of intellectual thoughts or ideas is expressed in forms strongly influenced by cultural socialization and experience. To effectively communicate and teach students, teachers must be able to decipher these codes for effective exchange of thoughts and ideas. Knowledge about ethnic communication linguistic structures as well as cultural nuances, contextual factors, delivery, vocabulary usage, logic and rhythm, gestures, intonation, non-verbal movements, and discourse features prepare a culturally responsive teacher to better accommodate students (Powell & Powell, 2015).

Other communication styles should be integrated in the preparation for and practice of culturally responsive teaching. In mainstream culture and schooling, a passive-receptive form of communication predominates while many African Americans use an active-participatory style of communication. Mainstream schooling communication is didactic, with the role of the speaker being active and the role of the listener being passive. While teachers talk, students are expected to intently listen quietly and only speak when granted permission. Student participation is typically solicited by teachers' asking convergent questions requiring factual responses (Coady, Harper, & De Jong, 2016).

Contrastingly, African American communicative styles are more participatory, active, dialectic, and multi-modal (Price & Nelson, 2018). Listeners are expected to engage with speakers with feedback, commentary, or prompts. Speaker and listener roles are more fluid and interchangeable. This interactive style of communication among African Americans is referred to as "call-response". This communal communication style can prove problematic within the classroom for students and teachers unfamiliar or untrained in classroom cultural diversity. Uninformed teachers regard them as distracting, inappropriate, or rude and accordingly act to extinguish the behavior. Students who are prohibited from using this form of communication may be intellectually silenced. Denying the use of their natural ways of talking can diminish their thinking, academic efforts, and intellectual engagement. Therefore, it is a critical element that teachers be culturally trained and educated in classroom practices of a diverse student population (Price & Nelson).

Additionally, the actual delivery of instruction to African American students is necessary in the preparation for culturally responsive teaching. Any form of teaching is deeply embedded with culture, requiring a multiculturalized instructional technique to the learning styles of African American students. For example, a communication style referred to as topic-chaining is very conducive with a storytelling teaching style. Communal cultural systems demonstrate effective learning in peer coaching and cooperative group learning arrangements. Music, novelty, motion and movement, frequent variability in projects and formats, and dramatic effects in teaching improve African American academic performance and success (Brophy, Alleman, & Halvorsen, 2016).

African Americans are not always seen as having a distinctive culture but are treated as though they are corruptions of Caucasian culture (Nieto, 2015). In schools, literacy ability is typically defined as speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills. These literacy skills represent the mainstream learning endorsed by schools. It is argued that despite this view of literacy being extremely valued within the school system, it is also narrow and defines individuals with differing forms of cultural experiences, practices, and literacies as “nonliterate”. For example, literate practices of Caucasian middle-class families such as going to the library or reading bedtime stories may not be practices within African American families. Some African Americans, for example, may not practice taking their children to the library because as children, they themselves were not introduced to the practice. Consequently, because they do not have the same traditional literate practices that are esteemed in school, in many schools, African

American students and families are perceived as “at-risk” or “disadvantaged” (Edwards, McMillon, & Turner, 2015).

In classic research identifying nine domains of literacy: daily living, school related activities such as homework, religion, entertainment, general information, literacy skills, work, interpersonal communication, and story time, incorporate many literacy practices that are part of American life. Reading recipes and cooking, paying bills, reading the newspaper, and working on the computer are all literacy practices demonstrated daily (Nieto, 2015).

Historically, indigenous peoples and people of African descent were not thought to be educable and were not included in the mainstream educational discourse. African American students were successful in schools that exhibited community access and involvement, trust between teachers and parents, and concern and care for students. Effective teaching of African American students involves recognition and attention to the ways that race and racism construct and constrict peoples’ lives (Ladson-Billings, 2014; & Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

It is important that teachers understand the specific and unique qualities of the African American cultural experience. The expectation for educating African Americans was low due to the ideology of White supremacy, which argued that African Americans were genetically inferior. The performance of African Americans in schools replicates the historically low expectation of success for African Americans. A more systematic, comprehensive approach is needed to prepare preservice students to meet the needs of diverse learners. This approach could utilize autobiography, restructured field

experiences, situated pedagogies, and returning to the classroom of experts (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Teacher educators need to assist prospective teachers with recognizing the ways in which race and racism structure the everyday experience of all Americans as well as how the two negatively impact African American students and their ability to successfully negotiate schools and classrooms. Education's goal is for all citizens to participate in the formation of the nation and its ideals; however, if a significant portion of society is excluded from high-quality education, these ideals can never be fully realized. The possession of a high school diploma does not guarantee success, but not having one spells certain economic and social failure (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Appropriate pre-service experiences must be utilized to properly prepare teachers.

When prompted for recommendations to parents and family members in assisting their children to pursue academic success despite numerous environmental obstacles, African American students strongly encouraged the use of non-traditional methods of parental involvement that facilitate academic success. Particularly, participants mentioned informal practices and activities such as nurturing; communicating with their children about school; instilling and cultivating cultural values; and sending them to school adequately rested, fed, clean, and ready to engage in learning experiences. Focus group participants additionally recognized the importance of natural support systems in the lives of African American students. Natural support refers to the inherent resources in the students' family, school, and community environment that can serve as supportive conduits for their academic success (Slaten, 2016).

