

THE IMPACT OF MENTORSHIP ON THE MOTIVATION TO LEARN: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL AFRICAN AMERICAN
MALE STUDENTS AT RISK FOR FAILURE

by

Godwin Prospere

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how at-risk male African American students who attend Title I inner-city high schools in Central Florida, and are at risk for failure, perceive mentorship impacts their motivation to learn. The theories that guided this study were Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, and Bandura's social cognitive theory of self-efficacy, as each theory describes the basic needs that must be satisfied before an individual can be motivated to learn, and the role of interaction in developing self-efficacy and the motivation to learn. The central research question that guided this study sought to understand how at-risk African Americans high school students perceive mentoring impacts their motivation to learn. Additional subquestions explored the impact of mentoring on the participants' self-efficacy and behavior, the impact of mentoring on the participants' intrinsic motivation, and the impact of mentoring on the participants' college readiness and career selection process. A final subquestion sought to understand how the participants perceive effective mentoring-related educational intervention strategies impact the achievement gap between African American males and Caucasian males. A transcendental phenomenological research design was used to investigate a convenience sample of 10 to 15 at-risk male African American high school students. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews, observations, and focus groups, at one inner-city middle school. The data were analyzed using traditional phenomenological analysis methods of bracketing, horizontalization, clustering the data into themes, textural and structural descriptions, and synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). The final step in data analysis resulted in a composite description, the essence of the experience for the participants (Creswell, 2013).

Keywords: at-risk, hierarchy of needs, mentorship, motivation, self-efficacy.

Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my loving family and encouraging friends. I express my deepest gratitude to my loving wife, Candida, whose support and words of encouragement helped me maintain my focus, tenacity, and enthusiasm. My three sons Jerthwin, Yan, and Gershon have been a source of inspiration throughout my academic journey. I am also extremely grateful to my cousin, Natasha Fergusson, who was my most encouraging and best cheerleader.

I also want to dedicate this work to my mother, Patricia Madge Prospere, whose good example guided and taught me to be industrious and to work hard to achieve my goals. I am truly thankful to my church family for their support, encouragement, and prayer that gave me the fortitude to complete this arduous process. Also, I express gratitude to my dissertation committee members, Dr. Elam and Dr. Talada, for their support and guidance. Finally, words cannot express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Tierce for his skills and expertise, guidance and encouragement, and patience throughout the dissertation process.

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List of Abbreviations

Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)

Annual Yearly Progress (AYP)

Curriculum Compliance Teacher (CCT)

English Language Learner (ELL)

Exceptional Student Education (ESE)

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

Language Education Plan (LEP)

Multi-tier Systems of Support (MTSS)

National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Orange County Public Schools (OCPS)

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Race to the Top (RTTT)

United States of America (USA)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Scholars have noted that many African American male students perform below academic expectations (Marshall & Oliva, 2010). Researchers have further observed that at-risk minority students of color have a lower high school graduation rate than their Caucasian counterparts (Watson, Washington, & Stepteau-Watson, 2015). The lower rate of high school graduation for African American males has resulted in a loss of productive citizens and a high expenditure on social services at the local, state, and federal levels of government (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2008). Nevertheless, while a slight future decrease in high school dropouts among African American male students is predicted (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), there is the need to consider mentorship as a program that would further diminish the dropout rate (Tolan, Henry, Schoeny, Lovegrove, & Nichols, 2014). Many proponents of mentorship have purported that mentoring is an effective intervention tool to enhance at-risk African American students' motivation to learn (Williams & Nelson-Gardell, 2014). However, research on mentoring programs has primarily focused on student academic outcomes, and to a limited extent, on how students experience mentoring rather than on mentoring as a motivational tool (Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002).

Chapter One of this study provides a contextual framework for this transcendental phenomenological research. A brief synopsis of the literature is presented, and the educational context and implications are delineated. The historical, social, and theoretical contexts are also explicated. Finally, the problem statement, purpose statement, significance, research questions, and key definitions are discussed.

Background

Historical Context

Of approximately 1.2 million students who drop out of school annually in the United States, 25% are African American (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Florida has a 32% African American dropout rate (Florida Education, 2014), which is significantly higher than many states. For example, New Jersey, Texas, and Wisconsin each report an African American dropout rate of 12%, while Iowa reports a 10% dropout rate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Researchers have observed that mentorship is an effective solution to many issues in education, and is effective in mitigating the low academic performance among African American male students (Watson et al., 2015). Subsequently, mentorship has become a prolific means of educating at-risk students due to the rise of African American male students' poor academic performance and high dropout rate in high school (Apprey, Preston-Grimes, Bassett, Lewis, & Rideau, 2014).

Mentoring young men is not a new concept as it has been applied for centuries. For example, the story of mentoring originated from Homer's *Odyssey* (Wyatt, 2009). In Homer's tale, Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, fought in the Trojan War and entrusted the care of his household to Mentor, who functioned as the teacher and overseer of Odysseus' son, Telemachus (Wyatt, 2009). As a result, the word mentor advanced to mean trustworthy advisor, friend, teacher, and sagacious person. History further documents many instances of effective mentoring relationships, including Socrates and Plato, Hayden and Beethoven, and Freud and Jung (Wyatt, 2009). Mentoring is an essential practice of human development in which one individual invests time, energy, and personal knowledge in supporting the growth, development, ability,

personality, and building capacity of another person (Cole, 2015; McCoy, Winkle-Wagner, & Luedke, 2015; Seal, 2015; Wyatt, 2009).

Social Context

Recent literature explicated the profound impact of mentoring programs on students' learning outcomes and motivation to learn (Banerjee-Batist & Rio, 2016; Boswell, Wilson, Stark, & Onwuegbuzie, 2015; Mallett, 2012). Adolescents benefit emotionally, cognitively, and socially from adult mentors (Cole, 2015; Gray, 2012) and e-mentoring programs (Mammadov & Topçu, 2014). Mentoring improved students' academic achievement and intrinsic motivation to learn (Banerjee-Batist & Rio, 2016; Leidenfrost, Strassnig, Schutz, Carbon & Schabmann, 2014; Tough, 2016). In addition, mentoring enhanced students' attendance, class participation (Grima-Farrell, 2015; Tough, 2016; Watson et al., 2015), and attitude towards academics (Bakhurst, 2015; Lechuga, 2014; Sherma & Freeman, 2014). Delinquency and inappropriate behaviors were significantly reduced among students who participated in mentoring programs (Grima-Farrell, 2015; Sherma & Freeman, 2014; Tolan, et al., 2014).

School-based mentoring was an intervention tool used to close the academic achievement gap (Lechuga, 2014; Nuttall & Doherty, 2014), engaged African American males in the education process (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012), and redirected at-risk adolescents (Gray, 2012). Approximately 70% of African American students belong to single-parent families with the head of household being single women (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015). Many of these single women who are the head of an African American household work multiple jobs to provide for their families (Marshall & Oliva, 2010), which prevents them from being actively involved in their children's education. Furthermore, the low socio-economic status of low-income families, including single-parent homes, hindered the parent or parents from actively participating in their

children's education process and poor parental involvement augments risk factors among adolescents (Marshall & Oliva, 2010). Low-income families also experienced higher stress levels and mentoring has been documented as being an excellent stress coping mechanism (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Goff, 2011). Tough (2016) posited that family, peer, and school connectedness served as protective barriers against adolescents participating in risky behavior and poor academic performance. Therefore, mentoring, in the absence of such protective barriers, may act as a mechanism that can help students connect socially and academically, give a sense of belongingness, and provide a platform which could catapult them to academic success (Castellanos, Gloria, Besson, & Harvey, 2016; Karcher, Davis, & Powell, 2002).

Research indicated that students participating in school-based mentoring programs were more likely than their non-mentored counterparts to report having a non-parental adult with whom they feel confident to discuss their problems, who care about what happens to them, and assist them with their decision-making process (Leidenfrost et al., 2014). Additionally, mentees developed positive attitudes towards academic success, were more likely to trust and respect their teachers, had higher levels of self-confidence, and possessed a superior ability to articulate their feelings (Karcher et al., 2002; Seal, 2015).

African American males experienced adolescence differently than their Caucasian counterparts (Wyatt, 2000). For example, racism, socioeconomic complications, and oppression have a major influence on the development of young African American males (Lofton & Davis, 2015; Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Wyatt, 2000). Moreover, inner-city African American youth were more vulnerable to criminal behavior influences, illegal substance abuse, poor academic progression, and sexual activity earlier than other youth (Watson et al., 2015). Wyatt, (2000) further predicted that nationally, approximately 59% of African American males graduated from

high school in 2012-2013, compared to a higher graduation rate of 65% for Latinos and 80% for Caucasian males (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015).

Scholars noted that mentorship could be an effective support mechanism to provide the academic, social, and health support for minority at-risk students, including African American males (Marshall & Olivia, 2010).

Theoretical Context

Mentorship is a partnership between a more experienced or more knowledgeable individual who guides an individual with less experience or knowledge (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). Consequently, mentorship gives at-risk adolescents a sense of belongingness and helps develop connectedness between them and their family and school peers. As a result, mentored students who feel they belong are likely to improve their academic performance (Karcher et al., 2002). Students who encounter authentic and caring relationships are more likely to experience significant improvement in the learning outcomes (Cole, 2015). Growth needs (e.g., maturity, academic, social) are argued to be contingent upon trust and authentic relationships such as are experienced through mentoring (Tough, 2016).

Additionally, mentoring is a mechanism that can provide an extra layer of support for poor, at-risk, disadvantaged, and unmotivated students (Mallet, 2012). As noted, many minority students are at a disadvantage due to the socio-economic status of the family (Tolan et al., 2014). As a result, these students may not have a rich experience during their pre-school years, and their environment may have lacked the resources needed to enhance early childhood learning, stimulate their senses, and develop an age-appropriate vocabulary (Marshall & Olivia, 2010).

Underprivileged students commence elementary school education at a disadvantage in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts (Banks & Banks, 2010). Thus, elementary school

years are critical, and students may develop low self-esteem, feelings of incompetence, and become unproductive. This deficit situation is compounded when they are retained due to poor academic performance, and failure to receive a passing score on standardized assessments in reading and math (Marshall & Olivia, 2010). Mentoring is an excellent intervention tool that can be utilized to provide at-risk students with caring and loving relationships that positively impact student academic performance in early grades (Gray, 2012; Maxwell, 2014; McCann & Lloyd, 2013). Mentorship can give them a sense of belongingness and safety, develop their self-esteem, and increase self-efficacy (Maslow, 1943).

Successful current and future achievements are contingent upon self-efficacy (Bandura, 2000). Students' academic success and ability to competently perform assigned tasks are not predicated upon the skills, but the unwavering belief of how the skills are applied and utilized to achieve tasks (Bandura, 2000; Tough, 2016). Students who participate in a peer-mentoring program have an improved perception of themselves, transitioning to postsecondary education, program selection, attendance, and higher academic achievement (Goff, 2011; Tough, 2016). Mentorship influenced minority students in several ways including behavior, connectedness to parents, peers, and school, motivation to learn, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and academic achievement (Cole, 2015; Drago, Rheinheimer, & Detweiler, 2016; Seal, 2015).

Situation to Self

I began my teaching career as a high school math and reading teacher, and subsequently a middle school mathematics instructor for nine years. My initial experience with mentoring included the implementation of a school-based mentoring program in collaboration with the sixth-grade dean. This mentoring program was effective for sixth-grade students in the areas of behavior and academic achievement. My inspiration for selecting the topic, the impact of

mentoring on African American high school male students' motivation to learn, stems from my personal experiences as a sixth-grade mentor.

As a sixth-grade mentor, I endeavored to provide students with a rich educational experience, and incorporated comprehensible instruction support in my instructional delivery. Despite the extensive and meticulous planning and implementation of best practices, students were very disruptive, unmotivated, and opposed to learning mathematics. The inappropriate behavior of some students had an adverse impact on other students' academic achievement.

These classroom challenges forced me to seek strategies to resolve these problems. I was convinced that a school-based mentoring program would curb the disruptive behavior of these students and enhance their motivation to learn. I wrote a curriculum for the mentoring program, trained teachers to mentor students, and selected male students to participate in the mentoring program. I was perplexed and wondered why students were unwilling to be enrolled in a program that could possibly be beneficial to their future success. As a result, answers were sought in literature to understand how mentoring motivated students to learn.

The search of the literature led me to undertake an ontological philosophical stance in terms of this study since ontology is the assumption about the nature of reality and its characteristics. Ontology also seeks to answer the question of when something is real (Creswell, 2013). Things are considered real when they are constructed in the thoughts of the participants engaged in the process (Creswell, 2013). Thus, qualitative researchers embrace multiple ideas and investigate a phenomenon with the objective to account for various realities (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenological study delineated the participants' experience of the phenomenon differently (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, I anticipated an ontological strategy, aligned with

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory and Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory, will increase my understanding of how African American male students in middle schools perceive mentorship impacts their motivation to learn if.

