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## A Phenomenological Study to Explore Educators' Perceptions of Recruitment and Retention of African American Teachers in Advanced Placement Courses

Tangela LaShon Allen

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A Phenomenological Study to Explore Educators' Perceptions of Recruitment and  
Retention of African American Teachers in Advanced Placement Courses

by  
Tangela L. Allen

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the  
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education  
and School of Criminal Justice in Partial  
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2023

## **Approval Page**

This applied dissertation was submitted by Tangela L. Allen 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.

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## Statement of Original Work

I declare the following:

I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility as described in the *Student Handbook* of Nova Southeastern University. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

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Tangela L. Allen  
Name

June 26, 2023  
Date

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*In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.-1  
Thessalonians 5:18kjv*

## Abstract

A Phenomenological Study to Explore Educators' Perceptions of Recruitment and Retention of African American Teachers in Advanced Placement Courses. Tangela L. Allen, 2023: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: critical race theory, advanced placement program, African American teachers, high schools

This dissertation was designed to provide positive perspectives regarding recruitment and retention practices in an urban school district. Recruiting and retaining African American teachers for Advanced Placement (AP) courses is a vital educational issue in the U. S. The number of African American teachers teaching AP courses was low.

A phenomenological research design guided the study's investigation. The phenomenon in the investigation was the underrepresentation of African American instructors of AP courses. Zoom semi-structured interview data for 15 AP teachers were analyzed with a thematic analysis approach to answer six qualitative research questions.

The theoretical framework was the Critical Race Theory suggesting all students were entitled to equal educational opportunities. Finn and Scanlan (2020) reported educational barriers of African American students concerning access, equity, and entrance in AP programs had been a problem since Jim Crow. Additionally, Johnson and Larwin (2020) posited teachers, of the same color as the students and with similar background and experiences as adolescents, alleviated some of the barriers for these students.

For Research Question (RQ) 1 themes conveyed there were few African American preservice teachers in teacher education programs at many large predominantly Caucasian universities. These universities had few scholarship programs for African American preservice teachers. Themes for RQ 2 suggested there were no or little awareness of any district or high school plans to recruit African American AP teachers. Themes for RQ 3 indicated the AP programs in some high schools were not adequately supported by the district to acquire the necessary materials and resources. The analyzed data for RQ 4 revealed, as a preferred practice, African American AP teachers enjoyed the freedom to build their own curriculum as AP teachers, and this freedom was a rewarding retention incentive for them. African American AP teachers liked to teach the best and brightest of the urban students, especially academically talented students from poverty communities. This translated into a preferred practice. The analyzed data for RQ 5 suggested there were varied challenges with teaching AP courses. Some students did not possess the required prior level of knowledge to successfully complete some AP courses. There was difficulty motivating some students to maintain a high-quality AP level of work throughout the entire school term. Themes for RQ 6 indicated African American AP teachers were happy at the schools when these teachers perceived their students possessed enhanced self-efficacy in passing AP examinations.



## Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	1
Definition of Terms .....	4
Purpose of the Study .....	5
Setting of the Study .....	5
Researcher’s Role .....	6
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	7
Introduction .....	7
Theoretical Framework .....	7
Critical Race Theory and Education .....	9
The History of Advanced Placement Programs .....	11
Historical Barriers for Black Admission in Gifted and AP Courses .....	14
African American Access, Equity, and Entrance in AP Programs .....	18
African American Teacher Recruitment and Retention .....	22
African American Teachers’ Influence on African American Students .....	25
African American Students Underrepresentation in AP programs .....	26
Summary of the Literature .....	30
Research Questions .....	31
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	33
Aim of the Story .....	33
Qualitative Research Approach .....	33
Participants .....	34
Data Collection and Instruments .....	35
Procedures .....	36
Data Analysis .....	38
Ethical Considerations .....	38
Trustworthiness .....	39
Potential Research Bias .....	41
Chapter 4: Findings .....	43
Introduction .....	43
Participants .....	43
Data Analysis for Research Question 1 .....	45
Data Analysis for Research Question 2 .....	47
Data Analysis for Research Question 3 .....	49
Data Analysis for Research Question 4 .....	51
Data Analysis for Research Question 5 .....	53
Data Analysis for Research Question 6 .....	56
Chapter 5: Discussion .....	59
Introduction .....	59

Implications of the Study .....	59
Relevance of the Study .....	62
Interpretation and Reflection .....	63
Recommendations for Change and Future Research Inquiry .....	68
Limitations .....	72
Conclusions.....	74
References.....	75
Appendices	
A Recruitment Flyer .....	95
B AP Teachers Interview Protocol.....	97
Table	
Demographics of Responding Participants (N = 15).....	44

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Statement of the Problem**

There was historical evidence from the research setting and national evidence from the literature to justify the existence of the problem. As a veteran African American high school teacher of AP classes with 29 years of experience in an urban school district in South Florida, this researcher observed many AP classes in her high school and other high schools in the urban school district. Results of the observations revealed only a minimum number of African American teachers in AP courses as instructors. An observation of this researcher was that most teachers of AP classes were young and middle-aged Caucasian and Hispanic American teachers.

Other observations by this veteran teacher in workshops, conferences, and meetings targeting teachers of AP classes revealed few African American teachers. All observations spanned many years. These African American students confided they wanted more instructors who looked like them to teach their classes.

Advanced Placement classes in South Florida were taught primarily by Caucasian and Hispanic American teachers who might not possess the cultural experiences to make the content of the curriculum culturally relatable for African American students [District Statistical Highlights 2018; Wallendar, 2014]. Wallendar posited that because teachers of other ethnicities sometimes did not have the knowledge, training, or inclination on how to make the curriculum culturally relatable, many African American children were reluctant to enroll in AP classes. Likewise, African American students became frustrated and challenged the system to be removed from AP classes (Caena, 2014). In the study, the researcher endeavored to uncover reasons for and solutions to the underrepresentation of

African American teachers through a literature search of knowledgeable authors and semi-structured Zoom individual interviews of a diverse group of experienced urban teachers of AP classes.

With education being one of the leading social institutions in the United States, teachers must catalyze education (Caena, 2014; Pavela et al., 2015; Wallendar, 2014). To become productive in school and society, African American students may experience quality education with diverse, qualified teachers. In their writings, Pavela et al. (2015) posited that all teachers had an active role in formulating productive citizens for future generations. Pavela et al. contended that in the urban high schools, the active role of African American teachers was of high importance because African American teachers may be the only positive role models or adults who looked like African American students and were representative of the environment in which the students resided. African American teachers might be some African American students' only array of hope for a better future, especially students who were gifted and highly intelligent but resided in undesirable home and community environments (Gershenson et al., 2018). The phenomenon of interest in the study was the shortage of African American teachers instructing AP classes in urban cities.

### ***Background and Justification***

The urban school district in this study experienced a significant increase in the number of African American high school students enrolling in AP classes from school years 2015–2018, while concurrently having a decrease in African American teachers in the AP classes (School District Statistical Highlights, 2018). In the year 2017–2018, a significant statistical report authored by researchers associated with the Florida

Department of Education regarding the research setting school district, the researchers posited that 3,956 (20%) of the secondary teachers were Caucasian, 5,004 (25.3%) of teachers were African American, 10,467 (52.9%) of teachers were Hispanic American, and 368 (1.8%) of teachers were classified as other (School District Statistical Highlights, 2018). According to the school district statistical highlights, demographics on the number of students in the statistical report were: 24,299 Caucasians, 72,468 African Americans, 251,140 Hispanic Americans, and 6,265 classified as Other. Of these students, the number of students from all ethnicities enrolled in AP classes was 30,063 (School District Statistical Highlights, 2018).

### ***Deficiencies in the Evidence***

Due to the scarcity of African American teachers who instructed AP classes, some African American students were at risk of not having positive role models to make a significant positive impact on their lives. As a result, these students forfeited an opportunity to challenge themselves, to become better prepared for college, and miss an opportunity to reduce the cost of their college tuition. Carver-Thomas (2018) posited that regardless of the demographics of the schools, AP classes had become a part of the course selection in most high schools. As with any new courses, there must be qualified teachers to teach the courses from varied ethnicities representative of the backgrounds of students in the courses. There should be qualified teachers to teach the AP courses, and there should be a match between students and teachers of the same ethnicity and cultural backgrounds (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

### ***Audience***

The significant stakeholders who were affected and benefited from the study were urban high school students, parents of urban high school students, AP teachers, district administrators, and school administrators. All urban high school students in AP courses were affected and benefited from exposure to teachers with more diverse backgrounds. Presently, most of the teachers who instructed AP courses in the research setting district were young Caucasian and Hispanic American teachers. African American students, in particular, benefited from the cultural relevancy and experiences that those African American teachers introduced in the AP classroom.

Additionally, parents of the urban high school students were affected and benefited from the study, particularly African American parents. The rationale was that these African American parents encountered African American teachers who were positive role models for their children. Parents more closely identified with the cultural background and nuances of the teachers. Some of the children's role models were from the same cultural background, community, and ethnicity as the students and parents.

Consequently, all AP teachers were affected and benefited because the introduction of more teachers in AP courses reduced the overall shortage of AP teachers as well as reduced the course load of teachers. Last, urban schools and district administrators benefited in that these administrators had access to preferred practices developed in the study to personalize the existing program to recruit and retain AP teachers.

### **Definition of Terms**

#### ***Own-Race Teacher***

A teacher is an own-race teacher who instructed students from the same race and ethnicity (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013).

### ***Scaffolding***

In scaffolding, teachers provided support so students may grasp new concepts and skills. Teachers provided information on new concepts and skills, modeled how to solve problems, and provided viable and easy to learn problem-solving strategies. Gradually, teachers removed the support and permitted students to practice. The aim was for the students to gain greater independence in the learning process.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose is to examine perspectives and lived experiences of African American schoolteachers as related to the preferred practices to recruit and retain African American teachers to instruct AP courses in an urban school district in South Florida. The most valid and reliable insights on the recruitment and retention of African American teachers for AP courses was directly drawn from the articulations of their lived experiences. Results from this research study enabled district administrators, school leadership teams, and teachers to establish a recruitment and retention program in the high schools located in the school district where this research will be conducted. The aim of the recruitment and retention program was to increase the count of African American teachers who instructed AP courses.

### **Setting of the Study**

This study was in one of the largest school districts located in a southern state. According to the district's website, the student population of the school district was 345,000 for the 2020–2021 school year. There were 18,276 teachers in Grades Pre k–12.

There were only a few districts with international studies programs and bilingual education. Bilingual education was offered in Spanish, Haitian Creole, French, and Mandarin Chinese.

### **Researcher's Role**

The researcher of the study was a 30-year veteran high school teacher in this urban school district. The researcher had a Bachelor's Degree in Communication and a Master's Degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Additionally, the researcher possessed certifications in English K–12, Speech Communications K–12, TESOL and other critical areas. The researcher had also taught English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Introduction to Writing courses at two collegiate institutions.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

The purpose is to examine the views and lived experiences of African American schoolteachers as related to the best practices to recruit and retain African American teachers to instruct AP courses in an urban school district in a southern state. The most accurate and reliable insights on the recruitment and retention of African American teachers in AP courses could have been directly drawn from the articulations of their own lived experiences. This phenomenological study enabled district administrators, school leadership teams, and teachers to establish a recruitment and retention program in the high schools located in an urban school district. The recruitment and retention program aimed at increasing the number of African American teachers who instruct AP courses. The phenomenon in the study was the shortage of African American teachers who instructed AP courses.

### Theoretical Framework

There were few educators who concern themselves directly with Critical Race Theory (Giroux, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1998, & McLaren, 1994). However, several influential educational educators are pursuing the theory in one or more of its current manifestations. Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and Ladson Billings were the best-known critical theorists.