Little information has been published on African American students' perceptions of what tools and resources they need to succeed academically despite the exposure to risk and adversity (Williams & Portman, 2014). Boser (2014) contends this is due to the underrepresentation of African American teachers to detail what minority students need to be successful. African American students suggested several ways parents and family members can encourage educational resilience within the home environment to support academic success. Specifically, students advised that parents can (a) search for innovative ways to become involved in the school environment; (b) help with homework and monitor specific assignments and activities; (c) implement daily routines and schedules for homework and studying, bedtime, and meals; (d) delegate time for the discussion of school-related topics and current events; (e) establish study routines and set school-related goals; (f) demonstrate interest in the academic and social development of the children; (g) allocate time in the schedule with children on nonacademic tasks; and (h) cultivate and maintain inherent support systems (i.e., teachers, relatives, community members) to assist students in their academic endeavors as needed (Williams & Portman, 2014). These students suggest that parental involvement of African American students produces positive student outcomes, including improved student attitudes, morale, and academic success amongst a variety of educational disciplines. This is also true of culturally competent school counselors, serving a variety of roles including consultants, advisers, counselors, and advocates (Williams & Portman, 2014). Similarly, Kumar et al. (2018) stated that school systems can support African American students by providing teachers with whom they identify. Kumar et al, went on to say that when students have these examples, they are more successful because the instruction is diversified.

Collaborative efforts between families, schools, and communities in the development and promotion of academic and personal growth among African American students is vitally important (Boser, 2014; Williams & Portman, 2014). This compensates for the absence and lack of services, resources, and programs, as well as African American teachers in the school system (Boser, 2014). For African American students to succeed academically, Williams and Portman (2014) stressed the importance of taking personal responsibility for remaining focused and obtaining various sources of motivation to succeed academically despite adversity are essential for overcoming school failure. In other words, students must illustrate the belief that every adolescent can succeed in school and in life despite difficult life circumstances (Williams & Portman, 2014). Additionally, it is imperative that schools provide the diversified learning opportunities to tailor to the various styles of academic learning (Orfield et al., 2016)

Black Males & Inequitable Schooling

Certain beliefs regarding African American male students are inaccurate and can be harmful to the education of the African American male (Harper & Davis, 2012). African American males are capable of success in school although they are not viewed in that light (Stroub and Richards, 2013). Based on the oppositional culture theory, minority students develop a resistant stance to dominant cultural spaces, such as schools, in which whiteness is rewarded and minorities are subordinated (Harper & Davis, 2012). African Americans were underrepresented and underserved (Harper & Davis, 2012). Despite the unfair disadvantage placed on African American males, they do care about education although they often do not have the resources to be successful (Fiel, 2013) African American males aspire to earn doctorates to address some of the issues that they have

personally faced while pursuing an education (Harper & Davis, 2012). Although African American males care about education, they feel that educational institutions do not care about them (Harper & Davis, 2012; Stroub and Richards, 2013). Due to many participants stating that they had few African American male teachers, it is likely that they view careers in education as being for Caucasian women. However, there are African American males willing to oblige their careers to disentangling pressing problems in education policy and practice (Harper & Davis, 2012).

In discussions pertaining to the promotion of academic success among urban African American male students, oftentimes the voice of the students themselves is not heard (Vega, Moore III, & Miranda, 2015). While many studies have extracted and collected the opinions of educators, parents, and school administrators, only a few have explored the perceptions of African American male students as to what factors they need to succeed academically (Vega, Moore III, & Miranda, 2015). While interviews from peers and administrators can be useful, students possess the unique knowledge into the relational, cultural, individual, and contextual factors that influence their academic performance. Equipped with this information, academic counselors, and other educational stakeholders (i.e., teachers, parents, community members, and school administrators) can identify ways to develop, modify, or remove existing school policies and practices in order to promote academic achievement and student resilience (Kumar, Zusho, & Blondie (2018); Vega, Moore III, & Miranda, 2015).

An individual's capacity to recover from or adapt to challenging and difficult circumstantial experiences is referred to as resiliency. Educational resilience is noted as the ability of children/adolescents to succeed in an educational environment despite

exposure to environmental or personal adversities. Resilience is not a single attribute or personal trait of an individual but the result of interactions between several of an individual's attributes and characteristics (i.e., sense of self-worth, intelligence, coping strategies and styles) and is specific to appropriate contextual situations (i.e., social, educational, emotional, physical, relational). Researchers typically examine two distinctive concepts as intrinsically present in the application of resilience: protective factors and risk factors (Chapman, 2014).