The social learning theory of Bandura (1977) and the social development theory of Vygotsky (1978) were critical to this transcendental phenomenological research. The theoretical framework of these theorists shaped this investigation and guided this study. Learning is a cognitive process that occurs through observation or direct instruction within a social context (Bandura, 1997). Social interaction is paramount to cognitive development, and thus the community is vitally important in the construction of meaning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Bandura's (2000) social learning theory has been utilized within several areas of research, including aggression, behavior modeling, and self-efficacy. Bandura (2000) argued that observing and modeling are critical aspect of learning. Also, observation and modeling facilitate individuals to learn and perform behavior. A child's environment has a significant influence on their learning experience (Bandura, 1997). Mentoring in social learning situations helped the mentor and mentee build a significant relationship. As a result of this connectedness, the mentor's suggestions and guidance were likely to be accepted by the mentee and the behavior modeled by the mentor will be imitated (Karcher et al., 2002).

Vygotsky (1978) asserted that social interaction is paramount to the development of cognition. Thus, one's environment, the community in which he or she is socialized, and social experience are critical variables to the process of constructing meaning. Vygotsky also argued that the potential to develop cognitively is predicated on the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky delineated ZPD as a level of development a child can procure via engagement in social behavior. Therefore, since mentoring provided students the opportunity to engage in

full and significant interactions, they were more likely to develop their full ZPD through mentorship. Also, a student under the supervision and guidance of a mentor was capable of achieving much more than through his or her efforts (Vygotsky, 1978).

Therefore, I used an interpretive paradigm because I was concerned with understanding the impact of mentoring on at-risk African American high school male students' motivation to learn from the subjective experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). I used interviews, focus group, and participant observation, because they are meaning-oriented methodologies and will facilitate a subjective relationship between the participants and me.

Problem Statement

Researchers asserted that at-risk male African American high school students lack the motivation to learn and are performing below their academic potential (Nuttall & Doherty, 2014). Research further indicated that the implementation of mentoring programs in schools might be a solution to the academic crisis affecting African American male students (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001; Watson et al., 2015). In addition, mentoring provided stability to high school students who experienced severe challenges with social, physical, and emotional changes (Lindt & Blair, 2016). Therefore, the problem of this phenomenological study was to understand how at-risk high school male African American students perceive mentorship impacts their motivation to learn.

The transition period between adolescence to adulthood is turbulent due to the numerous changes youth experience (Lindt & Blair, 2016) and the frequent lack of parental support from parents or guardians (Marshall & Olivia, 2010). At-risk students can be taught the necessary skills required to be successful (Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001; Wright, Maylor, & Becker, 2016), such as how to enhance their academic accomplishment,

attitude, and self-esteem as well as improve their school attendance and behaviors, through mentoring (DuBois et al., 2002; Simões & Alarcão, 2014; Wilson, Cordier, & Wilkes-Gillan, 2014). Some of these mentoring skills included problem-solving, the ability to make wise decisions, perseverance to overcome challenges, critical and independent thinking, and the ability to build the capacity to take ownership of one's own learning (Lindt & Blair, 2016; Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Tough, 2016).

Many quantitative researchers of mentoring have used a comparative group approach (Jacobi, 1991) in which data was collected from mentored groups and compared to untreated groups, and conclusions were made based on the academic performance. However, more research is needed to study mentorship because it is a relatively new area, available research is primarily quantitative (Leidenfrost et al., 2014; Karcher et al., 2002), and a gap exists in the literature since there is a dearth of qualitative data on mentorship (Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2012). The present qualitative study provided a better understanding of the phenomenon of mentorship by compiling multiple perspectives of the experience from the participants (Creswell, 2013).

Furthermore, researchers have neglected to explore how at-risk African American male students in high school perceive the experience of mentorship impacts their motivation to learn (Grossman et al., 2012). Therefore, the intent of this investigation was to capture multiple perspectives from the participants who experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994) and subsequently reduce their experience of mentorship to a delineation of the universal essence (Creswell, 2013). This investigation complemented extant research, which is mainly quantitative, with qualitative research about the phenomenon of mentorship (Leidenfrost et al.,

2014). Finally, at-risk male African American high school students had a voice about how they perceive the influence of mentoring on their motivation to learn (Grant & Dieker, 2011).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how at-risk high school male African American students perceived mentorship impacted their motivation to learn. A transcendental phenomenological research design was utilized to frame this investigation, and the participants were 15 male African American students who were at-risk for failure. The setting for the study was a predominantly African American high school located in a low-income community in central Florida. The theories that guided this study were Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, and Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory of self-efficacy. Maslow (1943) argued that human needs are hierarchical and basic needs must first be satisfied to facilitate growth needs. Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory of self-efficacy explained why students lack the motivation to learn, their learning impediments, and the conditions that must be satisfied for students to enhance their academic achievement.

Significance of the Study

This investigation on mentorship intended to augment the body of literature, particularly qualitative research. There is a dearth of qualitative research on mentorship, and this study sought to fill the existing gaps and presented qualitative data delineating how students perceive mentoring impacts their motivation to learn. The study enhanced current educational practices, provided participants' perceptions of the experienced phenomenon, and advanced the research area of mentorship by presenting qualitative data.

Proponents of mentorship purported that mentoring is an intervention tool (Cole, 2015; Radcliffe & Bos, 2011) that enhances self-efficacy and self-concept (Bandura, 1994; Drago et al., 2016; Tough, 2016). Scholars also noted that mentoring has a positive impact on academic achievement (Gray, 2012; Lechuga, 2014; Watson et al., 2015). At a practical level, classroom educators may benefit from this proposed research, and the results of the investigation could be used to promote the practice of school-based mentoring. Through gaining an understanding of how African American male students perceive mentorship impacts their motivation to learn, faculty mentors and college professors could better prepare to provide academic support and mentoring in other areas required by individual students.

Furthermore, as result of this study, at-risk African American students who are academically successful could become more productive citizens, breaking the vicious cycle of poverty, and avoiding participation in criminal activity (Ericson & Phillip, 2012; Watson et al., 2015). Moreover, these at-risk African American students who are academically successful could serve as a role model to other at-risk African American students, become advocates of change, and have a positive influence on their community (Watson et al., 2015).

Finally, this proposed phenomenological study could potentially benefit educational institutions at all levels, religious and socio-cultural organizations, mentoring programs, and fill the gap in educational literature and research regarding mentoring. Additionally, this study facilitated the furtherance of Maslow (1943) and Bandura's (1977) theoretical frameworks through the investigation of school-based mentoring programs for at-risk African American male students who have a low level of motivation to learn.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

Central Research Question

How does at-risk African American male high school students' perceived mentorship impact their motivation to learn?

The central research question was designed to understand students' motivation to learn and how mentoring impacts their motivation (Lindt & Blair, 2016). This question guided the study to better understand students' perception of mentorship. At-risk African American male students had the opportunity to participate in educational research. Obtaining an understanding of these perspectives may contribute to policies, practices, and enhanced responses to the needs of these students.

Sub-Question One

How does at-risk African American high school students' perceived mentorship impact their self-efficacy and behavior?

Sub-question one was a reflective question designed to understand the extent to which the participants' beliefs in their ability helps them to accomplish tasks (Bandura, 1997) and their perceptions of themselves (Maslow, 1948). Many researchers agreed that mentoring is an effective approach that may help at-risk students develop self-efficacy and subsequently, enhance their academic achievement (Bandura, 1997; DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Leidenfrost et al., 2014; Mallett, 2012; Snowden & Hardy, 2013).

Sub-Question Two

How does at-risk African American high school students' perceived mentorship impact their intrinsic motivation?

Sub-question two sought to understand how mentorship impacts at-risk male African American students' motivation to learn. Current literature revealed that mentoring programs have a profound impact on students' learning outcomes as well as their intrinsic motivation to learn (Banerjee-Batist & Rio, 2016; Boswell et al., 2015; Mallett, 2012). As a result, mentoring improved students' academic achievement (Banerjee-Batist & Rio, 2016; Leidenfrost et al., 2014; Tough, 2016).

Sub-Question Three

How does at-risk African American male high school students' perceived mentorship impact their college readiness and career selection process? e

Sub-question three was designed to gather data on participants' perceptions of the impact of mentoring as an intervention to improve academic achievement and on college readiness and careers selection. Many studies indicated that the American education system is not equipped to teach minority students, particularly at-risk male African Americans (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Nuttall et al., 2014; Tolan et al., 2014; J. Watson et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2016). However, mentoring was an effective intervention tool to improve academic output (Gray, 2011; Leidenfrost et al., 2013), and place students on a college path (Goff, 2011; Radcliff & Bos, 2011).

Sub-Question Four

How do at-risk African American high school students perceive the effectiveness of mentoring when used as an educational intervention strategy to close the achievement gap between Caucasian and African American males?

Sub-question four sought to understand the impact of mentorship as an intervention tool and its power to prevent academic failure. I have firsthand experience working with young

African American male students who were in the juvenile justice system while in middle and high school. The academic achievement of these students was below grade level and that of their Caucasian counterparts. This question guided the study as to how mentorship interrupted and redirected adverse academic and life courses, enhanced academic accomplishment (Leidenfrost et al., 2014; Williams & Nelson-Gardell, 2014), and closed the achievement gap (Lechuga, 2014; Nuttall & Doherty, 2014).

Definitions

1. *At-Risk Students* - Students who are at-risk of failure due to poverty, limited English proficiency, race or ethnicity, academic failure, noncompliance to norms, geographic location, and socioeconomic status (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).
2. *Civic Identity* - A multifaceted and dynamic notion of the self as belonging to and responsible for a community or communities (Stafford-Brizard, 2016).
3. *Growth Mindset* - Wherein students ascribe to the following belief: My ability and competence grow with my effort (Stafford-Brizard, 2016).
4. *Hierarchy of Needs* - The stages of growth in humans or the pattern that human motivation moves through (Maslow, 1948).
5. *Mentorship* - A partnership between a more experienced or more knowledgeable person who guides a less experienced or less knowledgeable person (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001).
6. *Relationship Skills* - The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating

conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed (Stafford-Brizard, 2016).

7. *Self-Awareness* - The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations, and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism (Stafford-Brizard, 2016).
8. *Self-Direction* - A process in which learners take the initiative in planning, implementing, and evaluating their own learning needs and outcomes, with or without the help of others (Stafford-Brizard, 2016).
9. *Social Awareness* - The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports (Stafford-Brizard, 2016).
10. *Self-Efficacy* - The belief a person has in his or her ability to successfully accomplish a task or succeed in specific situations (Bandura, 1997).
11. *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)* - The difference between a person's ability to solve problems independently compared to solving problems with guidance from an adult or in a collaborative structure with more proficient peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

Summary

Chapter One provided a synopsis of the relevant literature and explained how the current investigation will fill the gaps in the existing literature. A delineation of mentorship and my motivation for selecting the research topic were articulated, and the problem and purpose statements and research questions explained. This study addressed how at-risk high school male

African American students perceive mentorship impacts their motivation to learn. Mentoring was perceived as a solution to the academic crisis affecting at-risk male African American students (Tolan et al. 2014). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how at-risk male African American students perceive mentorship impacts their motivation to learn.

The American public-school system is not adequately equipped to meet the needs of African American male students and to provide them with the support they require to successfully graduate from high school (Marshall & Olivia, 2010). Several factors contributed to the lack of motivation to learn and academic failure among male African American high school students (Watson et al., 2015). The qualitative data collected in this study of at-risk African American male students' academic experiences could be beneficial to all stakeholders in school-based mentoring programs.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how at-risk high school male African American students perceive mentorship impacted their motivation to learn. This investigation sought to enhance the body of knowledge on mentoring by providing qualitative data about the lived experience of the phenomenon. Maslow's (1948) hierarchy of needs theory, Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory were the three theories chosen to shape the study. Maslow (1948) asserted that the motivation to learn and appreciation of philosophy was contingent upon the satisfaction of man's basic needs. Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory delineated different ways humans learn and placed significant emphasis on self-efficacy and self-concept. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory delineated the role of external agents in the learning process.

This review of the literature provides a discussion of at-risk students and conditions that impacted at-risk African American high school male students' lack of motivation to learn. Some of these circumstances included language deficiency, poverty and its associated social ills, dysfunctional family structures, behavior issues, high issuance of referrals, and suspension and poor attendance (Tolan et al., 2014). Chapter Two explores the types of mentoring programs implemented in schools and the debate about the impact of mentoring primarily on student motivation to learn, behavior, academic engagement and participation, and learning outcomes. In addition, the chapter delineated how mentoring impacted students' motivation to learn, self-efficacy, and academic accomplishments. The chapter concludes with literature addressing the dearth of qualitative data on mentoring and provided at-risk African American male students with a voice in describing the lived experience of the phenomenon.

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in three theories that explicated the phenomenon of mentoring. The theory of human motivation by Maslow (1948) entailed the necessity to satisfy the basic needs as a prerequisite to becoming self-actualized. Social cognitive theory purported by Bandura (1997), described how human beings learn through observation, imitation, and modeling. Additionally, one's success and competency are not predicated on skill and expertise, but the belief in his or her ability or self-efficacy. Vygotsky (1978) asserted in his socio-cultural theory that social interaction is imperative to the advancement of cognition. In summation, one's milieu, the community, and social experience are critical variables to the construction of meaning (Bandura, 1997; Nuttall & Doherty, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). These theories can be applied to explicate the interactions of at-risk African American males within the context of a mentoring relationship and their perceived impact of the phenomenon on their motivation to learn.