A seminal thinker responsible for Critical Race Theory in education is Paulo Freire (1969). Freire's work, *"Pedagogy of the Oppressed,"* had been very influential in culture. Freire's work was attuned to the actual operation of power in and out of the classroom. This process embraced a critical demystifying fusion of social theory and

political praxis in which history subjects were ready to make a fundamental difference in the quality of their lives individually and collectively.

The theory framing this research study was the Critical Race Theory (CRT), which emerged into conception through a theoretical movement in the mid to late 1980s to reconstruct critical legal studies on racial issues (Cole, 2007). Ladson-Billings (1998) authored the theory and suggested that the CRT could be used to analyze society and culture to the various classifications of race, law, and power. Ladson-Billings explained that the CRT was a counteractive imitation of the Critical Law Studies (CLS) movement. The CLS movement did not address or acknowledge that race was a critical element toward legal systems (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

The CRT was designed to positively influence teachers and students, particularly those of African descent. During the Civil Rights Movement, the CRT was strengthened and became more visible in the public schools and universities through students' protests, boycotts, and the creation of alternative courses on race and the law at Harvard Law School (Martinez, 2014). In 1981, Derrick Bell, one of two Black professors to teach at Harvard Law School after the Civil Rights Movement, transferred to become the Dean of the University of Oregon Law School (Martinez, 2014). Afterward, the students' requested Harvard hire an African American professor to replace Bell, but Harvard's liberal administration denied their request. Harvard's administration informed student activists that there were no qualified African American scholars who merited Harvard's interest (Martinez, 2014). Consequently, the students moved forward with their student-led alternative course, an extension of what Bell's class was about, U.S. law through the race's prism (Martinez, 2014).

## **Critical Race Theory and Education**

Numerous endeavors existed in the past with the aim to level the playing field for students and teachers in K–12 and higher education but attempts significantly failed. Critical Race “scholars in higher education mobilized to confront this misconception head-on to remind us that the works of Dubois (1903), Myrdal (1962), and Bell (1987) remain prescient” (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015, p. 208). Since students from poverty-stricken communities based on race, sex, and socioeconomic status demonstrated greater unpleasant experiences than Caucasian students, many of them are low achievers and are placed in special education or underrepresented in gifted and AP programs. Also, the lack of essential educational resources leads to a high dropout rate for this marginalized group. Ledesma and Calderon (2015) recommended that changes be made in the educational system by examining curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching and learning through the Critical Race Theory Lens. They also expressed the need for educators to be aware of the attitudes and behaviors represent the widespread beliefs of White Supremacy and White Nationalists.

Moreover, the same calls for social justice in K–12 exist for institutions of higher education. Ledesma and Calderon (2015) argued that learning should happen for all students not withstanding race, gender, intelligence, and family income. Ledesma and Calderon divided CRT into two groups: Grades K–12 learning and university learning. In the areas of K–12, Ledesma and Calderon (2015) identified four themes: “(1) curriculum and pedagogy, (2) teaching and learning, (3) schooling, and (4) policy finance and community engagement” (p. 219). Also, in higher education, Ledesma and Calderon

(2015) reported three identified themes: “(1) colorblindness, (2) selective admissions policy, and (3) campus racial climates” (p. 220).

In their study, Ledesma and Calderon (2015) also indicated that the “CRT provides educators with the tools to transform current practices in pedagogy and teaching and learning into ones that remove colorblindness from the classroom curriculum” (p. 222). Ledesma and Calderon also encouraged distributive justice that shifts the educator's attitudes to call for social justice activism conducive to students of all races. Ledesma and Calderon (2015) also pointed out the prevalence of how White Supremacy continues to shape the culture of many institutions of higher learning, usually in the guise of "colorblindness" (p. 214). Unfortunately, the concept of colorblindness continues to support White privileges at many higher learning institutions, thus continuing the disparities between Whites and poverty-stricken persons, contributing to blaming academic challenges on students of color (Diggles, 2014).

On the other hand, Haney-Lopez (2014) explained the lure of colorblindness in this way:

Today the dominant etiquette around race is colorblindness. It has a strong moral appeal, for it laudably envisions an ideal world in which race is no longer relevant to how we perceive and treat each other. It also has an intuitive, practical appeal: to get beyond race, colorblindness urges, the best strategy is to immediately stop recognizing and talking about race. (pp. 77–78)

By answering the calls for social justice activism in K–12 and institutions of higher learning, educators can use their influence to fight for equal access to education for all marginalized groups (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). In order for institutions of

learning to be inclusive, there must be a change to (a) initiatives; (b) infrastructure; (c) environments; (d) curriculum; (e) pedagogy; (f) financing; and (g) policies against racism, inequalities, and social injustices (Allen, 2015). By now, we should know that CRT in education has evolved into a revolutionary project (Hughes, 2012).

In the January 2012 issue of *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, a provocative blog centered on CRT was posted by Robin Hughes. In the blog, Hughes (2012) implied that "CRT has become the newest "sexy" theoretical framework, the new little black dress, fishnet, black pantyhose, smoking jacket" (para. 2). Hughes coined the term "CRTitlicious," and suggests that scholars in education and other fields have been drawn to CRT's radical past to the presumption of if you mention yourself as a CRiT, your scholarly work is guaranteed to be published. Hughes also offered advice to wannabe CRiTs and practicing CRiT-likes that it is not enough to sprinkle CRT here and there in your work, though Hughes jests:

Being a CRiT has become so cool that you only have to be a little vested in the framework. For instance, write 25 pages of text and use one paragraph of CRT- that is fair enough; it is called a teaser. Add a paragraph that explains the four tenets lifted directly from Bell or Delgado and Stefancic. Sprinkle in some of the "names" (we all know them), and you are really sexy. (Para. 6)

### **The History of Advanced Placement Programs**

Advanced Placement Course Programs were created to enhance gifted students' educational experience as they transitioned from high school to college. An Advanced Placement course is a course formulated by the College Board starting in the mid-1950s. The purpose of the college-level courses was to bridge the gap between high school and

college. Students can complete a college-level introductory course in the AP course program while they are in high school. Students will be awarded college credit for the class when they pass the AP exam at the end of the course (College Board, 2018; Grissom et al., 2015).

Advanced Placement courses have increased at an enormous rate all over the United States in the past few years (College Board, 2018). According to Judson and Hobson (2015), for more than a decade (1992 to 2015), the number of AP courses that schools offered doubled, and the number of administered exams exceeded well over 500%. In conjunction with the rise of the AP program enrollees, a teacher can decide whether students enroll in an AP class or do not enroll (Judson & Hobson, 2015).

The latest Annual AP Report to the Nation was in February 2014 (College Board, 2014). The report recommended that any academically ready student for AP, whether gifted or not, should experience the rigor of an AP class. The definition of "academically ready" is based on the students' scores on the Preliminary SAT (PSAT). The PSAT score is linked to a predicted AP score for a particular subject. While some believe that additional Black students enrolling in AP will expose them to an academically challenging environment, the PSAT alone cannot predict effort exerted once in the course (College Board, 2014). Students receive an AP potential letter and an invitation to consider enrolling in identified subject(s) for the next school year. This letter represents one of The College Board's suggested tactics to increase AP enrollment of 10 traditionally underserved populations, including Black students (College Board, 2014).

Most students who enroll in AP courses are referred by a teacher the students admire and identify with (College Board, 2018). The teacher's judgment or influence

determines a student's experience and exposure to a rigorous college-level education. The AP program allows students to take high school courses while earning college credit and qualifies students for more advanced classes when they enroll in college.

A teacher's recommendation, nomination, or influence for entry into an AP class can be positive or negative (Lawson-McKinnie, 2016). Unfortunately, the recommendation can predicate how the teacher perceives the student and not solely on their performance ability. A student's perception of the teacher can be another influencing factor because they share their classes' experiences. Students discuss the coursework level, the rigor, the class atmosphere, and whether they learn anything from the teacher's lessons. Students will also discuss whether they felt the teacher prepared them well enough to take the AP exam and whether the teacher was qualified, meaning how well the teacher knew the curriculum.

In addition to the class context, teachers can influence a student's decision to enroll in an AP class (Lawson-McKinnie, 2016). If a teacher refers, recommends, or nominates a student to enroll in an AP class, this opportunity positively influences the student because the student feels the teacher believes they can succeed on a college level. As a result, the student's self-esteem is bolstered, and typically the student will enroll in the class and work hard to perform up to the teacher's expectations just because the teacher believed that the student could handle the level of rigor (Cherng, 2017).

If a teacher does not refer, nominate, or recommend a student for an AP class, the lack of a recommendation can diminish a student's motivation to try to enroll in an AP class in the future as well as shatter their level of achievement and self-esteem (Judson & Hobson, 2015). There is a standard procedure in most public schools for a teacher to refer

a student into an AP course compared to using a standardized test to determine entry in the AP course. Cherng (2017) posited, "When teachers underestimate their students' academic abilities by perceiving that their classes are too difficult for students, it matters, but it matters differently for different groups of students" (p. 1).

### **Historical Barriers for Black Admission in Gifted and AP Courses**

Identifying gifted children has been an issue of considerable debate. Educators and intelligence testers have mostly been unable to develop consensus on a definition of intelligence or what is considered high intelligence, making developing criteria for gifted children in the United States a difficult task. The Jim Crow Laws resigned Black people to secondary status in America. Court cases, such as *Plessy v. Ferguson's (1865)* landmark case, brought awareness to how Black people had been resigned to secondary status since 1865 when slavery was abolished (Scott, 2008). In 1892, Homer Plessy, an African American man, was kicked off a train and arrested for sitting in the White section. Homer used Amendment XIV to fight his case with the Supreme Court (Scott, 2008). Consequently, Homer did not win. Segregation was made legal, and Jim Crow laws remained in the south.

### ***Brown v. Board of Education (1954)***

Another historical case, *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*, also resigned Black people to secondary status, even though it ended "separate but equal education" in 1954. In the case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)*, Oliver Brown, a parent of a young Black girl who was denied access to a White school in Topeka, Kansas, filed a desegregation suit against the school board. The Supreme Court ruled unanimously in favor of Brown's suit, citing separating children based on race may adversely affect a



child's ability to learn and create inferiority complexes (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954). African Americans have come far since this case, but many believe that there is more to be done for equal education opportunities in America (Weinstein et al., 2004).

An African American is three times more likely than a white student to be placed in special education, 3.2 times less likely to be placed in gifted classes and twice as likely to be corporally punished or suspended...The tragic reality is that schools are racially segregated and more unequal now than they were before *Brown*. This fact remains: African American children, among other children, still face unequal opportunity to learn. (p. 512)

After *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)*, more than 200 school desegregation cases were heard. Many Black people faced racial hardships after this ruling declaring racial segregation was unconstitutional because there were no specified details on how the law should be implemented. Therefore, African American students experienced racism in disguise as "freedom of choice." As a result, new schools were being built in White, affluent neighborhoods leaving the less affluent Black residents no choice but to send their children to outdated schools (Delinder, 2004, p. 2).

In the 1980s, there were concerns about cultural bias against students of color because items on standardized tests pertained to middle-class experiences (Nash, 1987). In 1983, the *Nation at Risk Scores Report* was put in place to raise academic standards for gifted learners. This curriculum was a concern for many years because school district leaders had the advantage to set their standards, there was no accountability, and gifted students in low performing schools were not a priority (*Nation at Risk Scores Report*, 1983).