An emphasis on both factors may significantly contribute to the knowledge and understanding of how African American male students succeed in environments despite the presence of various forms of adversity. Resilience as a trait can only be defined by individual experiences encountering some degree of adversity or risk in the absence of experiencing any significant risk or danger; such children or adolescents can be described as well adjusted, competent, or normal but cannot be referred to as being resilient. Literature citing resilience typically describes risk factors as contextual conditions or individual characteristics of a group of individuals, especially children and adolescents, which increase the probability of undesirable outcomes or results, including academic failure. According to research, academic environments that serve economically challenged or racial minority students may introduce risk factors through the failure of providing a supportive educational community, institutionalizing decreased academic performance expectations, or supplying inadequate educational resources (Chapman, 2014).

Educational resilience is not simply a personality trait that disables negative environmental effects from influencing children and adolescents; in fact, some of the

actual reasons for the success of the individual include protective factors that involve support systems, personal attributes and traits, institutions, and resources. Protective factors enable individuals to defy the ramifications of risk factors. Protective factors include the internal and external resources an individual uses to moderate or mediate when exposed to the effects of risk or adversity and promote effective adaptation or competence. Scholars and researchers have theorized that the utilization of protective factors promotes positive educational-related and developmental outcomes for children and adolescents who are more grounded in environmental encounters across three systems of influence: community, family, and school. Thus, these three systems have the potential to have a direct or indirect impact on African American student outcomes, serving as a means of protection (to mitigate) from adversity and risk or to the least extent, functioning as a buffer between educational failure and academic success (Chapman, 2014).

To increase the success of African American students, in addition to the diverse background (Kumar et al., 2018), students emphasized the importance of generating real and authentic connections with teachers and advocating for services, resources, programs, and policies, which facilitate and encourage success (Williams & Portman, 2014). Community-based organizations and members can also assist in this effort by fostering the academic success of African American students and by providing resources such as education, health care, housing, recreation, job training, and employment (Williams & Portman, 2014). African American male students believed community participation in school reform is a critical component in promoting educational resilience among African American students, specifically, among the community, school, and family environments

as core elements in strengthening educational resilience (Vega, Moore III, & Miranda, 2015). The partnerships among these entities seek to integrate service delivery and decrease internal and external barriers to promote the effective environment for students to learn (Vega, Moore III, & Miranda, 2015). Moreover, African American students vocalized the necessity of having access to community services, activities, and resources such as academic clubs, churches, recreational centers, and programs allowing students to participate in something positive and engaging. Community members are encouraged to become active and involved in political action at the local, state, and national levels for student resources. Community support and resilience among children and adolescents provide safe community clubs, organizations, recreational facilities, activities, school-based services, and opportunities for students to acquire skills and cultivate interests (Vega, Moore III, & Miranda, 2015).

Hall (2017) believed non-cognitive and academic factors of microaggression may function as obstructive mechanisms to the dedication and graduation rates of minority undergraduate males. Regardless of academics, race, or non-cognitive factors, most minority male students experienced microaggressions that either redirected academic motivation to persist or served as impediments in their collegiate studies (Hall, 2017). Students described microaggression as a barrier to their studies, while others viewed it as problematic although they used the transgression as motivation to energize their efforts of completing college. Strayhorn (2014) stated that hierarchical regression techniques and multivariate statistics resulted in a positive correlation between college grades for African American males. Examined as an isolated variable, grit added strong predictive validity surpassing traditional measures of academic success including American College Test

(ACT) scores and high school grade point average (Wolters & Hussain, 2015).

Personality traits and non-cognitive variables like grit are responsive to programmatic or policy intervention. Parents and mentors of African American males can convey the importance of self-efficacy, and by associating grit in contributing to successful academic endeavors (Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014).

Structured opportunities for African American males such as listening to guest speakers, working in groups, or shadowing a mentor might be advantageous practices for not only building interest in college studies but also cultivating African American male collegians' grit, resulting in higher grades. As evident in this study, college student educators can contribute more to the needs of African American male students and assist them in earning better grades in college. Through earning good grades, students are more likely to obtain credits required for graduation, maintain academic standing per university requirements, and persist in the completion of a college degree (Strayhorn, 2014).

Summary

This proposed generic qualitative is grounded in Dewey's experience and education theory. This literature review examined the research literature on the effects of African American teachers on African American students. The theoretical framework detailed how race plays a factor in the overall development of a race or ethnic group (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). Ledesma and Calderon contend that educational measurement is a factor in this theory.

Brown v Board of Education was a landmark case, which prohibited schools from segregation (Rothstein, 2014). This famed case resulted in African Americans having equal rights and access to education. While some disparity remains, it is not legal to have

such disparities within the education system. While *Brown v Board of Education* resolved the legal issues associated with discrimination, it also resulted in African American teachers being laid off with some being terminated from employment (Rothstein, 2014). An attempt to ensure equality was to adjust educational plans and services to be inclusive of all students. This effort was to assist also in closing the achievement gaps (Orfield, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2016). However, what was not considered was the effect of not having a representation of African American teachers to assist with how African American students learn. Research contends that there is significant literature to support that the race and ethnicity of teachers contribute to more successful outcomes of the students served (Goldhaber, Theobald, & Tien, 2015).