Maslow (1948) was interested in comprehending what variables motivate individuals. Thus, he purported that human beings possess motivation mechanisms that are unconnected to remunerations, benefits, and unknown aspirations. Maslow (1943) posited that human motivation is contingent upon the premise that certain needs will be accomplished. Individuals' needs are arranged sequentially and whenever one need is successfully fulfilled, these individuals will seek to realize the next need in the sequence until all of their needs are satisfied (Maslow, 1948).

Human Motivation Theory

Maslow (1948) posited that certain conditions must be satisfied for effective learning to occur. The gratification of basic needs leads to growth needs or self-actualization. In essence,

human motivation is contingent upon satisfying one's basic needs (Maslow, 1948). Maslow's (1948) theory of human motivation delineated five motivational needs, and he graphically depicted his theory of human motivation as hierarchical stages in the shape of a pyramid. However, Bouzenita and Boulanouar (2016) argued that the model lacked empirical validity, it was ethnocentric, and ignored the missing spiritual dimensions of human existence.

Maslow (1948) posited that his five-stage theory of human motivation model was predicated on two principal categories. The first category was the deficiency needs comprised of physiological, safety, love, belongingness, and esteem. These basic needs served as prerequisites and facilitated the growth needs, which Maslow (1948) referred to as self-actualization. Thus, the fulfillment of these basic needs was an integral component of human development and sustained motivation (Moorer, 2014).

Irrespective of differences, people possess the capacity and potentiality to navigate every level of the hierarchical structure of human motivation, including becoming, eventually, self-actualized, the desire for self-fulfillment or reaching one's full potential (Maslow, 1948). However, the process will be fundamentally different depending on the challenges encountered along the way and the level of preparedness to skillfully confront life's unfortunate situations and circumstances. Maslow (1948) asserted that life experiences, such as separation or divorce and unemployment, might result in regression and fluctuation between the levels of the hierarchical structure of human motivation.

Consequently, the measure of one's progress towards self-actualization is determined by the frequency of interruptions and failures to reasonably satisfy ones' deficiency needs (Maslow, 1948). Additionally, Maslow (1948) purported that only 1% of human beings were likely to become self-actualized due to society's structure and remunerate system. Furthermore, Soni and

Soni (2014) asserted that Maslow (1948) perceived the self-actualized as more intelligent and superior to the masses.

Social Learning Theory

Bandura (2000) asserted in his theory of self-efficacy that one's success or failure was contingent upon self-efficacy. Thus, he described perceived self-efficacy as an individual's belief system concerning one's innate capacity to determine events that have direct consequences on life. The philosophy of life and self-efficacy significantly impacted feeling, the thought process, and outcomes of life (Bandura, 1997). The perception of self and the capacity to take control of life experiences was fundamental to mastering or avoiding a threat, and succeeding or failing in life (Bandura, 1997).

The fundamental belief in one's self and competence to effect change in one's life was paramount to success (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, self-efficacy may propel human beings to accomplish their aspirations and fulfill their dreams by the actions they successfully implement. Bandura (1997) posited that people who do not believe they can produce the desired effects have a deficit in their aspirations, lack intrinsic motivation, and are committed to weak goals. They also lacked perseverance to consistently engage in a productive struggle, and thus overcome the impediments and tumultuous experiences in life (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (2000) argued that there must be a multiplicity of variables that significantly impact the outcomes in life. However, Bandura (1997) asserted that all of these factors that function as motivators are embedded in our core system of beliefs, and the results of life whether a success or failure is predicated on this core sentiment.

Self-efficacy is a dynamic phenomenon and it is imperative to delineate the multiplicity of the ways it impacts human beings (Bandura, 2000; Velez, Sorenson, McKim, & Cano, 2013).

The brain is the center of one's body, and therefore, one's state of mind will influence every aspect of life. If one thinks positively, then one will view the world through a positive lens, which will result in a greater chance of success. On the contrary, if one has a negative perspective on life, then life will be unproductive.

Bandura (2000) argued that self-efficacy impacts several areas of the human consciousness because of its scope of influence. Self-efficacy influences cognition, emotions, and affective and selection processes (Bandura, 1997; Velez et al., 2013). Empirical evidence indicated self-efficacious people view setbacks as setups and continuously seek to enhance their performance individually or collectively (Bandura, 1997; Stafford-Brizard, 2016). Thus, self-efficacy increases self-confidence and motivation, the emotional state of equilibrium, helps individuals set clear and realistic goals, and creates a plan that delineates how to attain the desired effect (Bergey, Ketelhut, Liang, Natarajan, & Karakus, 2015; Stafford-Brizard, 2016).

Finally, Bandura (1997) purported that perceived self-efficacy explicated how the life of human beings is intricate and influenced by the socio-structural dynamics. As a result, self-efficacy can significantly impact our coping strategies, stress management skills, behavior management, motivation, career and goal orientation, and the ability to effect social change (Bandura, 1997; Wood, Newman, & Harris, 2015). Mentoring has helped at-risk African American male students to culturally reconnect, develop a sense of identity, and subsequently, enhance their self-efficacy and esteem (Watson et al., 2015).

Social Development Theory

Vygotsky (1978) asserted in his sociocultural theory that parents, caregivers, peers, and cultural context significantly influence the development of higher order functions. Collaborative structures provide the opportunity for individuals to share ideas, learn from each other, and

deepen one's understanding of the content (Bakhurst, 2015; Damşa & Ludvigsen, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, interaction plays a critical role in the learning process since it creates an avenue for individuals to synthesize multiple perspectives and grasps a more profound understanding of the information (Damşa & Ludvigsen, 2016; Tough, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky (1978) argued that people learn through imitating the action of others; therefore, an individual adapts or changes one's behavior as a result of interaction and collaboration with others (Bakhurst, 2015; Damşa & Ludvigsen, 2016; Tough, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). Finally, Vygotsky (1978) explicated ZPD, which is the difference between a person's ability to solve problems independently compared to solving problems with guidance from an adult or in a collaborative structure with more proficient peers to describe human learning as a social process.

Related Literature

Twenty-first-century education must implement a range of new initiatives that will meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students (Burks & Hochbien, 2015) as the American population is increasing in diversity (Marshall & Olivia, 2010). Furthermore, in addition to the diversity, about 50% of African American children live below the poverty line (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015) and many African American youths are affected by or engaged in criminal activity (Tolan et al., 2014; Watson et al., 2015). As a result, the current education system is not equipped to adequately address the problems associated with these changes (Burks et al., 2015; Tough, 2016).

One potential solution is mentoring as Simões and Alarcão (2014) asserted that mentoring has multiple benefits. Some include improving at-risk student academic achievement and retention rates, and decreasing disciplinary referrals and unexcused absences (Bean, Lucas,

& Hyers, 2014; Maxwell, 2014; Tolan et al., 2014; Tough, 2016). Mentoring fosters greater connectivity between students and their family, peers, teachers, and the community (Kemmis, Heikkinen, Aspfors, Fransson, & Edwards-Groves, 2014; Tough, 2016; Wilson et al., 2014). Also, mentoring enhances assessment performance (Bean et al., 2014; Maxwell, 2014; Tolan et al., 2014; Watson et al., 2015) and reduces stress and anxiety (Garza, Duchaine, & Reynosa, 2014; Hobson & Malderez, 2014). Finally, mentoring improves student engagement and participation in academic activity (Tolan et al., 2014) and increases student outcomes (Snowden & Hardy, 2012; Tough, 2016).

As a result, mentoring was an excellent intervention tool that can address the varied needs of at-risk male African American students (Leidenfrost et al., 2014; Watson et al., 2015). Rios-Ellis et al. (2015) purported that mentoring provides socio-cultural and socio-emotional support for students. Students experience greater academic success when their cultural capital concepts and cultural wealth from their community are utilized in their learning experience (Kochan, Searby, George, & Edge, 2015; Tolan et al., 2014; Watson et al., 2015).

Additionally, Critchfield and Twyman (2014) argued that instructional plans that integrate student experiences help promote future competence. Thus, a culturally responsive educational approach may guarantee greater student involvement (Marshall & Olivia, 2010), engagement (Tough, 2016), participation (Wilson et al., 2015), and subsequently, enhanced academic achievement (Fransson & McMahan, 2013; Grima-Farrell, 2015; Kochan, Searby, George, & Edge, 2015).

At-risk students who receive unconditional love and care from an adult mentor were likely to develop perseverance and motivation to learn (Dawson, 2014; Tough, 2016). Mentors who have trusted role models (Boswell et al., 2015; Hobson & Malderez, 2013) and demonstrate

compassion (Dawson, 2014; Weese, Jakubik, Eliades, & Huth, 2015) have a significant impact on student motivation to learn. High-quality mentors embraced their mentees despite behavior deficits, developed moral and ethical values, and created a conducive learning environment that enhanced academic achievement (Watson et al., 2014). Additionally, Vygotsky (1978) advocated a collaborative learning environment deepened student learning and academic output. Thus, students who participate in a mentoring program where an adult or peer provide support, guidance, and purposeful interaction have an increased chance of enhancing self-efficacy (Bakhurst, 2014; Bandura, 1997; Tough, 2016) becoming self-actualized (Maslow, 1978), improving their academic achievement (Bean et al., 2014; Grant & Dieker, 2011; Maxwell, 2014; Tough, 2016; Wilson et al., 2015).

The Plight of African American Males

African American students have a lower graduation success rate than their Caucasian counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Approximately 1.2 million high school students drop out every year in the United States (Rowley & Wright, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). For example, about 23% of African American students dropped out of high school in the 2015-2016 academic school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014) and the graduation rate was even lower for African American males who resided in urban or low-income neighborhoods (Goff, 2011; Leidenfrost et al., 2014; Rowley & Wright, 2011).

High school dropouts committed 75% of the crime in the United States (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015). The statistics presented a strong correlation between students who do not obtain a high school diploma and crimes committed. Many African American males who are imprisoned did not complete their high school career and those in the juvenile system have a ninth-grade education or less (Wilson, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; Watson et al.,

2015). Thus, the probability of African American males graduating from high school was extremely low in comparison to their Caucasian and Asian counterparts (Rowley & Wright, 2011; Watson et al., 2015).

Because of the low successful completion of high school by African American males, only 35% of men attending college were African American, compared to 46% being African American females (Edwards, 2006). Bush and Lawson Bush (2010) explored African American male achievement in community colleges and found that many African American males attended two-year colleges in Florida and their underachievement in community colleges was of significant concern (Edwards, 2006). Conversely, African American females accomplished higher academic outcomes than their male counterparts (Edwards, 2006; Bush & Bush, 2010). Therefore, mentoring may be an intervention tool to increase African American male college recruitment and retention.

Low-income neighborhoods are characterized by high crime rates, unemployment, poverty, and drugs (Watson et al., 2015). Approximately 65% of African American children live in single-parent households in which the head of the family is a female, thus leaving many bereft of male role models (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015). Furthermore, the current American education system is not prepared nor equipped to effectively address the challenges associated with these social changes (Burks & Hochbein, 2015; Marshall & Olivia, 2010).

Consequently, many African American males growing up in the low-income neighborhoods experience challenges that are unmatched to their Caucasian counterparts living in suburban areas (Rowley & Wright, 2011). The absence of fathers in the lives of African American children, and the disproportionate number of African American adult males who are incarcerated, have a tremendous impact on the quality of life African American children

experience (Karcher et al., 2002; Wilson et al., 2014). The disproportionate number of youth in the juvenile prison population in the United States complicates the African American predicament (Watson et al., 2015; H. Wilson, 2014), leading to the need to address this situation from an educative and or mentoring perspective.

Simões and Alarcão (2014) purported that mentoring has been an effective strategy toward addressing many of the challenges at-risk students experience because it has multiple benefits, including improving student academic achievement and retention rates as well as decreasing disciplinary referrals and unexcused absences. Mentoring also fostered more positive relationships between students and their family, peers, teachers, and the community (Castellanos et al., 2016; Mammadov & Topçu, 2014; Nuttall & Doherty, 2014; Wilson et al., 2014). An outcome of the formation of such relationships is attachment.

Attachment is one of the three building blocks for the healthy development of children (Kemmis et al., 2004; Maslow, 1948; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Stafford-Brizard, 2016).

Attachment is a profound emotional bond that united one individual to another over a period (Stafford-Brizard, 2016). Consequently, no significant learning can occur in the absence of significant attachment or relationships (Stafford-Brizard, 2016). Building relationships with at-risk students is essential to their well-being and enhancement of their academic progress (D'Souza, 2014; Grima-Farrell, 2015; Mammadov & Topçu, 2014; Mulvihill & Martin, 2016; Maxwell, 2014; Weese et al., 2015).

The second building block of healthy childhood development and stress management is the ability to persistently alter one's cognitive and behavioral energies to adequately cope with external and internal difficulties that are beyond available resources (Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Tolan et al., 2014). At -risk students are most likely from low-income families and

neighborhoods and thus lack resources (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Watson et al., 2015), and consequently lack the flexibility to constantly adapt to varied demands that require resources (Castellanos et al., 2016).