Even before the Javits Act was officially enacted in 1988, the federal government was involved in gifted and talented education. In 1969, Congress devoted an office to support gifted education programs. In 1972, a national report, the Marland Report to Congress, was published, and Congress began to focus more attention on gifted education. The Marland Report was considered a landmark study because of its national impact that stressed the need to recognize diverse giftedness and talent. Specifically, the Marland Report (1972) identified six areas in which high potential might be manifested, including:

- general intellectual ability
- specific academic aptitude
- creative or productive thinking
- leadership ability
- visual and performing arts
- psychomotor ability (p. 2)

To identify the most promising students in U.S. schools, the following definition of the term "gifted and talented" was developed by Congress in 1988 (Title IV-H.R.5):

The term gifted and talented youth means children who give evidence of high-performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to develop such capabilities fully.

The Marland Report also influenced subsequent legislation, such as the Gifted and Talented Act enacted by Congress in 1978. Finally, in 1988, the Javits Act (1994) was passed to coordinate programs to meet gifted and talented students' special educational

needs. This act serves students who are traditionally underrepresented in gifted and talented programs-- particularly minority, poor, English language learners, and students with disabilities--to help reduce achievement gaps and to encourage the establishment of equal educational opportunities for all students.

### ***The Bell Curve***

In the 1990s, Herrnstein and Murray (1994) wrote the book *The Bell Curve*. They argued that inherited and environmental factors influence human intelligence. Factors such as a Low IQ are a barrier for Black students and a vital precursor of poverty, even more so than the socioeconomic conditions in which people grow up. The authors introduced six crucial assumptions regarding the validity of "cognitive abilities" drawn from a classical tradition that are, by now, of technical dispute.

1. There is such a difference in the general factor of cognitive ability on which human beings differ.
2. All standardized tests of academic aptitude or achievement measure this general factor, but IQ tests expressly designed for that purpose measure it more accurately.
3. IQ scores match, to a first degree, whatever it is that people mean when they use the word intelligent or smart in ordinary language.
4. IQ scores are stable, although not perfect so, over much of a person's life.
5. Properly administered IQ tests are not demonstrably biased against social, economic, ethnic, or racial groups.
6. Cognitive ability is heritable, apparently no less than 40 percent and no more than 80%. (p. 22–23).

### ***The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)***

In 2002, the NCLB was passed. The NCLB (2002) was the primary initiative of the Bush Administration. The NCLB's primary goal was to raise educational achievement scores and close racial and ethnic achievement gaps in schools across America. However, the complex requirements failed to achieve their goals and proved many negative consequences that harmed students the most. As educators fought to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), African American students were underrepresented in Advanced Placement programs.

The consequences were narrowed down to curriculum and instruction and inappropriate high-stakes testing of low-level students, including testing special needs and English language learners and high-stakes testing of students left behind in America's schools of color living in low socioeconomic communities. The NCLB intended to improve all students' test scores and prepare parents with more educational choices and highly qualified teachers. Additionally, the NCLB failed to address the problems of equal educational resources across all schools, especially in the urban areas where the shortage of well-prepared teachers creates high demand.

### **African American Access, Equity, and Entrance in AP Programs**

There has been a significant increase in the number of Black students taking AP courses in high school over the past two decades. There has been a vast increase in the number of African American students enrolled in high school AP courses. In 1952, Ford Foundation leaders discovered that the most advanced students in high school were studying precisely the same material as students in many entry-level college courses and, as a result, developed the concept of advanced placement. Through its fund, the Ford

Foundation began to produce an AP curriculum. Then in the Fall of 1954, the College Board assumed control of the AP program. Seven pilot high schools, in cooperation with 12 colleges, began offering AP classes. In 1956, the College Board administered the first AP exams in 10 separate academic disciplines. That year about 1,000 students took approximately 2,000 AP tests.

In 1985, only 2,768 African American students took AP courses in the United States, which was 1% of the 270,000 AP students. According to the College Board in 1990, some 6,800 African American students participated in AP programs. Although providing an opportunity for more African Americans to qualify for more vital higher learning institutions, the AP test opportunity is likely to be a distinct disadvantage for them compared to Whites in their ability to pay for college because of vast racial wealth and income inequalities.

Researchers have recognized racial and equitable disproportionalities in gifted services since the 1990s. (Grissom et al., 2015; Kennedy, 2013). A survey conducted in 1989 by the United States Office for Civil Rights found that 6% of students were placed in gifted programs. By 1990, students enrolled in gifted programs rose to 6.6%.

According to the College Board, in 1997, the number of African American students who enrolled in AP courses increased more than four times from preceding years. African Americans took 34,514 AP exams, up more than fivefold from 1990. In 2007, 698,182 African American students took 2 million AP exams in 37 different subjects. Also, in 2007 the number of AP exams taken by African American students had jumped to 113,590, which is almost 17 times the number of exams that were administered to African American students in 1990 (College Board, 2008).

Additionally, in 2007, 51,423 African American students participated in the AP program. Therefore, each African American student took, on average, 2.2 AP tests. From 2006 to 2007, there was a 20% increase in the number of AP examinations taken by African American students (College Board, 2008). In 2010, however, Black students were still underrepresented. The percentage of students who were African American was 3.9%. Despite improvements in the gifted assignment's disproportionalities, race and inequity continued to persist in advance placement and gifted and talented programs.

According to the U. S. Department of Civil Rights Data Collection (2013-2014), students in AP and gifted courses have access to high-rigorous programs, such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). African American and Latino high school students have less access to high-rigor courses than White students. Of all high schools with high African American and Latino student enrollment, only 33% offered calculus, 48% provided physics, 65% offered chemistry, and 71% offered Algebra II. This Civil Rights data also compared high schools with low African American and Latino student enrollment. They represented fewer than 37% enrolled in these high-rigorous courses compared to more than half of White students.

Additionally, female students of color are disproportionately underrepresented in these courses. Likewise, Native American girls, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander girls, and Black girls are least likely to attend high schools with such high-rigor classes as chemistry, calculus, and physics. Also, English Language Learners and students with disabilities are underrepresented in high-rigor and AP courses. (U. S. Department of Civil Rights Data Collection, 2013–2014).

The College Board claims the PSAT is one of the most reliable tools used to measure student success in AP classes. The PSAT is a national test given during the students' sophomore year of high school (College Board, 2016). The PSAT was first administered in 1959 to prepare students for college entrance requirements and measure their critical reading and math skills (College Board, 2016). The PSAT and AP statistics under the College Board's direction indicate that thousands of eligible Black students do not take available AP courses for which they qualified. More successful efforts could increase Black students who take AP courses and receive passing scores on AP exams if this assessment is accurate and equitable. Based on the PSAT results in 2013, more than 300,000 Black students qualified for at least one AP class (College Board, 2016); however, only a little over 88,000 took an AP class. Trevor Packer, executive director of the AP program for The College Board, said the AP program's racial gap stems from systemic problems that must be fixed beginning at the elementary and middle school levels.

According to Harvard's Civil Rights Project (2004), African American students are half as likely as Caucasians to be put in Honors or Advanced Placement (AP) English or Math classes and 2.4% more likely than Caucasians to be put in remedial classes. Even when African American students demonstrate equal ability with their White counterparts, they are less likely to be placed in accelerated classes. Students who enroll in AP courses in high school are eligible to take the corresponding AP examination and earn college credit for scores above a minimum threshold. Given the importance of being academically prepared for college coursework, many African American students have not

been exposed to the curriculum necessary to succeed in college (Singleton et al., 2008, p. 14).

Grissom and Redding (2016) conducted a study using a national sample of 21,260 kindergarten students of color who were underrepresented in gifted programs compared to White students. Grissom and Redding uncovered evidence that African American students in classrooms with non-African American teachers are less likely to receive Gifted reading services in subsequent years. Grissom and Redding also found that the likelihood of assigning high-achieving Black students with White students was low because it diverted gifted services from other White students who may benefit from the program regardless of their gifted scores (Grissom & Redding, 2016).

### **African American Teacher Recruitment and Retention**

To address the urgency to diversify the causes of underrepresentation of teaching professionals in public schools, the United States government implemented several political policies, such as the 50 States Teacher Equity Strategies, Every Student Succeeds Act, the President's FY17 Budget Request, in state budgets, and other initiatives (Sun, 2018) to address the diversity dilemma. While the government and public conjunctively to resolve the lack of diversification in the teaching workforce, Goldhaber et al. (2015) affirmed that the problem emerged from "the demographic change in student populations, potential benefits from a diverse teacher workforce for student learning outcomes, and popular perceptions that African American teachers have a higher turnover rate" (p. 1).

The teaching profession does not demonstrate an equal and diverse teacher-student ratio. Variations in minority student populations have risen, but the recruitment



and retention of minority teachers have not grown comparatively (Ulrich, 2014). As a result, the U.S. Department of Education (2016) generated interest in racial representation in the teacher labor force.

Partelow et al. (2017) agreed that for the past 30 years, diversity in the teacher workforce, particularly African American teachers, has been the subject of discussion. Additionally, several researchers (Grissom et al., 2015) posited that a diverse teacher labor force is needed and beneficial to every student, especially African American students. Grissom et al. noted that African American teachers have more patience, compassion, and cultural sensitivity with African American students. Geiger (2018) concurred with Grissom et al. and contended African American teachers are much more apt to seeing potential, intelligence, and talent in African American students, which leads to these teachers referring African American students for gifted and AP classes.

An increasing body of research proves that teachers of color provide benefits to all students, including students of color (Bryan & Ford, 2014; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Several studies have found that teachers of color boost the academic performance of students of color (Bryan & Ford, 2014; Carver-Thomas; Darling-Hammond, 2017). One such study by Carver-Thomas (2018) found that Black students benefited from having a Black teacher for just 1 year in elementary school, especially for low-income families. Students of color also experience social-emotional and nonacademic benefits to having teachers of color, such as fewer unexcused absences and lower likelihoods of chronic absenteeism and suspension. Teachers' influences also include improved reading and mathematics test scores, improved graduation rates, and high aspirations to attend college (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

Another study revealed that minority teachers are valuable for poverty-stricken students (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond discovered numerous minority teachers were asked to instruct in poverty-stricken communities because principals were challenged enticing these teachers to teach at their schools. Indeed, “three in four teachers of color work in the quarter of schools serving the most students of color nationally” (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 19). Minority teachers have a vital “role in filling gaps in these schools, and whether they decide to remain in teaching has significant impacts on students of color” (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 20). However, some Caucasian students indicated they like the teachers’ classrooms with the high academic standards and supportive learning environment.

Additional research shows that retaining veteran minority teacher retention is vital to reduce all teachers' shortages, including minority male teachers (Henfield et al., 2014). There is a pressing need to increase the number of Black male teachers in AP and gifted courses “as so many gifted children from all racial and gender backgrounds can and do benefit from their presence in the classroom” (Henfield et al., 2014, p. 148). National calls must encourage and make Black male teachers' presence in gifted classrooms a priority effort that must be developed during the preservice and recruitment process (Henfield et al., 2014).

### **African American Teachers’ Influence on African American Students**

Prior research studies (Simon et al., 2015; Villegas et al., 2012) demonstrated that African American students taught by same-race teachers are the recipients of more favorable behavioral evaluations than students who are not taught by African American

teachers. Many of these findings prove that non-race teachers, White, are racially biased stemming from racial and academic stereotypes. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2019), in 2015–2016, 80% of the teaching population was comprised of Whites, 9% Hispanic, 7% Black, and 2% Asian compared to the percentages in 2003-2004: 83% White, 6% Hispanic, 8% Black, and 1% Asian.

Past studies on racial disparity consistently reported that African American students are at a disadvantage more than their White classmates when taught by non-African American teachers. McGrady and Reynolds (2013) conducted an Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS) of Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White 10th graders. Their study confirmed that the effects of racial mismatches in the classroom often depended on the racial or ethnic statuses of both the teacher and students. McGrady and Reynold's (2013) analysis of Asian students found that “Asian students were viewed more positively than White students, while African American students were viewed more negatively than Asians, Whites, and Hispanics” (p. 5). However, the perceptions of Hispanic students were similar for those of Caucasian students. McGrady and Reynolds's (2013) study suggested that “racial mismatch contributes to the reproduction of inequality across generations because it complicates classroom interactions and undermines African American students' academic achievements” (p. 7).