It should be noted that there are external factors that contribute to the student's learning or the lack thereof. This includes their socioeconomic status, living environment, academic support, and family dynamics (Goldhaber, Theobald, & Tien, 2015). These factors contribute to the student's overall success. A strong support system, coupled with the student's learning style or method could produce successful outcomes for the student and the school (Goldhaber, Theobald, & Tien, 2015).

Caucasian students account for 83% of the teaching population. Due to this representation of Caucasian students, other learning styles for other races are not highlighted (Sleeter, La Vonne, & Kumashiro, 2014). This means that all students are forced to learn the way of the majority. This racial make-up reinforces that African Americans are not considered when assessments, methods, and modalities are being taught. Moreover, how the assessments are being developed and for which population of students (Sleeter, La Vonne, & Kumashiro, 2014). Kumar, Zusho, & Blondie (2018)

reinforce the need for culturally diverse educators. Having a diversified educational staff will ensure that the curriculums utilized within the educational system meet the needs of all learners (Webb & Thomas, 2015).

Research Questions

The central research question for this study is:

What role does racial match play in African American students' perceptions of their academic success or failure?

The sub-questions for this research study are:

1. How does student-teacher racial matching influence African American students' educational experiences?
2. How do African American students describe the relationships they share with racially matched teachers?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Aim of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of African American students who have had a limited student-teacher racial matching in their educational program. Additionally, this study aimed to further examine the awareness and perceptions of students' educational experiences. Through the exploration of five male and five female African American students' perceptions, this researcher sought to understand their perspective and worldview, ultimately, developing an understanding of a phenomenon (Hollins, 2015).

Qualitative Research Approach

This study was undertaken using a generic qualitative inquiry. Kennedy (2016) defined a generic qualitative inquiry as an inquiry of a phenomenon that investigates people's subjective opinions. Kennedy (2016) also described generic qualitative inquiry as an external investigation of a person's experience.

Participants

The participants of the study were a sample of African American, middle school students between the ages of 11 and 14. There were five male participants and five female participants. The participants attended a Title 1 middle school in Florida. Since a specific age and ethnicity were targeted for the purpose of this study, purposeful sampling was used. Purposeful sampling was utilized when conducting qualitative research. According to Creswell (2012), researchers intentionally selected individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon in purposeful sampling. There are various types of purposeful sampling; however, for the purposes of this study,

homogeneous sampling was used. In homogeneous sampling, the researcher purposefully sampled individuals or sites based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics (Creswell, 2012). In this case, the individuals sampled were from the African American, middle-school subgroup.

Instruments

A qualitative interview tool was developed by the researcher. The literature review and research questions guided the development of the interview questions (see Appendix). The drafted interview questions were piloted and validated by non-participant educators. The researcher utilized three teachers who were non-participants. Each were asked to read the proposed interview questions aloud and discuss what each perceived was the motivation of the question and the data that was expected to be generated. The informal perceptions were compared to the primary researcher's intent. If there was a notable mismatch identified, the primary researcher sought advice from the non-participant on how best to clarify the question. For instance, if a question were ambiguous and not clear or used language that was not understandable, it was revised.

Procedures

Upon the study's approval from the district and the research site, the researcher requested teacher contact information from the research site's administrator via email. The teachers of African American students were identified by the school principal based on the inclusion criteria to identify the participants and for consent and assent purposes. The recruitment letter was provided to the administrators by the researcher, then emailed to teachers by the administrator. The recruitment letter was emailed to the parents for notification by the classroom teachers. The recruitment letter was mailed to parents by

the classroom teacher, with the assistance of the administrator; for those parents who did not have an active email addresses on file with the research site. The cost was at the expense of the researcher. The parents were asked to respond and return the consent form within seven days to the teacher who coordinated with the researcher to retrieve them. Upon obtaining parental consent, the purpose of the research was reviewed with the students participating in the research by the researcher if requested, during a non-instructional specified time by the teacher prior to or after the start of the school day. The student assent form was provided to the teacher from the researcher via the school email through the county's email system. The students were read and explained the research information and the assent form to review after the consent of the parents, to determine if they would like to participate. The review of the purpose of the study and the assent form with the students took place during a non-instructional time with the researcher, coordinated by the class teacher.

Once participants were selected, a time for the interview was coordinated before or after school with the student and their parent, based on the availability of the student. The details of the interview were discussed during the coordination of the interview. The students were greeted and escorted by the researcher. The interview space at the research site was requested from the school's administrator by the researcher via email. The interviews with the students took place at the research site in a confidential space provided by the school administrator.