Finally, self-regulation, the third block, is one's ability to adequately control attention, emotion, and executive functions so that the action taken will facilitate the successful accomplishment of the projected goals (Stafford-Brizard, 2016). These non-cognitive skills form the base of all the building blocks a child needs for healthy development and future academic achievement (Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Tough, 2016; Watson et al., 2015).

Mentoring reduces stress and anxiety (Lindt, & Blair, 2016), increases student engagement and participation in the academic activity (Wilson et al., 2014), and increases student outcome (Snowden & Hardy, 2012). Therefore, mentoring has been a strategy that can cater to the diverse needs of at-risk male African American students (Watson et al., 2015). Rios-Ellis, Rascon, Galvez, Inzunza-Franco, Bellamy, & Torres (2015) also asserted that mentoring provides socio-cultural and socio-emotional support for students who suffer from attachment deficits and stress.

The plight of African American males has continued to deepen as their social, economic, and educational challenges become more profound in American society (Erik, 2006; Watson et al., 2015). Further, there has been a call for greater parental involvement and more stable family structure for African American males (Watson et al., 2015). Parents and adult family members were imperative to the academic success of African American male students (Castellanos et al., 2016; McCoy et al., 2015; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). Children who receive maternal warmth and experience a sense of belongingness and security at home are more likely to develop

academic skills (Drago et al., 2016; Maslow, 1948; Soria & Stebleton, 2013; Tolan et al., 2014; Tough, 2016).

Conversely, the experience of maternal hostility has a negative influence on the development of cognitive and academic skills (Alomar & Strauch, 2014; Curtis & Hansen-Schwoebel, 1999). For example, African American males who are raised in dysfunctional homes that are hostile, unstable, and neglected have a greater propensity to be psychologically and behaviorally maladjusted and to academically underachieve (Marshall & Oliva, 2010). During my tenure at a low-income middle school, I found that African American males experienced greater academic success when they had a concerned dad, parents, or guardians who actively participated in their students' education (Tough, 2016).

The achievement gap between African American males and other ethnic groups was comparatively significant (Hartney & Flavin, 2014; Watson et al., 2015). Many African American males were retained in elementary school (Bowman, 2005) and African American male students were more likely to be retained in third grade compared to Asians, Caucasians, and Hispanics (Bowman, 2005). Retaining students was a predictor of academic self-concept, maladaptive motivation, absence from school, and dropout rates (Bowman, 2005; Thompson & Kelly-Vance 2001). African American male students are believed to be retained due to cultural incompetency and sensitivity amongst Caucasian educators, and Caucasians comprise approximately 90% of the teaching force in the United States (Lofton & Davis, 2015; Watson et al., 2015; Wun, 2016).

Thus, race played a major role in the overrepresentation of African American males in the American prison system (Lyons, Lurigio, Roque & Rodriguez, 2013; NAACP, 2014; Wilson, 2014). Wilson (2014) argued that African American males are twice as likely to be imprisoned

as compared to their Caucasian counterparts. African American males are also more likely to be apprehended, receive a harsher punishment, and be incarcerated than Caucasian males for similar crimes (Miller 1996, NAACP, 1014; Wilson, 2014). Similarly, with African American adults disproportionately represented in the prison population (Anderson, 2009; NAACP, 2014, Wilson, 2014), young African American males were disproportionately represented in the juvenile criminal justice in every state in America (Tough, 2016, Watson et al., 2015). African Americans represent 26% of juvenile arrests, 44% of youth who were detained, 46% of the youth who were judicially waived to criminal court, and 58% of the youth admitted to state prisons (Wilson, 2014).

Also, African American males were more likely to be apprehended and detained in a juvenile detention center than Caucasian males (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Watson et al., 2015). Children with at least one incarcerated parent were five times more likely to become incarcerated themselves (Sykes & Pettit, 2014). African American males have a 30% chance of going to prison in their lifetime, compared to Caucasian males with a 4% chance of being imprisoned (Watson et al., 2015). African American youth are more likely to be raised in low-income families (Marshall & Olivia, 2010), live in single-parent households headed by a mother (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015), and grow up in neighborhoods inundated by delinquency and violence, consequently engaging in deviant behavior themselves (Watson et al., 2015).

Getting tough on crime and the war on drugs policies have had a significant impact on African Americans (Anderson, 2009; Watson et al., 2015; Wilson, 2014). African Americans represented 32% of the people apprehended for drug trafficking or possession, but constituted only 12% of drug users (NAACP, 2014; Wilson, 2014). African Americans constitute approximately 80% of the people penalized for crack cocaine and are incarcerated for a

significantly longer time for drug offenses than their Caucasian counterparts (NAACP, 2014; Wilson, 2014). However, 70% of the users of crack cocaine in the United States were Caucasian or Hispanic (NAACP, 2014; Wilson, 2014).

The results of the mass incarcerations of African American males have been devastating on the African American family structure (Roettger & Swisher, 2011; Swanson, 2015; Sykes & Pettit, 2014). Children who experience their fathers' incarceration have an increased propensity for delinquent behavior that continued into adolescence and adulthood (Roettger & Swisher, 2011; Swisher & Roettger, 2012). Many African American males have been raised without a father figure and their mothers work two or three jobs to provide for the family (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015; Wilderman & Wang, 2017). The high level of stress, anxiety, lack of attention, not feeling safe and belonging, and poverty influence the academic output and high school dropout of African American students (Nuttall, 2015; Seal, 2015; Sykes & Pettit, 2014; Watson et al., 2015, Wildeman & Western, 2010). Hence, there is a need to address these issues by instituting strategies and programs, such as mentoring, to potentially improve the outcome of African American males.

No Child Left Behind

Racial inequality and inequity in education have been a grave problem in the United States (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Rowley & Wright, 2011; Wells & Roda, 2016). In 1954, the United States Supreme Court decision *in Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* resulted in the unprecedented move of the desegregation of public schools (Bogin & Nguyen-Hoang, 2014; Rowley & Wright, 2011). By 1957, the National Guard mandated Little Rock, Arkansas to accept African Americans in public schools (Bond, 2015; Rowley & Wright, 2011). Thus, a few years later the Rights Act of 1964 forbade discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or

ethnicity, and enforced desegregation of schools (Bogin & Nguyen-Hoang, 2014; Rowley et al. 2011).

The United States has consistently addressed racial inequality and inequity in the education system (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Rowley & Wright, 2011). Numerous government policies have been passed to resolve the issues of discrimination in the American school system (Dee & Jacobs, 2011; Rowley & Wright, 2011), with the most recent being No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

The primary focus of NCLB was accountability as it related to academic achievement (Reback, Rockoff, & Schwartz, 2014; Rowley & Wright, 2011). As a result, NCLB addressed the academic output of American students, particularly the comparison scores of state-mandated standardized tests between low-income and minority students and their Caucasian counterparts (Rowley & Wright, 2011). All schools were mandated by the federal government to provide a high-quality education to every student regardless of their demographics or ability level (Bogin & Nguyen-Hoang, 2014; Rowley & Wright, 2011).

Educational institutions' academic achievement was graded based on adequate yearly progress or AYP, (Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, & Harrington, 2014; Klein, 2014; Rowley & Wright, 2011). Parents had the prerogative to transfer their children from a failing school to another school that received a better grade based on high stakes standardized test (Klein, 2014; Rowley & Wright, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). However, parents who opted to transfer their students to another school had to meet other obligations, which most of the time was difficult for low-income parents (Rowley & Wright, 2011).

Thus, while NCLB offered parents school choices for their children (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), it failed to address elements beyond the schools' control, such as

socioeconomic status and parental involvement (Klein, 2015; Rowley & Wright, 2011). NCLB failed to incorporate students' past experiences and cultural differences, which significantly influenced their academic achievement (Reback et al., 2014). Consequently, the academic achievement of at-risk students with racial minority status and identity were directly affected by NCLB (Rowley & Wright, 2011; Wilson, 2014).

Schools and Environment

The social environment is one of the most critical variables that determine a school's academic success (Back, Polk, Keys, & McMahon, 2016; Bae & Wickrama, 2015; Maxwell, 2016). The social environment or socioeconomic status of an educational institution influenced the selection of teachers (Engel & Cannata, 2015), student-teacher ratio (Rowley & Wright, 2011), and the rules and regulations that govern the school (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Rowley & Wright, 2011). NCLB gave a school district the privilege to determine the socio-economic status of the schools within the district (Klein, 2015; Rowley & Wright, 2011), and the district collected taxes and allocated the funds to schools within the district (Payne & Biddle, 1999).

This approach resulted in severe financial consequences for low-income areas (Rowley & Wright, 2011). Property value has generally been lower in low-income neighborhoods and thus, schools in poor areas received less money (Grissom et al., 2014; Rowley & Wright, 2011). NCLB worsened the unequal distribution of resources that were needed to enhance the academic achievement of low-income schools (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Rowley et al., 2011). Schools also received money per student and therefore, schools in low-income neighborhoods had to increase the teacher-student ratio due to diminishing funds (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Payne & Biddle, 1999).

Students enjoy significant educational benefits when they were enrolled in smaller classes (Matta, Guzman, Stockly, & Widner, 2015; Musau & Migosi, 2013). Some of these benefits included increased attention for students (Diette & Raghav, 2015; Mathis, 2017; Rowley & Wright, 2011), conducive classroom atmosphere (Diette & Raghav, 2015; Mathis, 2017), a reduction in discipline problems (Diette & Raghav, 2015), quality of teachers (Dieterle, 2015), and improved academic accomplishments (Watson, Handal, & Maher, 2016).

In my teaching experience at low-income schools, I observed that at-risk students thrived much better and enhanced their academic achievement in smaller classes. Larger class size decreased teachers' classroom management abilities (Diette & Raghav, 2015), student academic performance (Watson et al., 2016), and instructors ability to differentiate instruction that caters for all learning styles, intelligences, and abilities (Back et al., 2016; Mathis, 2017; Musau & Migosi, 2013). However, Odden (1990) argued that reducing class sizes may not have any significant effect on student performance. Nevertheless, numerous variables in the school environment may contribute significantly to academic achievement. Variables include bullying, harassment, (Kim, Schwartz, Cappella, & Seidman, 2014; Lacey, Cornell, & Konold, 2017) and highly structured school rules (Voight, Hanson, O'Malley, & Adekanye, 2015; Waweru, Mwebi, & Kirimi, 2017). Hence, the results of NCLB were deemed disastrous for minority students, particularly African American males (Brunn-Bevel, & Byrd, 2015; Rowley & Wright, 2011; Papay, Murnane, & Willett, 2016).

The NCLB introduction of high-stakes standardized tests created additional hardships for at-risk students who already struggled academically; their struggles were due to multiple factors, particularly their socioeconomic status (Brunn-Bevel & Byrd, 2015; Dee & Jacobs, 2011; Rowley & Wright, 2011; Watson et al., 2015; Tough, 2016). Also, at-risk students received less

financial resources, fewer highly qualified teachers, larger class sizes, and less attention in class (Rowley & Wright, 2011). Thus, NCLB did not meet the intended objective of closing the achievement gap between minority students and their Caucasian counterparts (Bogin, & Nguyen-Hoang, 2014; Klein, 2015; Rowley & Wright, 2011). Further, students who failed to meet passing scores were provided with before and after-school tutoring; however, most students were unable to attend due to numerous reasons the school had no control over, or students were not motivated to participate (Klein, 2015; Reback et al., 2014; Rowley & Wright, 2011).

However, students who were enrolled in schools close to the AYP failing margin showed a greater probability of scoring higher in reading than their counterparts enrolled in similar schools that were above the AYP passing margin (Reback et al., 2014). NCLB sought to enhance the academic achievement of students, but the policy did not target the core of the problem with the American education system (Rowley & Wright, 2011). The core of the problem in education is the socioeconomic status of at-risk students and the inequality and inequity of resources (Marshall & Olivia, 2010, Rowley & Wright, 2011; Watson et al., 2015).

Although there was an effort to implement new initiatives, there needed to be a greater focus on the curriculum, teaching methods, and interventions directed at enhancing the academic output of at-risk students (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Watson et al., 2015). Currently, many researchers have advocated for the implementation of mentoring programs to provide additional layers of support for at-risk students (Kemmis et al., 2004; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Snowden et al., 2011). The current American education system is focused on standardized assessments and test scores; but little or no emphasis is placed on preparing and equipping teachers to effectively address the challenges associated with at-risk students and social changes (Burks & Hochbein, 2015; DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Radcliffe & Bos, 2011; Wilson et al., 2014).

Stafford-Brizard (2016) argued that it is imperative to utilize a framework for comprehensive student development in the formative years of students' educational experience. Also, the success of future learning and academic achievement is contingent upon the building blocks for learning (Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Tough, 2016). Students must possess self-awareness, which is the capacity to precisely recognize one's emotions and thought processes; determining how their feelings and thoughts influence their behavior (Garg, Levin, & Tremblay, 2016; Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Wolters & Hussain, 2015).