In another study, Peterson et al. (2016) examined the effect of teacher's clear ethnic-based expectations for academic achievement and implicit prejudiced attitudes across ethnic groups. They conducted a survey consisting of 38 teachers. Peterson et al. (2016) explained that the study was designed to “access the ethnic stereotypes associated with academic achievement and failure among ethnic groups, and vital findings were

students benefited academically when their teachers favored the same ethnic background; teachers' explicit expectations did not change related to ethnic groups” (p. 125).

According to Peterson et al., most research on teacher expectations and implicit attitudes relied on explicit expectations measures. However, the teacher's inherent prejudices and attitudes toward students related to student end-of-year math scores more so than their reading scores (Peterson et al., 2016).

### **African American Students Underrepresentation in AP Programs**

The Black and White perceptions of being gifted and talented is a pertinent educational issue in this country. The College Board's AP Program has a strong academic curriculum to raise student achievement. However, African American students feel they are underrepresented (College Board, 2018). The College Board's AP Program provides all students the opportunity to facilitate their own college choices, financial budgeting, an opportunity for test practice, and acceptance into postsecondary education (College Board, 2018). Although this program has been in existence for decades, there remains an underrepresentation of African American students in AP and gifted classes.

In 2015, Evans conducted a study to explore African American students' underrepresentation in gifted and AP programs. Evans (2015) focused on the barriers students said hindered their participation in AP or gifted classes. Evans interviewed five students, four males and one female, for this study. Evans' study drew findings from the methodology of narrative inquiry. The study provided a platform through narrative inquiry so that African American students could share their perceptions and experiences about the academic and racial barriers they perceived that hindered them from wanting to enroll or be in gifted or AP classes. In her narrative inquiry study, Evans found that

students have various misconceptions about gifted and AP courses. Other findings showed that African American students feared being the only minority in the program and had little or no encouragement from teachers and counselors not of color (Evans, 2015).

Finding a place to belong may be a challenging dream for many youths in AP programs. Being an accelerated learner typically places African American students in the spotlight but being an accelerated learner in AP programs has many different concerns (Ford, 2013). A concern is how peers and friends view an African American student in AP programs. A second concern is that AP programs are somewhat of a self-contained program where AP African American students seldom experience opportunities to associate with no-AP African American peers (Ford, 2013). However, this becomes difficult when the African American students are alienated from their culture because of preconceived notions of them "acting White," which is a misrepresentation of their African American culture (Ford, 2013).

The term "acting White is what African American students in gifted and AP courses are often labeled by their peers in nontraditional subjects" (Nasir et al., 2015, p. 187). Some characteristics of "acting White are speaking properly, getting good grades in school, raising hands to contribute to the class discussion, and the student's choice to excel" (Nasir et al., 2015, p. 188). Nasir et al. conducted a study to investigate the effect of AP and gifted students of color being unfairly labeled by others in their culture; findings conveyed the term acting White had at least some negative effect on the achievement motivation of the AP and gifted African American students. Some students

were reluctant to try their best academically in the classrooms and to speak up and answer questions.

According to Davis (2014), "tracking is a good example to delineate elements that segregate students in ability groups and thus also imposes racially correlated opportunities to learn is a notorious structural contributor to the achievement gap" (p. 402). Tracking is a method that significantly correlates with performance scores on AP tests. Students are tracked or organized into small groups within categories based on their performance scores before being placed in AP courses. Often, tracking is used to place students into classes based on their standardized test scores and GPAs. Tracking is a major factor in the achievement gap between African Americans and other races (Davis, 2014). Tracking may occur under the pretense the students are placed together in one class to preclude them from disrupting the more capable students in the classroom setting. The premise is often misleading and false. Further, numerous Black students "who are tracked and placed in the same classes together year after year have no desire to become any better than what the school system has already told them that they can be" (Davis, 2014, p. 427).

Card and Giuliano (2014) also studied the effects of tracking gifted students in a large Eastern school district. District leaders mandated that every single gifted student in fourth and fifth grades be enrolled in separate gifted classes for high achievers. Card and Giuliano (2014) "found significant positive effects for high achievers in the program, particularly for low-income Black and Hispanic students" (p. 14). The two researchers contended that the performance scores could significantly increase even in the most impoverished neighborhoods if tracking is implemented correctly. Card and Giuliano's

findings suggested “that a comprehensive tracking program could boost performance scores if schools established a separate classroom for the top-performing students in each school” (p. 34).

Deardorff (2009) conducted the first national study in the United States on intercultural competence. From this national study, Deardorff organized elements of intercultural competence into different categories. Some categories are attitudes, knowledge, skills, internal and external outcomes. The aim of the categories was to guide efforts in developing and accessing individuals' intercultural competence. Educators can hold professional development courses to teach intercultural competence. Professional development in intercultural competence will help teachers identify students who feel alienated from their race. This professional development can also be a beneficial tool to close the achievement gap between African American students who have teachers of other races teaching them in their AP courses.

According to Deardorff and Jones (2012), fostering intercultural competence is for the entire life to strive to achieve full intercultural competent. Further, the process of developing intercultural competence becomes is accelerated when there are thoughtfulness and personal and professional reflections daily. Thus, more than knowledge is required. Knowledge must be used concurrently with the requisite attitudes of openness, curiosity, and respect among students and teachers.

### **Summary of the Literature**

Ladson-Billings (1998) authored the theory and suggested that the CRT could be used to analyze society and culture to the various classifications of race, law, and power. Ladson-Billings explained that the CRT was a counteractive imitation of the Critical Law

Studies (CLS) movement. The CLS movement did not address or acknowledge that race was a critical element toward legal systems (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The CRT was designed to positively influence teachers and students, particularly those of African descent.

Advanced Placement Course Programs were created to enhance gifted students' educational experience as they transitioned from high school to college. An Advanced Placement course is a course formulated by the College Board starting in the mid-1950s. The purpose of the college-level courses was to bridge the gap between high school and college. Students can complete a college-level introductory course in the AP course program while they are in high school. Students will be awarded college credit for the class when they pass the AP exam at the end of the course (College Board, 2018; Grissom et al., 2015).

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### **Research Questions**

The study had six qualitative research questions aligned with the principles of the

Critical Race Theory. The questions were suggested for investigation in the research of Ladson-Billings (1998) and McLauren (1994).

1. What were the perceptions of teachers as it pertains to the underrepresentation of African American teachers teaching AP courses in high schools in an urban school district in South Florida?

2. How did teachers perceive the district's practice of recruiting African American teachers to instruct AP classes in high schools in an urban school district in South Florida?

3. How did teachers perceive the district's practice of retaining African American teachers to instruct AP classes in high schools in an urban high school in South Florida?

4. How did African American teachers perceive and describe the benefits of being an AP teacher in an urban school district in South Florida?

5. How did African American teachers perceive and describe the challenges of being an AP teacher in an urban school district in South Florida?

6. What factors were perceived to be related to the influences of students in AP courses that were critical to the recruitment and retention of African American teachers in an urban school district in South Florida?

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Aim of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate the phenomenon of recruiting and retaining African American teachers to teach AP courses in an urban school district in South Florida where the majority of AP teachers were Caucasian and Hispanic American. This research study was intended to uncover reasons for and solutions to the underrepresentation of African Americans teaching these classes. Additionally, this study also aimed to uncover the factors in the educational environment that contributed to the views of teachers who teach or have taught AP Capstone courses.

### **Qualitative Research Approach**

Phenomenology was an approach that qualitative researchers used that focused on the commonality of lived experiences within their study participants. Phenomenology was deeply rooted in the words of philosophers, such as Kant, Heidegger, Husserl, and Moussakas. Moustakas (1994), who was known as the creators of phenomenology, posited that research should focus on the whole experience and search for the essences of the incidents. Moustakas also viewed human behaviors and experiences as an inseparable relationship between the people experiencing the lived experiences. On the other hand, Husserl believed that extricating science from philosophy was the key to directing attention towards connecting lived experiences (Oberg & Bell, 2012).

This phenomenological study was conducted from the perspective of 15 high school teachers in the urban school district. Teachers at multiple high schools were targeted as research participants. The data were collected from interviews with high school teachers who taught AP courses. These procedures lent themselves to Husserl's

"transcendental" style of phenomenology. Husserl's phenomenology style became known as "transcendental" because he viewed consciousness, and its structures as separate from specific lived experiences and thoughts (Berg, 2015). According to Oberg and Bell (2012), one of Husserl's critical premises was that our everyday actions were filled with meanings that appeared to us through lived experiences. The core of this investigation shed light on the perceptions and lived experiences of the African American teachers who teach AP and gifted courses.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were 15 purposefully selected diverse teachers of AP courses at multiple senior high schools located in an urban school district in a southern state. This study's participants were asked based on their experiences and direct involvement with teaching or supervising AP courses in any subject. Participants were selected using the qualitative sampling procedures called purposeful sampling and criterion sampling. These two types of sampling strategies were utilized in this study based on Creswell's works (2013). Purposeful sampling involved selecting and identifying individuals who were knowledgeable about or had experiences with the central phenomenon. Using a purposeful sampling methodology allowed maximum opportunities for comparative analysis of teachers with various experiences and backgrounds with improving recruitment and retention strategies.

Criterion sampling was another strategy that was used in this study since all participants underwent the same experience. Individuals were selected based on the assumption that they possessed the same knowledge and experiences of this phenomenon. This study followed this protocol to achieve data saturation (Creswell, 2013).

Additionally, every teacher's professional experience was diverse due to levels of education, certifications, and experience in teaching AP courses. Most schools in this school district were similar in size, socioeconomic status, and grade levels. Students were placed into AP classes based on the students' AP test scores from the previous year and or gifted levels. Teachers were interviewed about their lived experiences by answering several research questions. Hence, data from the teacher interviews facilitated subsequent data analysis. Furthermore, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all participants.

### **Data Collection and Instruments**

Semi-structured interviews were utilized extensively in this qualitative research. Each semi-structured interview took 30 to 60 minutes. These semi-structured interviews followed specific protocols to keep the interview focused on the topic. Interviews were more comprehensively useful to achieve optimum use of the interview time. Moustakas (1994) supported the idea that interviews in a phenomenological study involved an informal interaction process by asking open-ended questions. The interviews were recorded to capture the essence of the responses. Recording the interview made it easier for the researcher to focus on the participants' interview and verbal cues.

Creswell (2013) explained that the researcher was a crucial instrument in qualitative research when the researcher collected information independently (p. 179). Interviewing in a qualitative study was a method used to extract relevant information from the interviewee's perspective. Interviews were a method of investigation that allowed a researcher to understand the lived experiences of the participants involved in a phenomenon. The researcher created questions with a teacher who was not considered for

this study to ensure the interviews were clear and precise. A practice interview with another teacher, not in the study, was conducted to ascertain if the interview questions and answers might be completed within the 60 minutes that would be allotted and whether the teacher clearly understood them.

### **Procedures**

Before any research was conducted, it was approved by the university's Instructional Review Board (IRB). Approval from the IRB ensured that the participants' rights in this study were protected, and an informed consent was received from participants who choose to participate in the study (Creswell, 2013). After receiving IRB approval for this study and permission from the district superintendent, supervisors, and principals at the targeted schools, participants were solicited to participate in this research study to gain their perceptions on retaining and recruiting African American teachers for AP and gifted programs.

In phenomenological studies, Duke (1984) recommended 3–10 subjects, Polkinghorn (1989) suggested a range of 3–25, and Creswell (2013) recommended 3–10 participants but no more than 25. However, Morse (2000) suggested at least 6 participants in a phenomenological study is satisfactory. The 15 diverse participants in this study were carefully chosen by purposeful and criterion sampling that ensured that the interviewees had experienced the phenomenon in question.