The data was collected through one-on-one interviews with the participants. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Upon all data being collected and transcribed, students were provided with an opportunity to review the transcript of their

interview from the researcher through their teacher. This was to solicit the perceptions and lived experiences of the interviewees (Creswell, 2012). In one-on-one interviews, the researcher asked questions and audio recorded the responses from only one participant in the study at a time (Creswell, 2012). These open-ended questions were asked in a confidential environment. Follow-up questions were only asked to clarify responses. The participants in the study were encouraged to provide a explanation of their personal experience, which includes their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, images, memories, sensations, etc. The students were encouraged by being reassured that they could be honest and that there would be no repercussions because of participating in this study. The researcher contacted the teacher via email to provide any clarification to students, if needed prior to analyzing the data. With permission, interviews were recorded with a digital recorder, and field notes were taken. After the data was recorded, the information was transferred electronically to the researcher's computer. The data was erased from the electronic recording device after the electronic transfer. The electronic data is stored on the researcher's password protected computer, where it will be stored for three years. After that time, it will be destroyed permanently. The recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected was transcribed, coded, and analyzed utilizing a VSAIEEDC model approach. The analysis was conducted by creating themes from like data and analyzing it for commonalities. In addition to qualitatively examining complex situations, the VSAIEEDC model also allowed for the examination of emotional issues, feelings, and perceptions. The analysis was completed using emotion categories to

organize the data collected. The interview results were coded by combining like or similar information and categorizing the data to create central themes (Bengtsson, 2016). The results were coded by participant, using Male 1, Male 2..., Female 1, and Female 2... Finally, the qualitative data were analyzed overall to determine the impact of having African American teachers.

The first step in the data analysis using the VSAIEEDC model was to explore the data by scanning for the perceptions of similarities and differences of the data collected. The data was then placed into categories. This was completed by identifying words, descriptions, and phrases by categories. The internal verification was completed by determining if the data were logical and feasible as well as ensuring personal biases were removed. The external verification corroborated the findings with existing research. The demonstration was completed by ensuring the data and content analysis was theory driven. The data and content analysis were driven by Dewey's perspective that education does not discredit experience but rather identifies the strengths and weaknesses and presents a revised perspective of education (Eisner, 2017). Lastly, the conclusion evaluated the analysis and its results to determine if further analysis was needed (Kennedy, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

To maintain the ethics of the study, confidentiality, and anonymity of participants, especially since they were minors, was a priority. Confidentiality and anonymity of the research site was also considered. All documents were always secured. Data collection did not begin until the study was approved by IRB. Upon the study being approved, only approved data was collected. The data collected will be deleted after three years of the

study being completed. The documents will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer.

Limitations

While the researcher attempted to eliminate any potential limitations, there were some that still existed. Some students may have been reluctant to answer all questions fully or honestly for fear of reprisal. There were other limitations that may have affected the outcomes of this study. Since the participants were minors, they may not have been as willing to participate and give an open and honest account of their experiences. Obtaining parental consent was possibly a challenge. Finally, time to conduct interviews was limited due to the school schedule and student transportation. Interviews were conducted during a time that was convenient for the participants. This was a limitation because the researcher was limited to the time and availability of the student as coordinated by the school.

Trustworthiness

This study can be trusted because the researcher followed approved research techniques in data collection. The data was analyzed according to approved research methodologies outlined. This assisted with ensuring the research data was collected and analyzed in a manner that was valid.

Potential Research Bias

As an African American female educator, this research presents a potential personal and professional bias as this study examined the student's experiences of African American teachers. To manage the potential bias, interview questions were strategically formed. Additionally, the research utilized an unstructured interview

approach to ensure a full description of the phenomena being studied. This included utilizing open ended questions that allowed for clarity and follow up. The strategic formation of the interview questions ensured that questions were not worded in a manner that would lead the participants to answer in a certain way. This was achieved by validating the instrument with other experts and professionals in the field of education prior to data collection commencing. During one-on-one interviews, the tone, body language, and facial expressions of the researcher remained neutral so that the participants were not swayed in their responses.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand the experiences of African American students who had a limited student-teacher racial match in their educational program. This chapter examined the perceptions of ten students at the research site and used an individual interview technique to generate the data collected. The investigator used a qualitative methodology and a descriptive research design to display the data collected and analyzed as well as to answer the research questions. This chapter provided the results of the data collected from the study that was analyzed. The data was the result of the interviews conducted with the participants. The data collected in this study will be presented using central themes. It will also utilize quotes highlighted from the participants. The research question that will be addressed in this study is what role does racial match play in African American students' perceptions of their academic success or failure.

Central Themes

The central themes that emerged from the data collection were relatability and teaching style. The students participating in the survey believed they relate to African American teachers more than non-African American teachers. It should be noted that some students stated they did not see a difference, however, later spoke about how African American teachers understood them better. The relatability of African American teachers and students also underscored the central themes teaching style. The students reported that African American teachers used teaching styles and methodologies that they

related to and understood. The students stated they exhausted the teaching lesson to ensure they were successful opposed to non-African American teachers.

Relatability

One of the two central themes that was the result of the data collected was relatability. Through the data collection, students spoke of their relatability to the teachers and how it affected their learning. Interview question three asked, how well do you understand non-African American teachers? Of the students responding to the interview, students had similar responses in their answers. Based on the results of the interview, the students understand them overall; however, not all students believe they are fully invested in their education. The responses included students who were asked how they understand non-African American teachers, they stated, “they are the same when it comes to teaching”. A few students stated, “I understand them good,” or “I get them most of the time” “just as much as an African American teacher.” While students stated they understood them, they also stated, “it just depends on the teacher.” Students made comments that African American teachers give more information to ensure they are learning stating, “I just feel like Black teachers elaborate more,” because “they just don’t understand things I need help with”. They felt non-African American teachers use “strong words” that they cannot understand.