In addition, students must have the ability to honestly assess their strengths and weaknesses and take the initiative to plan, implement, and evaluate their learning needs and outcomes independently or collaboratively (Damşa & Ludvigsen, 2016; Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). Students must be able to establish and maintain beneficial relationships with diverse individuals and groups (Bandura, 1997; Nuttall & Doherty, 2014; Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). They must be able to communicate clearly (Han, 2012), listen keenly (Dias, Montiel & Seabra, 2015), resist peer pressure (Darensbourg & Blake, 2014) and social pressure (Bursztyn & Jensen, 2015), and seek help when necessary (Stafford-Brizard, 2016).

Furthermore, students must find the subject matter interesting and valuable for school to be relevant to them (Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Tough, 2016); they must experience a sense of belonging (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Maslow, 1948), develop a growth mindset (Rattan, Savani, Chugh, & Dweck, 2015; Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Tough, 2016), and have self-efficacy (Bandura, 2000; Bergey et al., 2015; Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Velez et al., 2013; Wood et al., 2015).

Students must also possess resilience (Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Tough, 2016), perseverance (Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Tough, 2016), academic tenacity (Laursen, 2015; Rimfeld, Kovas, Dale & Plomin, 2016), and curiosity (Maslow, 1948; Tariq, Batool & Khan, 2013), as

well as self-regulation (Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Tariq et al., 2013; Tough, 2016; Wolters & Hussain, 2015) and civic identity (Oyserman & Lewis, 2017) to succeed academically.

However, NCLB ignored these non-cognitive skills, which are the bedrock of academic advancement and accomplishment (Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Tough, 2016). As a result, 21st century education must implement an array of novel initiatives that cater to the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students, particularly at-risk students (Burks & Hochbien, 2015; Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Tough, 2016).

In 2009, the Obama administration introduced a major education reform through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) that provided more than \$44 billion of stimulus money for education (Wright, 2015). This new initiative was called Race to the Top (RTTT). States had to adhere to four essential requirements to access the funds (Rowley & Wright, 2011). The four requirements established by the federal government were as follows: (a) adopt international benchmark standards that prepare students for college and careers, including English language learners and students with disability; (b) recruit, develop, reward, and retain effective teachers and principals; (c) increase transparency by building data systems; and (d) implement intervention strategies to enhance the academic achievement of the lowest performing schools (Rowley & Wright, 2011).

However, Laughter, (2016) argued that high-stakes standardized tests remained a major feature of the new initiative in education and issues pertaining to English language learners and students with disabilities were not adequately addressed in funded state proposals (Brunn-Bevel, & Byrd, 2015; Rowley & Wright, 2011; Papay et al., 2016). Thus, intervention strategies failed to improve the academic performance of the intended lowest performing school (Burks & Hochbien, 2015; Stafford-Brizard, 2016; Tough, 2016). The evaluation of a student's academic

progress with one data point obtained via high stakes standardized test unfairly represents students (Laughter, 2016).

At-Risk Students

At-risk students are defined as students who are at-risk of failure due to poverty, limited English proficiency, disabilities, race or ethnicity, academic failure, noncompliance to norms, geographic location, and socio-economic status (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Tough, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; Watson et al., 2014). More specifically, African American males in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States have been perceived as failures and have been labeled as academic underperformers (Tough, 2016; Watson et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2016). The results of stereotyping are reflected in the education statistics of both the countries and portray African American males as at-risk students (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Tough, 2016; Wright et al., 2016).

African American males have been perceived within an educational context as problematic, aggressive, and menacing (Watson et al., 2015). African American male students are disproportionately represented among low educational achievement, and tend to have high rates of exclusion from school (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Tough, 2016; Watson et al., 2015; Wun, 2016). In addition, institutionalized racism in the education system contributes to the low academic performance of African American males (Wun, 2016). Racial oppression and bias against African American students has been a systemic and foundational problem in the United States educational system (Lofton & Davis, 2015; Wun, 2016). Teachers were reported by some as underestimating the potential of African American students, communicating low academic expectations of them, and the assumed behavioral issues hinder the students' academic growth and talents (Lofton & Davis, 2015; Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Tough, 2016). Furthermore,

poverty, insecurity, and low self-esteem influence at-risk students' motivation to learn because their basic needs are not satisfied (Maslow, 1948). Bandura (1997) purported that students' academic success is contingent upon their belief in their ability to accomplish tasks. Therefore, self-efficacy, self-confidence, and esteem impact at-risk students' academic success (Drago, et al., 2016; Tolan et al., 2014; Tough, 2016).

Despite being at-risk, African American male students' narratives divulge a determination to succeed academically (Wright et al., 2016). The cultivation of African American male students' determination can be harnessed and transformed into academic success by external agents, including the family and organizations (Kemmis et al., 2014; Tolan et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). At-risk students must be provided with a conducive learning environment that integrates instructional support to stimulate students' desires to learn despite the school environment (Grant & Dieker, 2011; Tough, 2016; Watson et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2016). Mentoring allows students to collaborate with a more mature individual who can encourage, inspire, and motivate them to persevere and pursue academic excellence in the face of adversity (Bean et al., 2014; Erickson & Phillips, 2012; Goff, 2011; Leidenfrost et al., 2014; Maxwell, 2014; Wyatt, 2009).

Approximately 65% of African American children belong to single-parent households, principally headed by single mothers (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015; Tough, 2016). Students who are raised in fatherless homes, come from low-income families, and live in communities plagued with crime and violence are more likely to underperform academically, while becoming victims of the system (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Watson et al., 2015). Therefore, in order to provide at-risk students the opportunity to achieve academic success, one must take into account the social context of education, the intricacies of their lived

experiences, and understand the ways in which their learning and achievement are impacted (Fransson & McMahan, 2013; Nuttall & Doherty, 2014; Tough, 2016; Watson et al., 2015).

African American youth are more likely to have poor school attendance and receive more disciplinary referrals and out-of-school suspensions (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Wun, 2016). If left unattended, these actions can ultimately result in higher dropout rates (Marshall & Olivia, 2010), engagement in criminal activity (Nuttall et al., 2014), increased contact with the juvenile court and detention centers, and eventual incarceration (Tough, 2016; Wun, 2016). African American males tended to be hopeless and disengaged and are more likely to turn to gangs, as gangs provide structure, rules, symbols, authentic peer relationships, and guidance from more knowledgeable members (Nuttall et al., 2014). Therefore, mentoring has been a viable mechanism through which at-risk African American youth can develop connectedness with family, peers, school, and the community (Karcher et al., 2002; Leidenfrost et al., 2014; Watson et al., 2015; N. Wilson et al., 2014). At-risk students also need to receive guidance, motivation, and support to competently handle life's challenges (D'Souza, 2014; Nuttall et al., 2014), cooperatively develop cognition (Tolan et al., 2014; Vygotsky, 1978), and ultimately enhance their academic achievement (Boswell et al., 2015; DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012).

History of Mentoring

Mentorship is a partnership between a more experienced or knowledgeable individual who guides a less experienced or less knowledgeable person (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001; Wyatt, 2009). Additionally, mentoring is an essential practice of human development in which one individual invests time, energy, and personal know-how in supporting the growth, development, ability, and building the capacity of another individual (Cole, 2015; Richter,

Kunter, Ludtke, Klunsmann, Anders, & Baumert, 2013; Seal, 2015; Wyatt, 2009). Gordon (1997) argued that mentorship is an integral aspect of human development in all cultures.

The term mentor has expanded in meaning, function, approach, and complexity (Chan Yeh, & Krumboltz, 2015; Fransson & McChan; McCoy et al., 2015). A mentor can be a trusted advisor, colleague, instructor, or a knowledgeable person (Cole, 2015; Seal, 2015; Tache, 2015; Wyatt, 2009). Historically, one can cite many examples of mentoring in the Bible, such as Jethro and Moses, Moses and Joshua, and Paul and Barnabas. Many proponents of mentoring perceive mentoring as an intervention to address many social (Leidenfrost et al., 2014; Maxwell, 2014), cultural (Fransson et al., 2013; Kochan et al., 2015; McCoy et al., 2015), and academic problems (Pennanen, Bristol, Wilkinson, & Heikkinen, 2016; Tough, 2016; Watson et al., 2014). However, many findings have also concluded the contrary (Jacobi, 1991; Lunsford, 2014). Several researchers have recommended further investigation on mentoring, particularly qualitative research (Butler, Whiteman, & Crow, 2013; Dawson, 2014; Godden, Tregunna, & Kutsyuruba, 2014; Leidenfrost et al., 2011; Searby, 2014).

Benefits of Mentoring

Mentoring helps youth develop authentic relationships (Maxwell, 2014; McCann & Llyod, 2013; Seal, 2015; Wilson et al., 2014). Connectedness with parents is the most important connection accounted for improvement in academic performance (Banerjee-Batist & Reio, 2016; Karcher et al., 2002). Many at-risk African American students do not have a father figure at home and thus, a caring mentoring relationship with an adult can help to fill the void (Watson et al., 2015). Students who enjoy healthy and caring relationships, especially with an adult or faculty member, have an increased chance of being academically successful (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Lechuga, 2014; Sherma & Freeman, 2014). A sense of belonging, safety, and positive

self-esteem are essential variables for academic achievement (Bakhurst, 2015; Maslow, 1948; Watson et al., 2015; Weese et al., 2015).

Erickson and Phillips (2012) asserted that religious mentoring helps improve student behavior and develop a strong moral ethic that is needed to guide future decisions. Religious mentoring decreases adolescent participation in deviant behavior through social control, creates greater access to social support, and provides a stable environment to socialize (Erickson & Phillips, 2012; Snowden & Hardy, 2012). Students who participate in a mentoring program have a significant reduction in truancies, suspensions, and expulsions and greater class participation and engagement (Grima-Farrell, 2015; Watson et al., 2015).

African American male students disproportionately receive discipline referrals and in and out of school suspensions (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Tough, 2016; Van Dyke, 2014; Watson et al., 2015). Additionally, African American males have a high rate of unexcused absences, increased dropouts, and low graduation rates (Watson et al., 2015). Consequently, many initiatives, including NCLB, have been taken to improve the academic accomplishments of at-risk students, which included a high number of minority students (Husband & Hunt, 2015). However, the cause of the problem related to the low academic achievement among African Americans, particularly male students, has not been adequately addressed (Grant & Dieker, 2011; Husband & Hunt, 2015; Marshall & Olivia, 2010). Subsequently, many researchers have advocated for the implementation of school-based mentoring programs to provide an additional layer of support to at-risk students (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Goff, 2011).

Watson et al., (2015) argued that African American males have been coveted and feared due to peculiar characteristics, such as their strength, courage, creativity, agility, intelligence, usefulness, and mysticism. Hence, there has been intense discussion as well as a sharp critique

of African American males. The stereotypes and stigma attached to African American males has been viewed as being part of a systematic effort to suppress and control this group (Lofton & Davis, 2015; Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Watson et al., 2015; Wyatt, 2009). The poor health and mass incarceration of African American males have had collateral damage on the African American family and particularly, African American youth (Crutchfield & Twyman, 2014). Watson et al. (2015) advocated mentoring as a new approach to educating African American males.

The problems faced by the African American population calls for an initiative that is creative and tailored to their needs (Marshall & Olivia, 2010). African American males are culturally disoriented due to Caucasian oppression and may be victimized by Americans of European decent (Lofton & Davis, 2015; Watson et al., 2015). Futhermore, the increased pressure of accountability on teachers, schools, and districts to produce results has created a stressful learning environment (Laughter, 2016; Nuttall & Doherty, 2014). The trauma students experience at home, in communities, and numerous social ills created profound learning challenges (Nuttall & Doherty, 2014; Watson et al., 2015). Thus, mentoring was an excellent approach to culturally reconnect African American students to the academic community (Chan et al., 2015; Kochran et al., 2015; Watson et al., 2015), and to learn to use the capital to transform failure into success (Wright et al., 2016).

Approximately 83% of public school teachers in the United States of America are Caucasian, 75% are Caucasian females, 7% are African American, and less than 2 % are African American males (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). American public-school teachers are more so disproportionately Caucasian and predominantly female compared to the high percentage of minority students in public schools (Marshall & Olivia, 2010).

Many Caucasian female teachers are believed to communicate low expectations of African American male students and label them as aggressive (Tough, 2016; Watson et al., 2015). A lack of cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity on the part of Caucasian teachers has contributed to the poor academic performance of African American males (Grant & Dieker, 2011; Marshall & Olivia, 2010). In addition, most education programs prepare teachers to educate Caucasian students and not students of color (Marshall & Olivia, 2010). Hence, at-risk students benefit from mentoring relationships with adults who know and understand them (McCoy et al., 2015).

Educators are desperately seeking for strategies to reconnect African American students to the education process. The lack of participation and disengagement in academic activity by African American males have been a point of discourse among educators (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). The poor academic performance (Leidenfrost et al., 2014), lower graduation rates compared to their Caucasian counterparts, and low numbers transitioning to college called for innovative approaches (Goff, 2011). New initiatives must include ways to look at the curriculum, teaching methods, and interventions (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Watson et al., 2015); there is a growing number of research findings that advocate for the implementation of mentoring programs to positively impact at-risk youths' academics and behaviors (Cole, 2015; Snowden & Hardy, 2013).