Procedures for this research study were explained in occurrences of weeks. During Weeks one and two of this study, a participant's flyer to solicit teachers to participate in this study was emailed to approximately 50 teachers through the school district's email (Appendix A). The teachers were given 2 weeks to respond after

receiving the initial invitation. If the potential participants did not respond within the allotted time, a follow-up email was sent to out to all potential participants during Week three. At the end of Week 3, unresponsive participants' names were immediately removed from the list along with the remaining participants who stated that they no longer wanted to be a participant in this phenomenological study. Their names were omitted from the email list, and no further emails were sent out to them.

As for participants who agreed to participate, arrangements were made to schedule a date and time, via email, to complete a consent form, demographic survey, and interview protocol (Appendix B) during Week 4. The interview protocol contained the demographic information and the questions the researcher asked the interviewee during the interview. The researcher encouraged the snowball approach to forward recruitment to other teachers who teach AP or gifted courses. As stated earlier, before administering any interview at any school site, district approval and permission was needed from the entities mentioned.

Upon agreement, each participant was emailed a Zoom link with their scheduled interview date and time during Week 5. As stated earlier, each interview was conducted via Zoom, then audiotaped and transcribed verbatim for data analysis immediately following the interview beginning Week 6 and continued throughout Week 7. The interviews were administered for the next 2 weeks. Afterwards, taped scripts were created to develop themes to answer the research questions during Week 8.

Amid Weeks 9 and 10, member checking was offered to each participant after their interview was transcribed. Member checking was also used after having a chance to review the audiotaped interview to allow the researcher to verify the recorded interview's

accuracy. Concurrently, during Weeks eleven and twelve, the researcher drew final conclusions from all interviews, transcriptions, themes, and member checking.

### **Data Analysis**

For this phenomenological study, the essence of the participants' lived experiences with AP programs in an urban school district in a southern state was highlighted during a thorough reading of the transcribed interviews and the recorded interview notes. To do this, the researcher first read the interview notes from each participant and listened to the audio recordings of the interviews repeatedly. Next, the researcher carefully examined all data to identify essential and recurring patterns. By categorizing, the researcher examined how the patterns and categories are interrelated (Creswell, 2013). The individual experiences and the context of those experiences will be investigated to identify common themes from the interviews. After identifying common themes, the researcher analyzed the data to create textual and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2013).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The use of human subjects was one of the most important ethical considerations in research. The Covid-19 pandemic affected the way that research was conducted. Researchers were learning how to conduct research studies more remotely using Zoom, Skype, and WhatsApp. Jowette (2020) contended that many researchers had to suspend data collection or redesign their study's social-distancing measures and protect the participants' rights.

The IRB approved the study before any interviews were conducted. After approval, the researcher received permission from the school district, the principal of



each school, and the people who elected to participate in this study. To ensure that no human rights were violated, the researcher required participants to read and sign an informed consent letter, including a statement that all participants were fully informed and that they were participating at their own free will. The letter also provided information regarding the study's purpose, procedures, and how the study would be conducted. Furthermore, the researcher was prepared to conduct Zoom interviews outside of working hours because time was one of the main factors some participants may have decided not to participate in this study. In doing this, the research did not disturb the school site or instructional time. Since the data was gathered with a small number of participants, the researcher confirmed if saturation occurred after all the interviews.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trust is an essential aspect of a phenomenological study. Trustworthiness contributed to the validity of the study. The primary focus of trustworthiness was to ensure the validity of the participants' data in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Anney, 2014). Trustworthiness had to be demonstrated by the professional atmosphere the researcher created for individual participants during their face-to-face interviews and other lines of questioning.

### ***Credibility***

Many different sources are needed for data collection to enhance credibility. Member checking was used in qualitative research to establish credibility in trustworthiness (Birt et al., 2014). Within an objectivist epistemology, members checking their interview transcripts enhanced the data's accuracy potentially (Birt et al., 2016). To ensure credibility and increase of the research study's trustworthiness, the researcher

provided a thorough description of the process of collecting and analyzing data and also provided questions before conducting the semi structured interviews. Additionally, all questions were checked and examined by a peer expert not involved in this study as well as members checking the transcripts to assure credibility of the data collected.

### ***Member Checking***

Moreover, as a backup, the researcher took notes during the interviews and had other questions on hand to ask probing questions. Member-checking validated the research data and checked the accuracy of information from each interview (Anney, 2014). Member checks related to the data's accuracy took place "on the spot" at the end of each interview (Anney, 2014, p. 277). Member-checking allowed the interviewee to look over and validate whether the interview information was complete and accurate. Conducting a member check also helped to establish trustworthiness and credibility within this study (Anney, 2014). Since this was a small study, data were analyzed by hand. Each interview was transcribed into a computer file for analysis. Microsoft Word and Excel software helped organize and transcribe the data from the interviews. After all data were collected from the interviews; the researcher began to identify the recurring categories, patterns, and themes.

### ***Confirmability***

Likewise, confirmability related to how the researcher showed the process used for interpretation after participants are interviewed (Anney, 2014). Participants in this phenomenological study were provided the opportunity to share feedback after reviewing the transcripts to ensure their responses via member checking. All participants agreed upon the accuracy of the contents of the transcript. The researcher also allowed the

teachers to elaborate after listening to and reading the transcripts, which added more credibility to their perspectives (Anney, 2014).

### **Potential Research Bias**

Potential research bias is a critical issue in qualitative research. As the interviewer, the researcher took extraordinary efforts to establish strong relationships with the participants to delve deeply into the phenomenon studied (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). One strategy that was used in this phenomenological study was known as epoché or bracketing. The bracketing method stressed the researcher's importance to be open-minded about existing prior knowledge, experiences, biases, and assumptions related to this study (Tufford & Newman, 2012). The bracketing method protected the researcher from engaging with participants' experiences by unearthing personal experiences. Bracketing also protected researchers and participants if the interview encountered emotionally charged topics, such as The Critical Race Theory (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

### ***Bracketing***

Philosopher Edmund Husserl introduced the concept of bracketing into the phenomenological study to avoid researcher biases, beliefs, theories, or preconceived ideas about lived experiences (Oberg & Bell, 2012). The use of bracketing helped the researcher focus on the research questions while using personal experiences that enhanced questions for further data collection. The researcher's preconceptions and biases were bracketed to focus solely on the participating teachers' perceptions and experiences since the researcher had the experience and possessed knowledge as an AP Capstone Teacher.

### *Transferability*

To overcome the potential limitations of this study, the researcher first had a solid foundation of the philosophical principles of phenomenology. Secondly, the researcher carefully selected the participants to ensure that they all had experienced the phenomenon. Thirdly, the researcher developed a trusting relationship to make the participants feel comfortable while probing into their personal lives to better understand their perspectives on recruiting and retaining African American teachers of AP courses.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### Introduction

In this chapter is a demographic description of the study's 15 participants. Additionally, there is a data analysis section. The data analysis section is organized by research questions. The section has a restatement of the research questions, interview questions aligned with each of the six research questions, and categories that emerged from the interview data. Further, in the section are emergent themes from the interview data. There are statements from responders that are representative of some themes. The data analysis section ends with answering each research question using a summary of the themes.

### Participants

Fifteen participants were interviewed. Pseudonyms instead of names were used to identify participants and to ensure confidentiality. The pseudonyms were Participants A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, and O. The participants instructed varied high AP courses such as AP French, Language and Composition, Environmental Science, U.S. Government, Calculus, Biology, Literature, Capstone Seminar, and Capstone Research. The participants taught one or more AP high school courses, honors courses, and/or regular education courses. Examples of the honors courses and regular education courses encompass Spanish, Precalculus, U. S. Government, Economics, French I and II, Honors Environmental Science, Honors Physics, Honors English I and II, Biology I honors, and Honors English II.

In the Table, a description of additional demographics of the responding AP participants is included.

**Table***Demographics of Responding Participants (N = 15)*

Demographic	Number
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	6
Female	9
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
African American	5
Caucasian	4
Asian American	1
Hispanic American	4
Haitian	1
<b>Highest degree earned</b>	
Bachelor	7
Master	6
Specialist	1
Doctorate	1
<b>Total years teaching in school district</b>	
1–5 years	6
6–10 years	3
11–15 years	2
16–20 years	2
21–25 years	2
Greater than 25	

Demographics in the table included gender, ethnicity, highest degree earned, and total time teaching in the research setting district. An examination of the table showed most teachers were female (9). Five teachers were African American; four were Caucasian, and four were Hispanic American. Seven teachers' highest degree earned was the bachelor's degree, while six teachers earned the master's degree. Most teachers (6) taught in the research setting district for 1–5 years.

## **Data Analysis for Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 is, what are the perceptions of teachers as these perceptions pertain to the underrepresentation of African American teachers teaching AP courses in high schools in an urban school district in South Florida? Virtual Interview Questions 1, 7, 10, 11, and 12 collected data for Research Question 1. The following is a category and five themes that emerged from the six interview questions. Additionally, statements from responders are specified that are representative of some themes.

### ***Category: Underrepresentation of African American Teachers in AP Courses***

#### ***Themes***

Five themes emerged from the interview data associated with Virtual Interview Questions 1, 7, 10, 11, and 12. The first theme is the underrepresentation of African American AP teachers is exacerbated by only a few preservice teachers in secondary teacher education programs at many large universities. The second theme is the underrepresentation of African American AP teachers in the urban high schools is partly because only a few African American AP teachers desired to teach AP courses. The third theme conveyed most participants did not know why African American AP teachers were underrepresented in teaching AP courses. The fourth theme was most teachers had no idea of how many African American AP teachers taught at the high schools.

Theme 5 suggested most AP teachers, from any ethnic group, did not volunteer to teach AP courses. The teachers were involuntarily assigned to teach AP courses by their current high school administrators. Support for Theme 5 came from the numerical responses to Interview Question 1. Responses to Interview Question 1 revealed 8 of 15 teachers became AP teachers through involuntary placement by their administration.

Additionally, three teachers desired and volunteered to teach AP courses. One teacher was recommended by a previous administrator. Two teachers reluctantly decided to assume teaching the APA courses because the courses had no assigned teachers.

Statements of one responder suggested the first theme. The responder said,

universities, particularly large predominantly Caucasian universities, with secondary teacher education programs, were not sufficiently promoting diversity in education relative to preparations to teach AP courses. Additionally, the universities' enrollment had only a small number of minorities as preservice teachers. Few scholarships were awarded to the minority students in the teacher education programs (T. Allen, personal communication, November 15, 2022).

For the second theme, a participant said,

I think any teachers in my school might capably teach AP courses, but many African American teachers do not want to teach these courses. I think the administrators need to encourage more African American teachers to instruct AP courses. Perhaps some type of extra incentive or support from the administration for these minority teachers may be helpful. Administrators might encourage them to attend the College Board sponsored Advanced Placement Symposium, Summer Institute, and College-Bound Advanced Placement professional development sessions. The thinking of the current administration is all teachers in the high schools have equal opportunities to teach AP courses (T. Allen, personal communication, November 15, 2022).

With the third theme, representative statements from various participants were, "I have not conducted sufficient research on the topic to speak on it; I do not know; without



statistics, I cannot provide a responsible answer; not sure.” Varied statements reflecting Theme 4 are, I am not aware of any African American AP teachers at my school; not sure; not known; that I do not know.” As stated, Theme 5 was supported by the numerical findings from Interview Question 1.