Interview question four, asked do African American teachers teach you differently from other teachers? How? Of the students interviewed, the students were split in their responses. Of the four students who stated yes that African American teachers teach differently from other teachers, some of the feedback included “they explain what we are learning so that we cannot ask that many questions”. Another student

wrote that they “feel as if they teach with love like they actually wanna help you succeed. And the excitement they show when you understand is AMAZING”. A student also stated, “African American teachers take the extra time to make sure I get the education I need and or it to make sense and I love it”.

There were four students who stated that African American teachers do not teach differently from other teachers stating, it’s because African American teachers do better at explaining. However, comparatively, another student stated, “I see them the same”. There were two students who stated, “sometimes African American teachers do not teach differently from other teachers” and African American teachers “show us both ways.” The students stated they show them how to do it the recommended way, however, if there was an easier way “they tell us to do it the easy way.”

Interview question eight asked, how does having an African American teacher help you improve your academic performance and grades? The student’s participating in the interview responded that they credit African American teachers for taking the time to ensure they are successful beyond academics. Another student stated African American teachers “actually help” and “offer tutoring” to bring up their grade. Other students reported African American teachers “teach the lesson easier” and their language is appropriate. Other students underscore this statement by stating African Americans elaborate better and “non-African Americans need to explain better”. Some students reported that African American teachers “give you good advice”. However, comparatively, there were two students who stated “they don’t” help them to improve their academic performance and grades.

Interview questions nine asked, how can non-African American teachers contribute to your learning? Of the students participating in the survey, students believed that non-white teachers could respond as African American teachers do. This includes not only doing “what they are supposed to do, which is teaching” but also “teach with respect,” which students say will allow them to “understand more”. Also, “they can do as much as African American teachers. “They can help me with my work or give me advice with a situation if I need help”. Several students reported they would like non-African American teacher to “teach us” and “help me strive for success” and “when I am struggling”.

Interview question 10 asked, are more African American teachers needed? Why or why not? All the respondents to the interview responded yes. Feedback from the students include African American teachers “are an overall delight” and “bring more spirit and joy to the school”. The teachers were described as “more helpful” and “teach better”. One student stated they deal better with Black teachers. The students voice concerns that “there are not many African American teachers”. By not seeing many African American teachers, “this makes them look underestimated”. As a result, “we need more African American teachers that will offer their students help and increase our grades”.

Teaching Style

The second central theme that emerged from the data was the teaching style of educators. Students reported the teaching style affected their learning. Interview question one asked, how are you affected when you are taught by an African American teacher? The students reported they are affected because “I learn a lot more when I am taught by

African American teachers”. Another student reported, “It helps me more”. Some students stated, “I am affected in a good way”, citing they have “some things in common” with African American teachers.

Half of the students reported that they were not affected by having an African American teacher versus a non-African American teacher. While some students stated they would prefer an African American teacher, they also noted that it does not necessarily influence them, rather it’s their preference. A student interviewed said, “It don’t really matter to me but it’s good”. Another student reported, “I still learn just as I would with a teacher that’s not African American”. Other students stated, “Not at all, it’s like any other teacher,” and “it does not affect anything at all”.

Interview question two asked, how are African American teachers helpful to you? Explain. The students interviewed reported that African American teachers as being helpful to them. A student reported “they explain more”. While another stated, “they go more in depth when it comes to work and provide more help to make me successful”. One student reported that the teachers “sometimes might know what our lives are like at home”. Some student reported, “they understand us more” or “understand me if I have an issue in class or something else dealing with other people”. Another student stated that “they help me with work... they go above and beyond to take the time to help me...”. Another student also stated, “they mentor us and help us when we are in need”.

Interview question five asked, do you learn differently with an African American teacher? How? Most of the students stated yes. When it comes to learning with African American teachers, students stated “I am more focused and organized”. They reported “I feel more engaged” and “they teach us about the real world”. Other students wrote “they

use better terms such as smaller, better to understand words”, or “they put it in a better way,” and “explain things... to into detail with question or answer.” While the other students stated they do not learn differently or sometimes, one student reported, “I am learning just as much” from non-African American teachers.

Interview question six asked, is school different for you when you have an African American teacher? Of the 10 students interviewed, they were split in their responses. Among the four students that agreed that school is different for them when they have an African American teacher, students responded, “school would be better, teachers would be the same as me”. Another spoke of the relationship, stating “the vibe I get from an African American teacher is great”.

Comparatively, there were two students that stated no, when asked is school different for you when you have an African American teacher. One student stated that they are not different, “just African American teachers need to explain better”. Another student stated, “not that much since I only have one African American teacher”. There were four students who stated sometimes when asked is school different for you when you have an African American teacher. One student stated it is “a little bit causes each teacher teaches different from one another”. Another student says, “it depends on the teacher’s personality”.