Researchers generally concur that mentoring impacts student achievement (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Radcliffe & Bos, 2011; Wilson et al., 2014). Literature presented empirical evidence of staff mentoring impacting student performance (Grossman et al., 2012; Karcher et al., 2002; Mammadov & Topçu 2014). Subsequently, peer mentoring can positively influence academic accomplishment (Goff, 2011; Snowden & Hardy, 2012).

Mentoring equipped students with tools to stay focused to cope with stress at home, school, and in the community (Lindt & Blair, 2016). Likewise, mentorship builds students' esteem (D'Souza, 2014; Grima-Farrell, 2015; Maxwell, 2014), gives them a sense of belongingness (Weese et al., 2015), helps students set and accomplish goals (Leidenfrost et al., 2014; Mammadov & Topçu, 2014), and keeps them out of trouble (Nuttall & Doherty, 2014; Watson et al., 2014). Students reported that their mentors gave them a feelings of respect (Cole, 2015; Seal, 2015), demonstrated empathy (Sherma & Freeman, 2014; Moodie, 2014), served as role models (Mulvihill & Martin, 2016), and protected them against potentially harmful relationships with their teachers (Castellanos et al., 2016).

At-risk students who receive mentoring were more likely to develop a true relationship with an adult or faculty member, maintain a positive attitude and behavior pattern, develop positive self-esteem, self-efficacy, and exhibit higher self-confidence (Mammadov & Topçu, 2014; Mulvihill & Martin, 2016). Mentored students also have improved attendance, participation, and engagement; receive fewer discipline referrals, and have enhanced academic achievement (Watson et al., 2015). The caring relationships students experience during mentoring impacts students within the academic context as well as in college and beyond (Wilson et al., 2014). Students who have experienced mentoring have improved their performance since their basic needs were satisfied (Maslow, 1948) and their self-efficacy was enhanced (Bandura, 1997; Wood et al., 2015) due to the guidance from a more mature, knowledgeable, and skilled individual (Cole, 2015; Seal, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978).

School-based mentoring is rapidly growing as an intervention and serves thousands of at-risk students (Collings, Swanson & Watkins, 2014; Grossman et al., 2012; Johnson, Simon, & Mun, 2014). The most popular and largest volunteer mentoring program in the United States is

the Big Brothers and Big Sisters program (Curtis & Hansen-Schwoebel, 1999). Big Brothers, Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) was the first organization in the United States to offer one-on-one mentoring to adolescents (Curtis & Hansen-Schwoebel, 1999). The program assigned mature adults to mentor at-risk students (Cole, 2015; Musewe, Harvey, & Riggs, 2014; Seal, 2015; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001; Wyatt, 2009). This mentoring program aimed at equipping at-risk students with problem-solving strategies, enhanced decision-making process, developed of a sense of community, and created the opportunity to interact with others with similar experiences while creating an action plan to overcome life's challenges (Watson et al., 2015; Song & Moon, 2015).

School-based mentoring programs widely vary in content, style, approach, duration, and purpose (Kemmis et al., 2014; Leidenfrost et al., 2014). However, while there is no evidence to indicate that one mentoring style is more effective than another, mentoring has yielded a significant level of success with at-risk students (Collings et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2014; Leidenfrost et al., 2014). Jacobi (1991) argued that there was no empirical evidence to substantiate the claims that academic success is enhanced through mentoring; the claim of academic success was assumed, rather than demonstrated. Wells, Gifford, Bai, and Corra (2015) drew a similar conclusion, stating that there was no conclusive evidence to indicate that mentorship augmented value to student academic accomplishments. Many mentoring programs were said to lack rigor, and therefore the assumed academic success is driven by teachers' fervent desires to improve student academic output (Jacobi, 1991).

Nevertheless, based on the findings of others, mentoring could have a positive influence on learning, improve academic engagement and participation, lower stress and anxiety levels, and ultimately improve academic achievement (Cole, 2015; Mulvihill et al., 2016; Musewe et al.,

2015; Snowden et al., 2012; Tache, 2015). The findings of these investigations challenged the conclusions of Jacobi (1991). The point advocated is that mentoring programs could be effective if they are properly designed, implemented, and monitored with fidelity (DuBois et al., 2002; Pennanen et al., 2016). Furthermore, mentoring programs are touted as potentially being effective when they are theoretically and empirically based (Dubois et al., 2002) and the mentors develop healthy and caring relationships with the mentees (Searby, 2014; Sharma & Freeman, 2014).

The assumption was that mentoring assists at-risk students due to the social and psychological support provided (Jacobi, 1991); subsequently, mentoring impacts learning outcomes, but is not predictive of academic accomplishment (Searby, 2014). However, many other variables, including self-efficacy, are identified as being predictive of academic success (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012), which mentoring at-risk African American students has been shown to provide them with social and emotional support, a sense of identity and connection to their culture, and improvement in their social functioning (Banerjee et al., 2016; Sherma et al., 2014; Watson et al., 2015). Nevertheless, Wood (2012) argued that mentoring does not reliably enhance student academic accomplishments, attitude, attendance, self-esteem, or behavior. Contrarily, Musewe et al. (2016) asserted that the success of any mentoring program is contingent upon two key variables: the intensity of the program determined by the frequency of contacts between the mentor and the mentee and the content engagement.

Maclver (2011) argued that mentoring has no significant effect on dropout rates even when research-based policies are well implemented to preclude dropout. The argument was that dropout interventions can only be successful when they are systematically implemented in the middle schools and continued through high schools (Maclver, 2011; Sherma et al., 2014).

However, proponents of mentoring countered that the passage from boyhood to manhood is traumatic; as a result, mentoring in middle school is vital and paramount to yield satisfactory results in high school (Grant & Dieker, 2011). Furthermore, several others (Collings et al., 2014; Grama-Farrell, 2015; Johnson et al., 2014; Lechuga, 2015) asserted that prevention strategies for at-risk students in the middle schools yield the intended results.

Further examples of mentoring success were purported by Alomar and Strauch (2014) in that they found mentoring has a significant impact on students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Additionally, mentoring has been credited for the improvement in behavior in students during the mentoring sessions (Cole, 2014; Bean et al., 2014). However, Jacobi (1991) maintained that student achievement is influenced by the fervent desire a teacher has to ensure students' success, and a result of mentorship. Furthermore, Fries-Britt and Snider's (2015) findings showed the failure of mentoring programs in meeting the needs of underrepresented students. However, Song and Moon (2015) refuted Jacobi's finding and argued that mentoring yields positive effects on students.

This study filled the gap in the literature and added to the body of knowledge on the phenomenon of how at-risk African American male students' perceived mentorship impacted their motivation to learn. There was a large volume of quantitative research on the topic, but limited qualitative research is available (Grossman et al., 2012; Lechuga, 2014; Searby, 2014). More research needed to be conducted with at-risk African American students (Grant & Dieker, 2011). Thus, this study provided qualitative data from at-risk African American students who have lived experiences of mentoring and the findings complement the existing quantitative findings.

This study gave African American males a voice regarding how they perceived the influence of mentoring on their motivation to learn (Grant & Dieker, 2011; Searby, 2014). The absence of African Americans' perceptions of the phenomenon precluded improvements to the manner to which they are provided educational services (Grant & Dieker, 2011). As a result, the findings of this study assisted in providing information on mentoring programs for at-risk African American students. Finally, this study also provided qualitative data that may help resolve ambiguities in many of the present studies. Many quantitative researchers recommended additional research on the impact of mentoring on academic achievement since the evidence was unable to provide conclusive proof that mentoring was predictive of academic success (Lechuga, 2014; Leidenfrost et al., 2014; Searby, 2014).

Summary

At-risk African American male students experience numerous problems in high school, including poor health, stress, lack of resources, dysfunctional homes, low self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-confidence (Nuttall, 2015; Watson et al., 2015). Many of these students live in violent and crime-ridden neighborhoods, are mentally depressed, lack the motivation to learn, and are academically underachieving (Song & Moon, 2015; Watson et al., 2015). Many researchers have delineated the benefits of mentoring on the physical, social, emotional, and academic well-being of African American males (Cole, 2015; Watson et al., 2015; Wilson, 2014). Furthermore, the literature underscores mentoring as an important variable to influence at-risk African American male students (Collings, 2014, Johnson et al., 2014; Snowden et al., 2012).

Mentoring reduced parental stress and emotional imbalance, improved behavior, and yielded positive effects on students (Cole, 2015; La Valle, 2015; Maxwell, 2014; Seal, 2015;

Tough, 2016). Mentoring also provided African American males with strong, caring relationships, guidance, motivation, and inspiration from their K-12 years through college (Watson et al., 2015). At-risk African American males need support mechanisms to utilize their capital to succeed (Wright et al., 2016). Mentorship helps satisfy the basic needs of students (Maslow, 1948), develops self-efficacy through interaction (Bandura, 1997; Bergey et al., 2015; Velez et al., 2013), and enhanced learning with guidance (Bakhurst, 2015; Damsa et al., 2015; Vygotsky, 1978).

This review of the existing literature also revealed the enormous challenges at-risk African Americans face in the public-school system and the high value that has been placed on mentoring (Watson et al., 2015). However, there is a dearth of qualitative data on mentoring and particularly, on at-risk African American high school students (Grant & Dieker, 2011). Also, African American male students who participate in mentoring have not been given a voice and the opportunity to describe their perceived influence of mentoring on their motivation to learn and their lived experience of the phenomenon (Grant & Dieker, 2011; Searby, 2015).

Transcendental phenomenology, a qualitative research approach was utilized to understand how at-risk high school male African American students' perceived mentorship impacted their motivation to learn in one high school in central Florida (Moustakas, 1994). Chapter Three delineated the procedures that was employed in this investigation.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how at-risk high school male African American students' perceived mentorship impacted their motivation to learn. Researchers have noted that poor academic performance among at-risk African American male high school students has been a major concern for public school institutions in the United States (Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008). In addition, an increasing number of African American male high school students are at risk for failure (Watson et al., 2015). Furthermore, research findings indicated that students who are retained or received remediation tended to be less successful academically and experienced lower graduation rates (Marshall & Olivia, 2010). Consequently, mentoring is believed by scholars to be an intervention to address the lack of motivation to learn and the poor academic performance among at-risk African American male high school students (Leidenfrost et al., 2014; Watson et al., 2015). Mentoring has also been purported as a strategy that can potentially close the achievement gap between African American students and their Caucasian counterparts (Apprey et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2008; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001; Watson et al., 2015).

The central focus of the present study was the lack of motivation to learn among at-risk African American male high school students (Nuttall & Doherty, 2014; Watson et al., 2015). Chapter Three includes details of the study design, a recapitulation of the research questions, a description of the setting for the study, and a profile of the study participants. In addition, my role as the researcher is explained and the data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations are explored. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter specifically, and the study in general.

Design

Creswell (2013) noted that a qualitative investigation is an inquiry progression of understanding, grounded in a distinct methodological approach to inquiry that explores a social phenomenon. Qualitative research helped the researcher construct a multifaceted and holistic picture, evaluate words, report detailed perspectives of the participants, and conduct the study in a natural context (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology, in its distinctively current form, originated from, and grows through, the work of Edmund Husserl (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

This proposed transcendental phenomenological research explored a heterogeneous group of 10 to 15 participants who have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, the transcendental phenomenological approach to qualitative research was the most suitable approach for my investigation because it examined the participants' experiences of the phenomenon using textual and structural descriptions from their perspective (Creswell, 2013). In addition, transcendental phenomenology focuses on the participants' experiences rather than on the researcher's interpretations (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, I examined the phenomenon of the study by utilizing rich lived experiences, textural descriptions, and structural descriptions to develop the essence of the study (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Transcendental phenomenological reduction was the most appropriate and aligned method of data analysis for this qualitative investigation because its usage produced a synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions and the essence of the lived experience of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, bracketing helped me set aside my personal experiences, biases, prejudgments, and preconceived ideas and thus resulted in a fresh perspective toward the participants and the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994).

Finally, the study ended with a description that explicates the essence of the phenomenon comprised of the participants' lived experiences and the way in which it was experienced (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

Central Research Question

How does at-risk African American male high school students' perceived mentorship impact their motivation to learn?

Subquestion One

How does at-risk African American male high school students' perceived mentorship impact their self-efficacy and behavior?

Subquestion Two

How does at-risk African American male high school students' perceived mentoring impact their intrinsic motivation?

Subquestion Three

How does at-risk African American male high school students' perceived mentorship impact their college readiness and career selection process?

Subquestion Four

How do at-risk African American high school students perceive the effectiveness of mentoring when used as an educational intervention strategy to close the achievement gap between Caucasian and African American males?

Setting

The setting for this proposed study was the upper school of a low-income K-12 private school located in Orange County of Central Florida. The pseudonym I used for the name of the site for the study is Zuzu High School. The selected school was one of several private schools in Central Florida. In addition, Orange County is the most diverse county in Central Florida and this diversity is reflected in the county's private and public-school student population. Zuzu High School is a co-educational school with 72% African American, 20% Hispanic, and 5% Caucasian, and 3% other.