### ***Answer to Research Question 1***

To answer Research Question 1 with the analyzed data, there are few African American preservice teachers in teacher education programs at many large predominantly Caucasian universities with secondary teacher education programs. These universities have few scholarship programs for African American preservice teachers. Additionally, some African American AP teachers have little interest in instructing AP courses. Most AP teachers in high schools do not focus on the issue of the underrepresentation of African American AP teachers. In fact, many AP teachers have no clue of why African American AP teachers are underrepresented and how many African American teachers are teaching AP courses at their high schools.

### **Data Analysis for Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 is, how do teachers perceive the district’s practice of recruiting African American teachers to instruct AP courses in high schools in an urban school district in South Florida? Virtual Interview Questions 1, 7, 8, 11, and 12 collected data for Research Question 2. The following is a category and three themes that emerged from these five interview questions. Likewise, statements from responders are included that are representative of some themes.

*Category: Recruiting African American Teachers to Instruct AP Classes*

*Themes*

There are three emergent themes associated with Virtual Interview Questions 1, 7, 8, 11, and 12. The first theme is there is no awareness of any district plans or incentives to recruit African American AP teachers. The second theme is there are no specific plans or incentives promulgated by the high school administrators to recruit African American AP teachers but there is a committee to recruit diverse students for the AP courses. The third theme is some school administrators say they have an open-door policy if any African American teachers are interested in teaching the AP courses.

Consistent with the initial theme a participant reported,

there are no specific plans for this type of recruitment that I am cognizant of at this point in time! I do not know of any district plans or incentives being implemented to recruit African American teachers for AP courses. Yet, I will do more research and ask this question to find out for sure (T. Allen, personal communication, November 15, 2022).

For the second theme representative statements were, “for AP teacher recruitment, I am not aware of any plans initiated by the high schools for African American AP teachers’ recruitment; we have a committee for recruitment of students.”

Suggestive of the third theme, it was reported that,

our high school administration has an open-door policy so I am sure if any teachers are interested in teaching AP courses, they can provide ideas to the administration and recruit students for their AP courses. I am in the process of reopening the AP Government course for next year and reestablishing the AP

Psychology course for the Social Studies Department. If anything, incentives come from the state more than anywhere else. I have been in high schools where I was the only African American teacher and/or the only African American teacher teaching AP courses. No effort was made to recruit or hire more African American teachers at those previous locations.

### ***Answer to Research Question 2***

To answer Research Question 2 with the findings, teachers' responses on the district's practice of recruiting African American teachers to instruct AP courses in high schools show there is no awareness of any district or high school plans or incentives to recruit African American AP teachers. There is an open-door policy with the high school administration if African American teachers are interested in teaching the AP courses.

### **Data Analysis for Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 is, how do teachers perceive the district's practice of retention of African American teachers who instruct AP courses in high schools in an urban high school in South Florida? Virtual Interview Questions 3, 5, 7, and 14 collected data for Research Question 3. The following is a category and two themes that emerged from the four interview questions. Additionally, statements from responders are included that are representative of some themes.

#### ***Category: Retaining African American Teachers to instruct AP Classes***

##### ***Themes***

Two emergent themes were connected with Virtual Interview Questions 3, 5, 7, and 14. The first theme is there is no awareness of any district retention plans for African American AP teachers. The second theme is some schools supply all materials and

resources needed in the AP courses to help students perform their classroom work, and some schools do not supply the necessary materials and resources. Ensuring teachers acquired all resources to successfully instruct AP courses is a huge retention incentive for all AP teachers. Suggestive of the initial theme several different responders reported, “I am not aware of any retention plans in the high schools. I really do not know; I have no idea about any retention plans for African American AP teachers in the district.”

Reflective of the second theme, a responder said,

I am not aware of anything specific, but as an African American AP teacher I know my school has been accommodating in the past for any needed resources and materials in AP courses. I am informed by colleagues in AP programs at other schools of their struggles to acquire sorely needed resources and materials. My belief is if an AP instructor has the support of the administration, this support goes a long way to building and sustaining the AP culture because of acquisition of these vital resources and materials. In my opinion, sustaining the AP culture does more to retain African American AP teachers than anything else (T. Allen, personal communication, November 15, 2022).

### ***Answer to Research Question 3***

To answer Research Question 3 with the results, most AP teachers are not aware of any district retention plans specifically for African American AP teachers. From a district perspective, the AP programs in some high schools have all the needed materials and resources for the AP courses to help students competently perform their classroom work. There are some high schools that are not supported by the district to acquire the

necessary materials and resources. Ensuring teachers receive all materials and resources to successfully instruct AP courses is a huge retention incentive for all AP teachers.

#### **Data Analysis for Research Question 4**

Research Question 4 is, how do African American teachers perceive and describe the benefits of being AP teachers in an urban school district in South Florida? Virtual Interview Questions 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 14 collected data for Research Question 4. The following is a category and five themes that emerged from the six interview questions. Further, statements from responders are included that are representative of some themes.

#### ***Category: Benefits of Being an AP African American Teacher***

##### ***Themes***

Five themes evolved from the interview data in Virtual Interview Questions 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 14. The first theme is African American AP teachers enjoy teaching all urban students to higher standards and with higher expectations. The second theme is African American AP teachers like to help all urban students make better decisions about universities. The third theme is that these teachers take pride in collaborating with other AP instructors. The fourth theme is these teachers enjoy the freedom to build their own curriculum as AP teachers, and the freedom is rewarding for them. The fifth theme is African American AP teachers like to teach the best and brightest of the urban students, especially academically talented students from poverty communities.

Suggestive of the first theme a participant reported,

as an African American AP instructor, I enjoy exposing students to higher standards of learning and higher expectations in my courses. I like working with students who want to learn. Additionally, by giving them the opportunity and

access to rigorous courses, I better prepare them for college (T. Allen, personal communication, November 15, 2022).

Comments associated with the second theme were,

I enjoy helping students make better decisions about admission to and academic success in universities, working with students who want to learn, and guiding students who desire to attend excellent universities. I feel satisfaction when I teach motivated urban students. I enjoy knowing my students will acquire skills that distinguish them from other university students. There are awesome discussions in my classrooms with the use of critical thinking skills required for successful university students. There is a family-type milieu created in my AP classrooms. The cohesive family environment is supportive of academic success for all students (T. Allen, personal communication, November 15, 2022).

Aligned with the third theme a responder noted,

I pridefully collaborate with other AP instructors, both in my field of study and other fields of study at all high schools. The collaboration enhances my self-efficacy and pedagogy. We meet on a regular basis and share instructional strategies since we have many of the same students. We inspire each other with independent ideas and boost each other's morale. I mentored AP teachers; I am an AP reader (T. Allen, personal communication, November 15, 2022).

Consistent with the fourth theme an African American participant said,

I enjoy the freedom to build my own curriculum as an African American AP teacher. If more courses gave teachers this type of freedom with the curriculum and instruction, we might engender happier students with higher levels of

academic learning and critical thinking skills (T. Allen, personal communication, November 15, 2022).

For the fifth theme, an African American responder said,

there is some pride and ego that is associated with teaching AP courses, and this type of teaching contributes to intrinsic motivation for teachers. I teach some of the best and brightest that the high school has to offer. They choose to enroll in the courses so there is self-motivation and self-interest (some buy-in on their part). I can go much deeper into course content. Obviously, if they pass the courses, the financial benefit provided by the state is also there (T. Allen, personal communication, November 15, 2022).

#### ***Answer to Research Question 4***

To answer Research Question 4 with the analyzed data, interviewed African American AP teachers perceive many benefits of being AP teachers. These teachers enjoy teaching all urban students to higher standards and with higher expectations. They like to help all urban students make better decisions about universities. They take pride in collaborating with other AP instructors. African American teachers enjoy the freedom to build their own curriculum as AP teachers, and the freedom is rewarding for them. They like to teach the best and brightest of the urban students, especially students from poverty communities.

#### **Data Analysis for Research Question 5**

Research Question 5 is, how do African American teachers perceive and describe the challenges of being an AP teacher in an urban school district in South Florida?

Virtual Interview Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, and 12 collected data for Research Question 5.

The following is a category and five themes that emerged from the six interview questions. Additionally, statements from participants are included that are representative of some themes.

***Category: Challenges of Being an African American AP Teacher***

Five themes came from the interview data for Virtual Interview Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, and 12. The first theme is some students, who are instructed by African American AP teachers, do not possess the required level of knowledge to take certain AP courses, and the second theme is there is sometimes insufficient materials, resources, and technologies for some AP courses. The third theme relates to the challenge of motivating students to maintain a high-quality AP level of work throughout the school term. The fourth theme is AP courses cannot exist in a bubble, and the courses must have awareness by stakeholders throughout all high schools and communities. The last theme pertains to the lack of staff and resources at some schools to recruit students for the AP courses.

Indicating the first theme a responding AP teacher said, “the majority of my students do not possess the academic preparations required to be successful in AP French; I have to develop more strategies to enhance their reading, writing, and critical thinking skills.”

For the second theme selected statements are,

certain sorely needed AP materials, resources, and technologies for courses to function effectively do not exist at some schools. There is not enough science equipment for hands-on learning, and the current on-line reading materials are not conducive to supporting critical thinking skills.



Aligned with the third theme a participant stated, “I find it difficult to motivate some students to maintain a high-level of academic work in AP courses for the entire school term. Some students become distracted and lose focus in the lessons.”

With the fourth theme representative statements of the theme are,

being isolated in AP courses is a challenge for some students. The AP culture has to become profoundly ingrained throughout all high schools and communities. Everyone in the schools and communities should be knowledgeable on the pros and cons of AP courses. Students must be aware of the rigor and sacrifices. The emphasis has to be on the high school AP examinations and state-mandated examinations and not on the grade point averages. The emphasis cannot be on the prestige of using AP enrollment to boost entry into universities. Further, there must not be a focus on enrollment in AP courses for students to brag among friends and adults in the communities about their enrollment in these courses (T. Allen, personal communication, November 15, 2022).

Suggestive of the last theme, an interviewed AP teacher revealed in the interview session, there is a lack of staff, resources, and technologies in some schools to recruit teachers who will adequately instruct AP courses. Additionally, there is a scarcity of administrative support. Little administrative support contributes to high student absences, lack of student motivation, and a push for lower-level students to enroll in AP courses. The lower-level students often do not possess the skill sets to be successful in AP courses. School administrators inform teachers to simply use the scaffolding classroom teaching technique, in part, because of the lower-level classroom learners (T. Allen, personal communication, November 15, 2022).

### ***Answer to Research Question 5***

To answer Research Question 5 with the results, there are varied challenges with teaching AP courses. Some students do not possess the required level of knowledge to successfully complete certain AP courses. There may be insufficient materials, resources, and technologies for some AP courses. There is difficulty motivating some students to maintain a high-quality AP level of work throughout the school term. The AP courses cannot exist in a bubble, and the courses must have awareness throughout all high schools and communities. There is a lack of staff and resources at some schools to recruit students for the AP courses.

### **Data Analysis for Research Question 6**

Research Question 6 is, what factors are perceived to be related to the influences of students in AP courses that are critical to the recruitment and retention of African American teachers in an urban school district in South Florida? Virtual Interview Questions 3, 13, and 14 collected data for Research Question 6. The following are a category and four themes that evolved from the three interview questions. Additionally, statements from responding AP teachers are included that are representative of some themes.

#### ***Category: Influence of Students in AP Courses to the Recruitment and Retention of African American AP Teachers***

##### ***Themes***

Four emergent themes were associated with Virtual Interview Questions 3, 13, and 14. The first theme is African American AP teachers are happy at the schools when these teachers perceive their students possess enhanced self-efficacy in passing

examinations. The second theme is the African American AP teachers take pride in helping urban students become well prepared for college success, while the third theme is the African American AP teachers are more motivated to remain at the schools when they witness honor students and academically talented students from poverty communities desiring to enroll in their AP courses. The fourth theme is African American AP teachers are elated to know that more students are exposed to nontraditional courses.