Interview question seven asked, do African American and white teachers teach differently? How? Of the 10 students participating in the interview, most of the students responded yes. African American students shared their frustrations with being taught by White teachers. Some of the frustrations included “Black teachers teach better”. Another student was speaking about understanding black and white teachers, and stated, “I can’t

understand white teachers, but I can understand African American teachers”. Another student went on to say, “some African American teachers know how to explain things down to where we can understand things”. Another student goes on to state “African American will try their best to teach everybody, while some white teachers don’t do that”. Other student shared that white teachers become “aggravated” when African American students do not understand. African American teachers will make sure students understand, while “White teachers will move on”. Similarly, another student stated they “feel like I’m being ignored” by white teachers and they “feel more comfortable asking questions” by black teachers. The four students that responded no, stated there is no difference, “they teach the same”. It was also stated that “White teacher’s need to explain better.”

Summary

Chapter 4 examined the perceptions of ten students at the research site. Through a qualitative design, the investigator used a descriptive research design to collect and describe the results of the data. The researcher also answered the three research questions that guided the study. The data revealed that students believed that African American teachers were needed for them to be academically successful. While not all students did not agree there were differences in African American teachers versus non-African American teachers overall, they did state African American teachers are paramount to their success. They reported that the African American teachers care more, they take more time to teach the subjects, they are aware of cultural and personal issues of the students, and they are familiar with struggles of African American students.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of African American students who have had a limited student-teacher racial match in their educational program. This chapter includes the discussion of study findings. Further, the recommendations, limitations, and overall conclusions will be discussed.

Data was collected from ten students at the research site. The students provided their perceptions about the educational instructional services delivered by both African American and non-African American teachers. The students overwhelmingly believed that African American teachers were more appropriate for their learning experiences. The students believed that African American teachers understood them better than non-African American teachers. The students believed they identified and related more to African American teachers as opposed to non-African American teachers. Overall, the students stated they understood African American teachers. This also included African American teachers understanding the students' culture and the way they learned. It was felt by these students that African American teachers took more time teaching them and ensured they were learning and understanding the materials. The students stated the teachers make sure they have adequate time to learn. They also believed that African American teachers delivered the instructional materials in a manner conducive to their learning style. Some students believed that they learned more when they are taught by African American teachers. The students interviewed felt that the way in which African American teachers interacted with them was different. The students felt that the teachers cared and were concerned about their learning and success. This was evident by the time

the African American teachers took to teach and re-teach, ensure they understood, allowed them to redo work, and made it easy for their learning.

How a student views the teacher also affects their perception of the teacher and their learning. The students perceive African American teachers as more appropriate for them because of the “vibe” they got from them. Another student described African American teachers as the bringing “joy and spirit” to the school. The data from the students is in alignment with the literature stating that the student’s perception and comfortability affects their learning and connecting to the teacher.

It should be noted that there were two students who felt there was not a difference in how African American teachers taught versus non-African American teachers. The students did view the instructional material as being delivered differently. They felt they taught and evaluated the same. One student stated, “I see them the same”. Another student stated, “it does not affect anything at all”. Although one student said it did not make a difference, they spoke of how African American teachers were helpful.

Research Questions Addressed

What role does racial match play in African American students’ perceptions of their academic success or failure?

Based on the results of the data collected, the student’s interviews detailed that they believed they receive the type of teaching as well as the extra help needed from African American teachers to be academically successful. Some of the students felt that racial matching was beneficial and necessary. According to Egalite and Kisida (2017), some researchers believe there is a positive impact of racial matching on student academic achievement. Similarly, students felt racial matching played a major role in

their academic success (Webb & Thomas, 2015). The data from the students concluded it gives them confidence, support, and targets their specific needs. Webb and Thomas (2015) concluded that students who feel a sense of self belonging at school perform better academically. Also, students who feel a stronger connection with their school may have higher self-esteem and have a more positive educational experience. This includes the feeling of being accepted, respected, and appreciated. With students feeling accepted within their school community, they tend to be more involved in the school activities. They are also more likely to have feelings of belonging and demonstrate stronger engagement in classroom practices (Webb & Thomas, 2015).

The students believed because they identify with the teachers, the teachers understand their learning needs. Overall, it plays a major role. By the students having someone who looks like them and identifies with them, it supports the research, indicating their chances of success increases. The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of African American students who have had a limited student-teacher racial match in their educational program. The data and the literature suggest that most students believe that student-teacher racial matching assists them with learning and the literature suggests that this makes them feel inclusive overall with a sense of belonging.

How does student-teacher racial matching influence African American students' educational experiences?

The students who participated in the interview reported that having an African American teacher influenced them. The students stated the influences included my teacher “knows my family” and “they help me with work... they go above and beyond to take the time to help me...”. These students communicated by seeing African

American teachers and having them as teachers bridges the learning gap. A racial/ethnic match between teacher and student has been demonstrated to have positive educational benefits for students, minorities (Goldhaber, Theobald, & Tien, 2015).