The pseudonym I used for the name of the school's neighborhood is Belmo; Justice City was the pseudonym for the city. Zuzu High School is a Christian school located in the Belmo neighborhood in the urban heart of Justice City. The student population of Zuzu High School is predominantly African American, and most of the students live near the school. Several schools' Partners in Education provided full scholarships for students to attend the school. Students who graduated with a 3.0 grade point average (GPA) or higher currently may have qualified for college funding.

Zuzu High School was selected as the research setting due to its predominantly African American student population and the inclusion of a school-based mentoring program. The mentoring program at Zuzu High School was implemented and coordinated by the Christian church that operated the school. Participants for the proposed study came from this site because they have all experienced the same phenomenon.

Zuzu High School has consistently been viewed as a low performing school for numerous years due to its location in a predominantly African American neighborhood, stereotypes about African Americans, and discipline issues (Rowley & Wright, 2011). It was difficult to recruit

and retain good teachers at Zuzu High school (Marshall & Oliva, 2010). As a result, the administration appointed newly hired teachers in the district to positions at Zuzu. The inability to recruit quality teachers specifically for Zuzu had a significant impact on the quality of instructional delivery at the school.

Zuzu High School was led by a strong African American male principal and one female African American assistant principal. The assistant principal was responsible for instruction, the advanced placement program, exceptional student education (ESE), and English language learners (ELL). The math coach was also the math and science department chair, while a reading coach was responsible for reading and social studies. There was one dean who was responsible for discipline, facility, lunch supervision, and electives.

The counselors headed the ELL department and were responsible for all documentation, conferences, designing, implementing, and monitoring the language educational plans (LEP), student placement, and ensuring students receive the services as stipulated in the LEP. Additional school resources provided include a mental health counselor, social worker, speech pathologist, and psychologist.

Participants

Following a successful proposal defense and approval of my application by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the school's administrators were contacted and asked to provide a list of at-risk African American male high school students. A sample of 12 to 15 students who agreed to participate, and whose parents gave consent, were contacted for participation in the study. Students were selected by using a purposeful criterion sampling procedure. In addition, convenience sampling was used due to participant availability; the

selection of participants in a convenience sample is contingent upon the availability and ability to access the participants (Creswell, 2013).

The criterion for selecting each participant was their lived experience of the phenomenon of mentorship (Moustakas, 1994). The participants of the study were selected based on the USA definition of African American since individuals from African descent include multiple cultural and ethnic disparities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The sample consisted of multiple cultures and ethnicities including African Americans from the Caribbean islands, Central and South America, and African Americans. The participants were selected from male students only who were between the ages of 14 to 18, and attended the same high school.

Approximately 12 to 15 participants from a central Florida K-12 private school were selected to participate in this transcendental phenomenological research. The sample included students who participated in a school-based mentoring program and were categorized as at-risk due to poverty, limited English proficiency, race or ethnicity, academic failure, geographic location, and socio-economic status (U.S. Department of Education, 2016; Watson et al., 2015).

An initial informational meeting was held during a mentoring session to apprise the students of the proposed research. Informed assent and consent letters were given to students and their parents to identify and solicit potential participants. Students and parents decided whether they were willing to participate in the research. I met with the potential participants to arrange an interview upon receipt of the informed consent and to coordinate a scheduled time with the principal to observe students in classrooms and conduct a focus group interview with the mentees.

Procedures

Following a successful proposal defense and approval by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A), parents and participants received an initial letter detailing the investigation and a time and place for the first contact. All parents and students who were willing to participate in the research signed the informed consent and assent forms before data collection began. Participating students and parents were given a thank you note for their willingness to participate in the research study; a scheduled date and time to meet for interviews was subsequently provided. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and were audio recorded at the research site outside the school day. Each interview was transcribed verbatim for later analysis.

Face-to-face interviews (see Appendix B) have often been the dominant interview technique in the field of qualitative research (Opdenakker, 2006). In addition, interviews are a crucial component of transcendental phenomenology research because they target obtaining accurate information (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) argued that interviews must be less than one hour long, include open-ended questions, and facilitate conversation. Therefore, in my study, open-ended interviews used the same open-ended questions for all interviewees (Creswell, 2013). I utilized open-ended questions as they focused on understanding the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

The interviews were conducted during the third marking period, which was a nine-week period from January to March 2018. All interviews were face-to-face with a duration of approximately 45 minutes (Creswell, 2013). No other forms of interviews were necessary because all the participants were from a central location and easily accessible. The interviews were conducted in a private room to protect the participants' privacy and ensure confidentiality.

I administered the interviews to the participants, recorded all interviews, and transcribed them verbatim.

I also arranged a date and time to meet with participants for a focus group interview (see Appendix C), which was conducted at the research site outside the school day. Following the interviews and focus group interview, I observed each student in their classroom setting three times for 20 minutes (see Appendix D). An observation protocol based on motivation, engagement, and participation was used to organize and record data. Thank you notes were sent to participants, parents, mentors, and school administration following completion of data collection. Finally, the data collected was stored in a password protected folder on my laptop computer.

The Researcher's Role

My role as the researcher in the proposed study was that of the instrument due to the need to understand how at-risk African American male high school students' perceived mentorship impacted their motivation to learn (Creswell, 2013). My biases and assumptions could have influence the study because I represented the human instrument who analyzed the data (Creswell, 2013). I also recognized that my experiences and knowledge gained during my tenure as a mentor for five years in an inner-city public middle school located in a low-income neighborhood could impact the study. In addition, I may have brought bias to the study due to my belief that mentorship is a useful intervention tool and strategy to re-engage minority and at-risk students into the academic process. Furthermore, my daily interaction with at-risk students across the county, while coaching English language learners (ELL), has resulted in increased knowledge about at-risk African American male students who lack the motivation to learn.

However, by bracketing my personal experiences I worked to limit the impact of my biases and assumptions (Creswell, 2013).

My role in this transcendental phenomenology research was significant. According to Moustakas (1994), I identified the phenomenon to be investigated, bracketed my experiences, and collected data from multiple participants who have a lived experience of the phenomenon. In addition, I analyzed the data by searching for significant statements and themes, developed textural and structural descriptions, and synthesized the textural and structural descriptions to create the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

The purpose of qualitative research was the contextualization, interpretation, and understanding of participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994), and although I had no professional relationship with the research site or with the potential participants, my personal involvement, partiality, and empathetic understanding could have influenced the data collection and data analysis process (Creswell, 2013). Finally, my biases could have influenced the development of textural and structural descriptions and the synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions that created the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Data Collection

This transcendental phenomenological research used face-to-face interviews, focus group discussion, and observations to collect data for this study of how at-risk high school male African American students' perceived mentorship impacted their motivation to learn.

Face-To-Face Interviews

The following open-ended interview questions were used to solicit responses from the participants to answer the research questions of the study.

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. What feelings were generated by your mentoring experience?
2. How do you believe mentoring has influenced your self-confidence and self-esteem?
3. Describe a successful academic experience since you began participation in the mentoring program?
4. How do you believe mentoring has changed your interest in school and desire to learn?
5. What mental changes do you believe you are experiencing because of mentoring?
6. What experiences from the mentoring program would you like to share with others?
7. How do you believe mentoring has influenced the grades you get?
8. What do you believe you would have done differently in middle school if you had been mentored then?
9. Describe how you became aware you needed to change your academic behavior?
10. How did you feel the first time your mentor encouraged you to go to college?
11. How do you believe mentoring has impacted your plans for going to college and getting a career?
12. What do you believe are some changes that can be done to the mentoring program to help you become more successful?
13. What other significant thoughts about the mentoring experience would you like to share?

Questions one was a reflective question that was designed to elicit students' feelings and emotions stimulated by mentoring (Seal, 2015).

Question two helped participants reflect on the extent to which they believe in their ability to successfully accomplish tasks (Bandura, 1997) and how they perceived themselves (Maslow, 1948).

Question three was non-threatening, served as a stimulus, gave students an opportunity to voice their experience, and encouraged the participants to actively engage in the interview process (Moustakas, 1994).

Question four sought to discover how mentoring has impacted students' motivation. Maslow (1948) argued that the emergence of growth needs is contingent upon the satisfaction of basic needs.

Question five aimed at understanding the extent to which students thought processes change. Additionally, an individual who felt as though they belong felt safe, felt loved, and whose physiological needs were met was motivated to achieve (Maslow, 1948).

Question six sought to understand the impact of mentoring on the participant's sense of community. Leidenfrost et al. (2013) argued that mentoring helps to connect students to their peers, teachers, and community. Attachment makes students feel integrated and gives them a sense of belongingness, which enhances their academic performance (Watson et al., 2015).

Question seven was designed to allow participants to reflect on how meeting their basic needs has significantly influenced their desire to accomplish a future goal (Maslow, 1948).

Question eight was designed to help the participants reflect on the impact of interventions and instructional support on their academic achievement. This question was based on reports that suggest the American education system is not equipped to teach minority students, particularly at-risk male African Americans (Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Nuttall et al., 2014; Tolan et al., 2014; Watson et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2016).

Question nine endeavored to determine if mentoring changed students' academic behavior. Vygotsky (1978) argued that students learn through imitating the actions of others, particularly more mature and knowledgeable individuals. Therefore, mentoring provided students the opportunity to interact, collaborate with others, and to adapt or change their academic behavior.

Question 10 sought to understand the impact of mentoring on students' desires to go to college. This question was based on a study by Leidenfrost et al. (2013) who purported that mentoring is an effective intervention to enhance student academic output.

Question 11 sought to understand how mentoring changes students' desire to attend college and pursue a career. This question was framed by Bandura (1997) who argued that self-efficacy is the belief one has in his or her own ability to complete tasks. Furthermore, Vygotsky, (1978) observed that students who are guided to academic success through interaction developed self-confidence and self-esteem. Finally, Maslow (1948) discovered that the arousal of intrinsic motivation in students served as a motivation to improve their learning output

Questions 12 was specifically designed to force the participants to reflect on the changes they have experienced and how their perspectives of the future have been transformed through mentoring.

Questions 13 was aimed at giving the participants the opportunity to add additional perspectives about mentoring. Questions 12 and 13 provided the participants an opportunity to add, confirm, and clarify individual information, which they initially provided.

Focus Group Interview

Creswell (2013) recommended using focus groups to obtain undisclosed thick and rich data during interviews. Additionally, Connelly (2015) stated that some participants divulge more

information about their experience in groups rather than interviews. Furthermore, researchers usually choose focus groups for data collection because they perceive the nature of the phenomenon under study as a social experience (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, open-ended questions from the interviews were utilized for the focus group interview and I facilitated the session to keep the participants on topic. There was one focus group interview and it was audio recorded and documented during and after the interaction (Creswell, 2013). I anticipated all the participants would freely express their experiences with mentorship.

Standardized Open-Ended Focus Group Interview Questions

1. What is your favorite activity during the mentoring session?
2. What have you noticed about other students who are in the mentoring program?
3. How do you believe mentoring has influenced your study or academic habits?
4. What do you believe to be the benefits or advantages of mentoring?
5. How do you practice what you have learned in mentoring?
6. How would you feel if you were told that the mentoring program will be cancelled?
7. How do you feel about yourself since you being mentored?
8. Is there anything else you would like to say about what you like or do not like about mentoring?

Questions one provided students with a voice in the process of mentoring. (Grant & Dieker, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; Seal, 2015). This question also provided the participants an opportunity to be what Moustakas (1994) terms “co-researchers” because they were given an opportunity to augment, endorse, and illuminate individual information, which they initially provided in the individual interviews.

Question two gave students the opportunity to learn from the behavior of others (Bandura, 200, Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) purported that students learn through imitating the action of more mature and knowledgeable individuals. This was a fitting question because mentoring provided students the opportunity to adapt or change their academic behavior because of interaction and collaboration with others.

Question three was a reflective question that was designed to help participants reflect on their learning, deepen their understanding, and to develop critical thinking (Stafford-Brizard, 2016).

Question four sought to determine students' perceptions of the benefits or advantages of mentoring and was based on the seminal works of Bandura (1997), Vygotsky (1978), and Maslow (1948).

Question five was designed to force students to reflect on the impact of mentoring on their habit and practice of what they have learned in mentoring, as mentoring provides African American males with strong caring relationships, guidance, motivation, and inspiration from their K-12 years through college (Wilson, 2014).

Question six endeavored to elicit how students' sense of security, belongingness, and attachment would be affected if they were not participating in a mentoring program (Maslow, 1948; Stafford-Brizard, 2016).

Questions seven was a reflective question that was designed to help participants reflect on the extent to which they believe in their ability to successfully accomplish tasks (Bandura, 1997, Stafford-Brizard, 2016) and how they perceived themselves (Maslow, 1948). Students who were guided to academic success through interaction developed self-confidence and self-esteem (Vygotsky, 1978).

Question eight provided the participants the opportunity to contribute additional perspectives about mentoring.

Observation

Observations were used in my study to enable me to describe the existing phenomenon utilizing my sense of sight and hearing and thus provide a vividly written delineation of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2013).

Observations are a methodical explanation of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social context selected for investigation (Creswell, 2013). Consequently, the observation was one of the main tools used to collect data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013), and the primary method used in fieldwork (Creswell, 2013).