Echoing the first theme it was stated, “based on my experiences I will continue to work at the high school because I perceive my students becoming more confident in passing their AP and state-mandated examinations.”

With the second theme a responder indicated,

as an African American AP instructor, I have become more motivated to work at my school because I enjoy the opportunity to expose by students to college-level standards and facilitate the students’ college readiness. By providing my students the opportunity and access to rigorous AP courses, I better prepare them for college (T. Allen, personal communication, November 15, 2022).

Aligned with the third theme a responder posited, “I am encouraged to stay at my school as an AP teacher when I see honor students and those from low-income communities pass AP courses, and they earn college credit.”

Echoing the fourth theme a participant stated,

before students enrolled in my AP courses, most students in my school’s demographics and the academically talented students from poverty neighborhoods had never been exposed to studying literature. Witnessing an African American

teach literature tapped into an unused mindset potential that intrigued them (T. Allen, personal communication, November 15, 2022).

*Answer to Research Question 6*

To answer Research Question 6 with the analyzed data, there are different factors perceived related to the influences of students in AP courses that are critical to the recruitment and retention of African American AP teachers. A factor is African American AP teachers are happy at the schools when these teachers perceive their students possess enhanced self-efficacy in passing examinations. These teachers take pride in helping urban students become well prepared for college success, and the teachers are more motivated to remain at the schools when they see talented honor students and students from poverty communities desiring to enroll in their AP courses. The African American AP teachers are elated to know more students are exposed to nontraditional AP courses.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

There was historical evidence from the research setting and national evidence from the literature to justify the existence of the problem. In Chapter 5 are implications and a discussion on relevance of the study. There is an interpretation of the findings with the reflections of this researcher. Recommendations for change and future research inquiry are offered followed by limitations. Chapter 5 ends with the conclusions of this researcher.

### **Implications of the Study**

There are seven implications from the study. An implication is because of the growth of AP courses at a significant rate all over the United States, there is a dire need to recruit and retain more African American AP instructors. The rationale is that from the years 2015–2020, the number of AP courses that schools offered doubled, and the number of administered exams more than quadrupled (Samuels, 2020). Further, according to Samuels, in most situations teachers had a significant influence on which students may or may not enroll in their AP courses. Most students who enrolled in AP courses were referred by teachers the students admired and identified with (College Board, 2019). Additionally, the teachers' judgment or influence determined students' experiences and exposure to a rigorous college-level education.

The second implication is an increase in the number of African American teachers instructing AP courses may result in an increase in the number of African American students enrolled in these courses. Rodriguez and McGuire (2019) reported African American teachers had a considerable impact on African American students' decisions to

enroll in AP courses. If African American teachers referred, recommended, or nominated African American students to enroll in AP courses, this opportunity from these teachers of color positively influenced the students' academic experiences at the high schools and universities. African American students' self-efficacy was enhanced. They worked hard to perform up to the AP teachers' expectations in the AP courses and university courses, simply because the teachers believed that these students might master the level of rigor of AP courses and the academic standards of universities (Rodriguez & McGuire, 2019).

Third, an implication is more African American teachers in the high schools facilitate achieving a greater diversity in the teacher labor force. Johnson and Larwin (2020) reported 79% of teachers are Caucasians; 9% are Hispanic Americans; 7% are African Americans, and 2% are Asian-Americans. The remaining teachers are in the other category. Therefore, an increased diversity in the teacher labor force, focusing on an augmented number of African American teachers, is sorely needed in the high schools. Duncheon and Relles (2018) explained African American teachers demonstrated more patience, compassion, and cultural sensitivity with some African American students.

Fourth, an implication is enhanced teacher diversity and an increase in African American teachers may contribute to a decrease in African American teachers' turnover rates in urban high schools, as suggested by Allen et al. (2020). The rationale is the enhanced teacher diversity may benefit African American teachers who experienced feelings of isolation, frustration, and fatigue when there were few African American teachers in their urban high schools. Turnover rates are a key contributor to the shortage of diverse teachers and a vital factor in urban school instability (Allen et al., 2020).

An implication is findings in the dissertation study emphasized the importance of district and site-level administration being heavily involved in the recruitment and retention process of African American AP teachers and serving as the champions for increasing equity and access for minority students and teachers in AP courses. Participants in the dissertation study reported on barriers that might be resolved by concerned and involved district and school administrators. Teachers of AP courses required proper professional development, encouragement, and incentives. They required time and space to collaborate and to share curriculum and instruction strategies. They desired reinforcement from each other (Finn & Scanlan, 2020). Concerned and involved administrators might ensure that AP teachers' concerns are properly and timely addressed.

The sixth implication relates to the present study's findings on the lack of awareness by teacher-colleagues regarding the number of African American AP teachers and the shortage of African American AP teachers in high schools. The results of the dissertation study revealed that many teachers did not know how many African American AP teachers were in their high schools or the influence of these teachers in soliciting African American students to enroll in AP courses. From the present study's findings, there was clarity for the researcher of this dissertation that the lack of awareness was deeply rooted in the research setting district's high school teachers. The lack of awareness furthered hindered the effective recruitment and retention of African American AP teachers.

Seventh, an implication is the need for the district to enhance its partnership with the College Board AP Institute programs and the universities' secondary teacher

preparation programs to provide meaningful and ongoing professional learning. The aim of the learning might be to assure that teachers are teaching AP courses with the appropriate preparations and the rigor required for students to pass AP exams. The district in the present study might partner with the institutes and universities to coordinate and fund additional programs designed to train diverse potential AP teachers while these teachers are enrolled in their secondary teacher education programs.

### **Relevance of the Study**

The present study is relevant because findings from the six research questions may be used to address the shortage of African American AP teachers in urban high schools. Findings may be used to engender district and high school recruiting and retention action plans. The results of the revisions may be more African American teachers with AP courses and more African American students enrolled in the AP courses. These African American teachers will be positive role models who might recruit more minority students in AP courses and inspire the students to excel in the courses and excel in the colleges (Lackey & Lowery, 2020).

The study is relevant because few studies (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods), were conducted that investigated the AP programs from the perspective of the underrepresentation of African American AP teachers (Lackey & Lowery, 2020). Consequently, according to Nelson and Waltz (2019) and Rodriguez and McGuire (2019), the present study addressed a void in the literature. Additionally, the researcher of the dissertation plans to conduct professional development with urban high school teachers and administrators to expose them to the findings and provide guidance on how to use the findings to enhance their teacher recruitment and retention plans. The



professional learning will be based on (a) preferred practices on how to recruit African American teachers and (b) preferred practices on how to retain African American teachers. A significant outcome of the professional learning will be preferred practices that may be used to establish or enhance a recruitment and retention program for the district's high schools. An aim of this researcher is for the findings from the present study to have an immediate impact of alleviating the shortage of African American AP teachers.

Another aim is for the findings to nationally influence the shortage of African American AP teachers. To achieve the second aim, findings from the study's six research questions will be presented at state and national conferences sponsored by professional education associations. Findings will be published in refereed journals such as the *Urban Education*, *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, and the *Educational Researcher*.

### **Interpretation and Reflection**

Research Question 1 is, what are the perceptions of teachers as these perceptions pertain to the underrepresentation of African American teachers teaching AP courses in high schools in an urban school district in South Florida? Findings for Research Question 1 showed there are few African American preservice teachers in teacher education programs at many large predominantly Caucasian universities with secondary teacher education programs. These universities have few scholarship programs for African American preservice teachers. Reflections convey my experiences with universities as a university student and a veteran teacher of greater than 30 years show secondary education teacher education programs require aggressive recruiting and retention plans for African Americans. Currently, in some districts and universities I

know these plans do not exist or the plans are not properly implemented and monitored. Kolluri (2018) concurred with my premises and indicated aggressive and comprehensive plans need to begin with grooming the middle school students to become teachers. Further reflections as an African American AP teacher and Chair of the Language Arts Department (9 years) at an urban high school, the researcher of this dissertation knows the plans must focus on visits to the churches, homes, and other locations in the local communities frequently by African Americans. In the visits, university advisors, counselors, professors, and other recruiters can discuss the benefits and importance of the education field. They might discuss what these universities offer to support the success of African Americans in the secondary education teacher education programs (Kolluri, 2018).

Additionally, findings for Research Question 1 in the present study convey some African American AP teachers have little interest in instructing AP courses. Results convey most AP teachers in high schools do not focus on the issue of the underrepresentation of African American AP teachers. In fact, the researcher of this dissertation experiences as a college instructor and high school AP course teacher convey many AP teachers have no clue of why African American AP teachers are underrepresented and how many African American AP teachers are teaching AP courses at their high schools. Klapproth and Fischer (2020) suggested the school administrations might place more emphasis on discussing the AP programs and AP courses at teacher meetings and while teachers are in their professional learning communities. Consistent with the writings of Klapproth, the researcher of this dissertation believes the discussion must include the need for more minority teachers to teach AP courses. The discussion can

showcase the training, resources, and materials available to support these teachers. Similarly, Wignall (2020) suggested the school administration frequently meet one-on-one with teachers. In the meetings, the administrators may invite and encourage teachers to teach AP courses. Many researchers, such as the researcher of this dissertation, think these invitations should not exclude the minority teachers as indicated in the findings in the present study (Evans, 2019; National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

Research Question 2 is, how do teachers perceive the district's practice of recruiting African American teachers to instruct AP courses in high schools in an urban school district in South Florida? The results for Research Question 2 convey there is no or little awareness of any district or high school plans or incentives to recruit African American AP teachers. There is an open-door policy with the high school administration if African American teachers are interested in teaching the AP courses. The researcher of this dissertation, from her experiences as a high school teacher and department chairperson, knows simply having an open-door policy is insufficient to recruit and retain AP teachers. Potter (2019) explained that not only should there be a comprehensive plan for recruiting and retaining talented and qualified teachers for each subject, but the plan must be reviewed frequently to ensure it is effective. If the plan is not achieving the recruitment and retention goals, the plan must be modified as needed. Extending the premise of Potter (2019), Triplett and Ford (2019) reported that teachers, school board members, parents, and leaders in the communities should be cognizant of the recruitment and retention plans. The researcher of this dissertation knows from her experiences that stakeholders' support and involvement must be genuinely solicited by the school administration. The aim of the awareness and involvement of all stakeholders is to attract

the best teachers to enhance the academic achievement of all students (Rodriguez & McGuire, 2019).

Research Question 3 is, how do teachers perceive the district's practice of retention of African American teachers who instruct AP courses in high schools in an urban high school in South Florida? The analyzed data for this research question convey most AP teachers are not aware of any district retention plans specifically for African American AP teachers. From a district perspective, the programs in some high schools have all the needed materials and resources for the AP courses to help students perform their classroom work. Yet, the researcher of this dissertation can identify some high schools that are not adequately supported by the district to acquire the necessary materials and resources. Ensuring teachers receive all materials and resources to successfully instruct AP courses is a huge retention incentive for all AP teachers (Martinez et al., 2019).

Research Question 4 is, how do African American teachers perceive and describe the benefits of being an AP teacher in an urban school district in South Florida? To answer Research Question 3 with the analyzed data, most African American AP teachers perceive many benefits of being AP teachers. Similar to the researcher of this dissertation in her role as an AP teacher, these teachers enjoy teaching all urban students to higher standards and with higher expectations. They like to help all urban students make better decisions about universities. They take pride in collaborating with other AP instructors. African American teachers enjoy the freedom to build their own curriculum as AP teachers, and the freedom is rewarding for them. They like to teach the best and brightest

of the urban students, especially academically talented students from poverty communities.