Some students reported non-African American teachers not understanding them. However, they believed African American teachers understand their home lives and their individual learning styles based on culture. Students stated, “I learn a lot more when I am taught by African American teachers,” and “they know what our lives are like at home.” Overall, some students reported having an African American teacher helps them to be successful. A student stated African American teachers “are more helpful” and “teach better”. The academic success of African American students is promoted by the relationship that teachers establish with their students (Schenke et al., 2017). Lindsay & Hart (2017) stated Black and White students made higher significant achievement gains when they were taught by a teacher of the same race teacher.

The relationship between an African American teacher and an African American student is both influential and beneficial (Egalite & Kisidia, 2017). Students of color with low achieving performance demonstrated the most beneficial effects from relationships with teachers of color (Egalite & Kisidia, 2017). Some students reported non-African American teachers not understanding them. However, they believed African American teachers understand their home lives and their individual learning styles based on culture. Students stated, “I learn a lot more when I am taught by African American teachers,” and “they know what our lives are like at home.” Overall, some students reported having an African American teacher helps them to be successful. A student stated African American teachers “are more helpful” and “teach better”.

How do African American students describe the relationships they share with racially matched teachers?

Based on the results of the students completing the interview, some students describe their relationship with African American teachers as needed, while others do not. Some students state that the relationship is not different; other remarks were made such as African American teachers understand them better and they have better relationships with them, based on them specifically calling out the names of African American teachers with whom they are close. Egalite and Kisida (2017) stated that a student's exposure to what they perceive as a good mentor can increase the cultural value that Black students' believes is foundational to academic success.

When students have not been exposed to racial matching, they are sometimes categorized as having disabilities and in special education programs, opposed to regular education classes (Jang & Lee, 2016). This is in alignment with the students believing African American teachers understand their learning styles better. Students spoke of African American teachers being able to identify with them when they are having struggles, even when they do not acknowledge it, or voice concerns themselves. Overall, the students believed they have better relationships with their African American teachers by evidence of their willingness to take extra time to assist them in learning, their similar cultural background, and their in-depth teaching style to ensure they understand the lesson.

Racial matching between teachers and students, especially minority teachers and students has a positive effect on student achievement (Jang & Lee, 2016). Teachers that create positive relationships with their students influence successful teaching by

facilitating an open and constructive learning environment (Pitre, 2014). Egalite and Kisidia (2017) contended that African American perspectives on the experiences, impact, and success of African American teachers with African American students in public schools is necessary. This was echoed by the students in the data collected. Most students interviewed believed having a racial matched teacher improves their education and learning.

Recommendations

As a result of conducting this study, it is recommended that the research site and district evaluate the number of African American teachers compared to the number of African American students. Based on the findings, ensure there is a diversity plan which addresses racial matching. This will assist with ensuring there are educators that students feel comfortable and identify with. It is further recommended that the evaluation of teachers include student perceptions. This will allow for direct feedback of the students who are being taught by the teachers. It will provide feedback to ensure diversity is being evaluated and considered. The literature researched in this study concludes that students believe they learn better when instructed by someone from their own culture and race who identifies with them and understands them. It is therefore imperative to ensure an evaluation system is implemented to review the effectiveness of the teachers with the student perception included. Last, it is recommended that the research site examines the instructional and learning styles to ensure the teaching methodologies are culturally appropriate for each population. This links to the purpose of the study with understanding that students have limited racial matching. In understanding this, teachers would be

evaluated to ensure cultural diversity in their teaching style and to make sure student culture and learning styles are taken into consideration.

Conclusion

Most students interviewed in this study believed that African American teachers were more culturally aligned with their learning strategies when instructing them. Most of the students believed that African American teachers instructed them better than non-African American teachers. This includes understanding them individually, culturally, and educationally. The students preferred to be racially matched with African American teachers. The students asserted having an African American teacher helps them to be successful and understand the educational materials being taught. The students believed that African American teachers understood them better. This included but was not limited to their culture, learning style, and diverse educational needs. The students believed the teachers understood their need, including the need of some lessons to be retaught and taught differently for them to learn the concepts.

The important elements of this study included what was discovered in the literature review and the feedback from the students. The literature review revealed that racial matching was necessary for students to feel comfortable learning and was a factor in students being successful. The data collected from the student did not reveal anything new. It was in alignment with the literature review in the study. The results of the study were also in alignment with the beliefs of the researcher.

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Appendix
Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. How are you affected when you are taught by an African American teacher?
2. How are African American teachers helpful to you? Explain.
3. How well do you understand non-African American teachers?
4. Do African American teachers teach you differently from other teachers? How?
5. Do you learn differently with an African American teacher? How?
6. Is school different for you when you have an African American teacher?
7. Do African American and White teachers teach differently? How?
8. How does having an African American teacher help you improve your academic performance and grades?
9. How can non-African American teachers contribute to your learning?
10. Are more African American teachers needed? Why or why not?