De Brey et al. (2019) posited teacher morale is high when teachers enjoy what they are doing. High teacher morale and high teacher self-efficacy are facilitated when teachers work with students who are highly motivated to learn, and there are few behavior problems. Horowitz (2018) explained that teachers want to make a positive and substantial difference in the future lives of students. At her high school, the researcher of this dissertation frequently witnessed teachers become excited and motivated when they perceived the positive difference in the future lives of adolescents was occurring. Horowitz (2019) suggested teachers enjoy collaborating with colleagues who are collegial and supportive of the learning process.

Research Question 5 is, how do African American teachers perceive and describe the challenges of being an AP teacher in an urban school district in South Florida? Results conveyed there are varied challenges with teaching AP courses. Some students do not possess the required level of knowledge to take certain AP courses. There may be insufficient materials, resources, and technologies for some AP courses. There is difficulty motivating some students to maintain a high-quality AP level of work throughout the school term. The AP courses cannot exist in a bubble, and the courses must have awareness throughout all high schools and communities. There is a lack of staff and resources at some schools to recruit students for the AP courses. Lisberg and Woods (2018) commented on the challenges. Lisberg and Woods reported the frustration of teaching students who cannot stay on task because the students are bored and insufficiently prepared for their current grade level. These lower-level students cause

frustration for the capable students and detract from the learning process of the capable students. Lisberg and Woods contended that for teachers to properly instruct their students, the school administration must ensure teachers acquire the required classroom materials and technologies. Upon reflection, as a teacher and high school department chair, the experiences of the researcher of this dissertation reveal that teachers should not have to purchase these materials and technologies with their personal funds nor borrow them from the communities and other well-funded high schools.

Research Question 6 is, what factors are perceived to be related to the influences of students in AP courses that are critical to the recruitment and retention of African American teachers in an urban school district in South Florida? Findings for Research Question 6 depict that there are different critical factors perceived to be related to the influences of students in AP courses. A factor is African American AP teachers are happy at the schools when these teachers perceive their students possess enhanced self-efficacy in passing examinations (Howell, 2019). As Chair of the Language Arts Department, this researcher frequently witnessed these teachers take pride in helping urban students become well prepared for college success, and the teachers are more motivated to remain at the schools when they see honor students and academically talented students from poverty communities desiring to enroll in their AP courses. The African American AP teachers are elated to know more minority students are exposed to nontraditional AP courses (Rubin & Hearn, 2018).

### **Recommendations for Change and Future Research Inquiry**

There are recommendations for change and future inquiry. For instance, this researcher's first option for data collection was to interview participants with face-to-face

individual interviews. The first option was not approved by officials associated with the research setting district IRB because of the COVID-19 pandemic and hectic schedules of the 15 participants. To protect the participants and interviewer's safety, all interviews were conducted on a virtual platform (Zoom). Upon agreement, participants were emailed a Zoom link with their scheduled interview dates and times. Therefore, a recommendation for additional research may be to replicate the study and collect interview data with 15 similar participants using face-to-face individual and focus group interviews. These interview results may be compared with the Zoom interview results in the dissertation study.

Second, the sample size in the dissertation study was only 15 AP teachers. A similar investigation may focus on a larger and more diverse sample size to improve generalizability to different high school settings (Merriam & Tisdale, 2019). More ethnic, gender, and age groups may be invited to participate in future studies who are AP teachers, work with African American AP teachers, and teach in urban high schools. Recommended ethnic groups are Asian American and Native American AP teachers. Additionally, a larger number of male teachers may be considered. Future researchers may identify new AP teachers and veteran AP teachers. Responses may be compared, and similarities and differences noted in the findings (Merriam & Tisdale, 2019).

Third, a recommendation is to interview and survey knowledgeable adults on the topic of African American AP teachers' recruitment and retention besides AP teachers. These knowledgeable adults might be high school counselors, high school administrators, district administrators, parents, and spouses of African American AP teachers. The collected data may yield different best-practice models. Best practices from each model

might be helpful to develop comprehensive district plans to enhance the recruitment and retention of rural, suburban, and urban African American AP teachers, as suggested by Brooks (2018) and Convertino and Graboski-Bauer (2018).

Fourth, the current study used a qualitative research approach guided by a phenomenological research design. Fifteen diverse AP teachers were interviewed (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Additional studies may use other prevalent qualitative research designs to include exploratory case study, multi-site case study, and ethnographic designs (Pratt et al., 2020).

Fifth, there are research designs other than the present study's phenomenological design and the aforementioned qualitative designs that may be used to investigate African American AP teachers' recruitment and retention. The additional designs may guide future researchers to employ different data collection and data analysis methods. Recommended are two quantitative research designs, two-group pretest and posttest true experimental design and the nonequivalent control group design (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). These two quantitative designs, with control or comparison groups, may yield more valid objective numerical findings. The numerical findings can be viable to school board members, federal and state grant agencies, school administrators, and district administrators. The usefulness may occur in the decision-making process on funding or expanding programs to enhance the recruitment and retention of African American AP teachers (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). Additional noteworthy and credible quantitative research designs are multiple regression, longitudinal, and descriptive designs (Coolidge, 2020).



Next, future researchers may opt to employ one of the mixed methods research designs. Recommended designs are convergent parallel, embedded, and exploratory sequential designs. With these mixed methods designs, qualitative and quantitative data may be integrated concurrently or sequentially as suggested by Coolidge (2020). Assorted designs (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods) may result in different types of findings and conclusions. The use of assorted designs and different data collection instruments might lead to more and different contributions to the literature and the Critical Race Theory that framed the current study (Pratt et al., 2020).

Seventh, the actual scores on the AP end of course examinations from all schools in the districts may be quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed for differences and relationships. Based on the literature, to pass, it is imperative that students score a three or higher on the AP examination (Johnson & Larwin, 2020). The range of scores is 1–5, and a score of 4 is required to earn college credit for the course without paying college tuition. Future studies may explore if there is a correlation between the demographics (gender, ethnicity, years of teaching experience, and highest degree completed) for teachers of AP courses and students' scores on the AP examinations. Additionally, future studies might investigate the influence of the demographics of scores of AP students on the AP examinations. Demographics of students may include family status, level of involvement in sports, and level of involvement in academic clubs.

The eighth recommendation focuses on the recruitment of underrepresented African American male AP teachers. In a future study, there might be a narrative inquiry design where African American male students are able to share their perceptions of the AP programs and why they feel African American males are not effectively recruited.

There is a need to expand the understanding and knowledge of the AP recruitment practices for African American males as well as the systems that created barriers for African American males to be equally recruited as AP teachers.

### **Limitations**

According to Coolidge (2020), limitations are potential weaknesses or problems in research that may make findings less valid in a research study. There are five limitations in the dissertation study. First, a limitation is recruiting potential participants. The pool of possible participants was limited because not all high schools in the urban district employed AP teachers or offered AP courses. According to the school district's Department of Assessment, Research, and Data Analysis (2019), less than 20 high schools participated in the AP program, and only four schools had the AP Capstone program. The AP Capstone program is a widely recognized program that facilitates students to become competent in skills highly valued by universities. The skills are independent research, collaborative teamwork, and communication skills (Department of Assessment, Research and Data Analysis, 2019). Another limitation was that most of the schools that offered AP Capstone courses were located in the research setting district's south region. Not all of the potential participants were from school sites located in the same school region where the researcher was located. In contrast, the researcher's school was located in the north end region of the district.

Third, a limitation may be the bias of this researcher (Boudah, 2020). The researcher is a 30-year veteran high school teacher with certifications in English K–12. Additionally, the researcher served as the Chair of the Language Arts Department and coordinate various schoolwide initiatives, such as the Senior Capstone Research Project,

Grade 10 Reading and Writing Bootcamps, Advanced Placement Writing Camps, and Read Across America activities. The researcher had an intricate role in getting the Advanced Placement Capstone Seminar and Research program initiated at a high school in the urban school district.

Another limitation is the limited ability of readers to generalize the study to a larger population of AP teachers beyond the 15 teachers in the present study, even though participants in this study were carefully chosen by purposeful and criterion sampling (Fraenkel et al., 2019). The present study was large enough to achieve data saturation but too small to generalize to other high school settings. For data saturation, Duke (1984) recommended 3–10 subjects, Polkinghorn (1989) suggested a range of 3–25, and Creswell (2013) recommended 3–10 participants but no more than 25. Morse (2000) suggested that at least six participants in a phenomenological study satisfied achieving data saturation.

The fifth limitation is the virtual interview instrument was a self-report instrument (Burkholder et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). Burkholder et al. suggested participants may not report accurate responses on sensitive topics for fear of negative repercussions from others. The others might include teacher colleagues, administrators, parents, and school board members. To reduce the ill-effects of this limitation, AP teachers in the dissertation study were assured all data would be kept confidential. They were instructed not to write names or school identifying information on any research data. Pseudonyms were used instead of names as recommended by Yin (2018). Yet, there might have been some teachers who failed to accurately report their experiences because of the sensitive nature of this topic (Johnson & Christensen, 2019).

## **Conclusions**

African American AP teachers are disproportionately underrepresented in teaching AP courses (phenomenon of the study) in comparison to all other ethnic groups. Consequently, the phenomenon is an area that deserves significant research efforts to seek solutions and to create greater national and international awareness of the problem. Awareness of the problem and solutions in the findings for this dissertation study are efforts of the researcher of this dissertation to reverse this problem. Systemic problems, such as the phenomenon in the study must be addressed through systemic change. With few African American AP teachers in existence in our urban high schools and many teachers and school administrators projecting an indifferent and a casual attitude to the problem, novice and veteran researchers are encouraged and invited to conduct research studies on this critical topic and provide support to reverse this trend.

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Appendix A  
Recruitment Flyer

## Recruitment Flyer

**Teachers wanted to participate in a research study on how they perceive the recruitment and retention of African American teachers teaching Advanced Placement classes.**

If you are interested, you will be interviewed via Zoom for social distancing due to COVID-19. The interview will be audio recorded. Once the audio recording of the interview has been transcribed, you will be called back for a second interview to review the transcription for accuracy.

The interview will focus on you answering open-ended questions from a survey geared towards your perspective on Advanced Placement courses and suggestions on how to retain and recruit African American Teachers in this area of teaching.

Once you have been selected to participate in this study, you will be notified via email regarding the purpose of the interview, you will receive questions to review, timeframe, and instructions as to setting up agreeable date and time for the interview; after which a Zoom link will be emailed to you.

Appendix B

AP Teachers Interview Protocol

### AP Teacher Interview Protocol

#### A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHERS FOR ADVANCEMENT PLACEMENT COURSES VIRTUAL INTERVIEW

Interviewee:  Male <input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/>	On-Site Location:  Off-Site Location:	Ethnicity:	Date:  Time:
Current Position:	Years of Experience: AP Teacher: ____ AP Coordinator: ____ Other: ____	Type of Degree(s):	Certifications:

**Read Consent to Participant and have him/her sign the consent form.**

1. How did you become an AP Instructor?
2. Which AP course(s) do you currently teach?
3. How do you think your experience as an AP Instructor help to influence your students?
4. What other subjects do you teach in addition to your AP course(s)? If applicable.
5. How does your experience(s) as an AP Instructor influence your relationship with other AP Instructors?
6. What type of professional development or other courses have you taken to become a certified AP Instructor?
7. What plans/incentives are being implemented at your school to recruit more African

American Teachers to teach AP classes?
8.. What does your school do to retain African American Teachers who teach AP classes?
9. Tell me about some of the challenges you face in your role as an AP instructor?
10. What is the percentage of African American Teachers that teach at your school?
11. What is the percentage of African American Teachers that teach AP classes at your school?
12. What are some reasons you think African American teachers are underrepresented as it pertains to teaching AP courses?
13. What is the percentage of your students who have passed the AP exam in the last 3 years?
14. Share with me some of the benefits of being an AP Teacher.
15. Is there anything that you would like to add or share regarding your experience(s) as an AP Instructor that we have not discussed?