Following Creswell's (2013) model, I operated in a non-participant/observer capacity in my participation role (Creswell, 2013). In addition, my role as the researcher was very important in the research process and I took notes during the observations. This was imperative, as accurate note taking is essential to the enhancement of the trustworthiness and reliability of the investigation results (Creswell, 2013).

The observation for my study was conducted after the individual interviews and focus group discussion at the participants' high school. Participants were observed in their classroom setting and an observation protocol was used to record the data over a two-week period. I observed student behavior and cognitive engagement during instruction and class activity, their demonstration of enthusiasm and perseverance throughout the lesson, and the degree of effort exerted to solve problems. I followed the method recommended by Creswell (2013) in which I explained events and behaviors of the participants in the classroom setting. In addition, my observation protocol used a scale of zero through three with zero representing *not observed*, one

being *attempted*, two *to some extent*, and three *explicitly observed*. The data collected from the observation protocol was used as a measure of students' level of motivation to learn and to triangulate the data collected from the interviews and focus group session.

Observations were scheduled with the administration. I took detailed descriptive notes and accurate descriptions of what was seen, heard, and experienced, including quotations. Finally, I expanded descriptive field notes using personal accounts and reflections for summary conclusion and theme development into reflective notes (Creswell, 2013).

Data Analysis

Phenomenological data analysis included first organizing the data collected from the research questions and then examining the data for an explanation of how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). These phenomenological data analysis steps are called phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). I used the technique of phenomenological reduction to analyze the data collected in this study because it was most appropriate and recommended by leading qualitative researchers. Moustakas (1994) outlined six steps to the phenomenological reduction, and that includes bracketing, horizontalization, clustering, textural description, structural descriptions, and finally, the composite description that results in the essence of the phenomenon. During bracketing, the first step in the phenomenological reduction, I set aside predispositions and pre-judgments as much as possible to avoid influencing the findings of my investigation (Moustakas, 1994). I also set aside my prior experiences and perceptions in order to experience new ideas and have a fresh start (Moustakas, 1994). Although setting aside predispositions and prejudgments were difficult to achieve, it is significantly important in qualitative research (Moustakas, 1994). I explained all of

my past personal experiences with mentoring at-risk African American male students in grades six through eight.

I then transcribed all the interviews and the focus group discussion verbatim (Creswell, 2013). Prior to coding, I read the observation notes, interviews, and focus group discussion multiple times. All the participants' interviews were examined, and significant statements, important sentences, and quotes were highlighted (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, I utilized the significant statements to describe how the participants experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

I gathered clusters of meaning from the significant statements made by the participants (Creswell, 2013), and these were then utilized to develop themes (Moustakas, 1994). I consciously set aside my presuppositions to create themes free from or with limited inappropriate subjective decisions (Moustakas, 1994). Following theme development, I carefully examined all the relevant meaning obtained from each interview and focus group discussion and deleted repetitive information (Moustakas, 1994). All units of relevant meaning were then arranged to formulate clusters of themes (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994), and from that the major themes were identified and central themes were determined (Moustakas, 1994). I subsequently revisited the interviews and focus group discussion to ensure the clusters of meanings were accurate (Creswell, 2013).

I also synthesized the significant statement and themes and wrote descriptions of the data and what the at-risk African American male high school students experienced in the mentoring program. I used the relevant information, sentences and quotes that were highlighted to document a rich description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). I also described how my experiences, the context, and the setting could have influenced the way the participants

experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013), and the way I used the participants' experiences of mentoring to write the descriptions (Moustakas, 1994).

Finally, I examined the descriptions to create a summary description that provided the reader with sufficient details to fully comprehend the phenomenon (Moustakas, 2013). The final step in data analysis was the synthesis of the descriptions to form a composite description or the essence (Creswell, 2013). I wrote a composite summary to describe the phenomenon using the participants' expressions (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

As noted by Creswell (2013), the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study may be improved through keeping procedures transparent, methodical, and based on actual data collection (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, I implemented safeguards during all steps of the research process to enhance trustworthiness and maintain transparency. In addition, the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study was enhanced through the following processes.

Credibility

Credibility is defined as the extent to which the findings of an investigation are believable or how accurately the reality is described (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is also defined as "the extent to which the research uses methods and procedures that ensure a high degree of research quality and rigor" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 657). I established credibility of this research study by clarifying biases, achieving triangulation, using member checks and peer reviews, employing an external audit, and conducting persistent observation (Creswell, 2013). The use of these credibility methods resulted in the establishment of the research findings and made the findings believable (Creswell, 2013).

Dependability and Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined dependability as the degree to which the research study can be reproduced. In addition, dependability is the extent to which similar results would be found, confirmed or corroborated by other researchers if the study were to be replicated using the same procedure (Gall et al., 2007). Confirmability has to do with the level of confidence that the findings of the study are reflective of the inquiry, and not on the potential researcher's biases (Moustakas, 1994). Confirmability verified that the findings were delineated by the narratives of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, to ensure the validity of the results of this study, I became aware of my preconceived ideas, beliefs, and biases and how they can impact the findings of the study (Creswell, 2013). I explained the process of data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2013). I also used a reflective journal to address my biases and assumptions before the interviews and to debrief and reflect following the interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, I collaborated with other professionals to corroborate the findings of the study (Moustakas, 1994).

Therefore, confirmability in my study was enhanced by providing details of every step of the data collection process and data analysis process. The processes and procedures used in my research were verified by an external auditor (Creswell, 2013), who was an external consultant with no connection to the investigation and therefore can objectively assess the accuracy of the account by examining the process and product (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used this external consultant to determine whether the findings, interpretations, and conclusions of my investigation were supported by the data (Creswell, 2013).

The solicitation of the participants' perspective of the interpretation of the data and the credibility of the findings is known as member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and is an

essential strategy to guarantee credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moustakas (1994) argued that credibility is enhanced by welcoming the participants to be co-researchers. Thus, the participants were given the opportunity to verify the transcripts from the interviews.

Additionally, participants were required to reflect on the information collected from the focus group and clarify information from the discussion to ensure the data was precise (Creswell, 2013). I allowed them to examine the preliminary analyses or themes to determine if there was missing information and get their perspectives (Creswell, 2013)

Peer review or debriefing is an external check, which was used to verify the research process (Creswell, 2013). The role of a peer was critical to the credibility of the findings of my research (Creswell, 2013). I asked a peer to question the research methods, data collection, analysis, and meanings. The difficult questions asked by the peer helped to keep me honest throughout the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and thus enhanced the credibility of the research findings (Creswell, 2013).

To ensure triangulation of data, I interviewed 13 students, engaged them in a focus group discussion, and observed them in their classroom setting. I used three different methods of data collection to triangulate the data collected (Moustakas, 1994). After I completed all the interviews and the focus group discuss, I transcribed the interviews verbatim and then reviewed all the interview transcripts (Creswell, 2013). Upon completion of reviews, I ensured that all the participants of the study were given an opportunity to clarify and confirm the findings to guarantee precision of responses through member checking (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Modifications were made if the participants disagreed with the accuracy of the transcripts. However, no changes were made if the participants confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts.

Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which the results of an investigation from one context is applicable to another context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability can be enhanced by providing rich and thick descriptions, and a synthesis of the structural and textural descriptions, that delineates the lived experience of the phenomenon by each participant (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The transferability of my study was enhanced through the process of triangulation, clarifying biases, member checking, peer review, external auditors, and the use of rich, thick descriptions (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1984).

Ethical Considerations

Creswell (2013) recommended adhering to ethical standards throughout every stage of the research process noting that the benefits of any research must outweigh the risks involved and measures must be taken to protect participants from unexpected risks (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, I maintained confidentiality, explained to the participants what measures will be taken to protect their privacy, and used password protection to store data using the computer.

No data was collected until the Liberty University's Institutional Review Board granted approval. Prior to participating in the study, all participants were informed about research procedures, confidentiality of data, and received informed consent forms (Creswell, 2013). The informed consent forms were signed by the students who agreed to participate and were returned directly to me. All participants were provided with the option to withdraw from participation in the study at any time.

All informed consent documents, interviews, and focus group transcripts were stored electronically in a folder that was password protected. The observation protocols were scanned and stored electronically. The written copies of the observation protocols, the transcribed

interviews, and notes taken during the focus group discussion were shredded immediately after they were scanned and stored electronically.

Participants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. Pseudonyms were also used in the published findings, and there was no specific or detailed information that could identify the participants in study. At the end of the data collection phase, I thanked the participants for their willingness to participate in the study, and each participant received a small token of appreciation.

Summary

School-based mentoring programs have become very popular in American educational institutions (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). However, there was limited qualitative research on mentoring as a phenomenon, seeking the perspective of the participants (Leidenfrost et al., 2014). This study added to the current literature because rich and thick descriptions about the lived experience and perceived impact of mentoring for at-risk Africa-American male high school students were provided by the study. The results of this study can be utilized to create conducive learning environments in which students can enjoy authentic professional relationships with teachers and other adults. Appropriate instructional supports were used in the study to enhance student motivation to learn, and develop self-efficacy, self-concept, self-image, and increase their chances of successfully completing their high school career. In addition, the results of this study may lead to the use of mentoring as an intervention tool to improve academic achievement, close the achievement gap between Caucasians and African Americans, and create more productive citizens. Finally, the findings of this study illustrated how educational institutions design, implement, and monitor the progress of school-based mentoring programs, particularly for at-risk male African American high school students.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how at-risk high school male African American students' perceived mentorship impacted their motivation to learn. Chapter Four presents a description of the participants and the findings of the research study. My research study focused on at-risk African American high school students who were at risk for failure. The research was aimed at understanding how at-risk African American high school male students perceived mentorship impacted their motivation to learn by analyzing the responses procured from the individual interviews, the focus group interview, and data collected during the direct observation. Also, in this chapter, the results of this phenomenological study are presented in themes based on the sequence of the research questions. Themes included in relation to participant experiences with mentorship are empowerment, enhanced self-efficacy, strong desire to succeed academically, improved grades in math and reading, and college readiness and career path selection. The themes and the research questions are answered following the discussion.

Participants

There were 13 participants in this study. All the participants identified themselves as African American males who had, or were, participating in the mentoring program at Zuzu High School. The participants had attended Zuzu High School between one and three years. The participants came from varying cultural backgrounds and home environments. However, they were all of Christian persuasion, of similar socio-economic status, and from low-income communities.

The following is a more comprehensive profile of each of the participants, including

information about their backgrounds and experiences with the phenomenon of mentorship.

Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the participants' privacy, maintain confidentiality, and ensure anonymity.

Asa

Asa is a student who was born in the United States to African parents. He has attended Zuzu High School for two years. He attended public school during his elementary and middle school years. Mentoring gave him a feeling of control and the ability to make good decisions. He also learned how to work collaboratively, and plan strategically. He was inspired by the talks and encouragement he received from his mentor. He works hard, completes his assignments, and pays attention in class. According to Asa,

Uh, I like school more because my mentor loves me and he tells me I must learn. I start to work hard and he helps me a lot. I have a good relationship with my mentor like a dad. I'm thinking straight he is my dog.

Asa admitted that he struggled with math and did not try because his mother told him math was difficult. However, because of encouragement from his mentor, he is focused, does his homework, ignores distractions, and has improved his grades in math and reading. He feels good and proud of himself and aspires to be a football player.

Ata

Ata is a student from Central Florida who attended Zuzu High School for three years. Two of those years he was as a high school student while the other year was in eighth grade. His prior educational experience was in a rural K-8 school with a predominantly White student population. Ata and his parents are members of the church group that operates the school. He

loves acquiring new knowledge, enjoys attending school, and possesses career aspirations to become a teacher upon graduation from college.

He is self-willed and self-determined, filled with bitterness because of constant conflict and lack of freedom to make decisions for his future. Mentoring has helped him to be able to work collaboratively and build self-confidence. He said that his mentor checks his grades and he says, “No Cs, only As and Bs.” He completed his assignments and improved his grades. He plans to graduate and attend a trade school. Ata stated that he felt good to know that someone believed that he had the ability to attend college. Ata added that he uses his time wisely, stays focus, and positive so that he can pursue his childhood dream of becoming a teacher.

He said,

I used to play around in class when I was in middle school, did not complete class assignments and homework, and did not understand the consequences of getting bad grades. I know that I need to take my academics seriously. My mentor explained to me the need for and benefits of academic advancements.”

Awf

Awf was born and raised in central Florida of immigrant parents and attended Zuzu High School for one year. He attended elementary, middle, and high school in the public-school system in south Florida. While his elementary and middle school experiences were in predominantly White schools, his freshman and sophomore years were with mainly African American students. He performed poorly at school and he was extremely negative. Awf asserted,

“Now that I feel more confident in myself, I am doing better in school. I make better decisions that will make me look good and feel smart like my mentor.”

He hated reading and math but his mentor helped him realize that reading is an important skill and it impacts his academic performance in all content areas. He can now focus, has a desire to succeed, and is willing to work hard. He is confident that he can obtain better grades, go to college, and study to become a lawyer.

Awf revealed that,

I never really understood the consequences of my behavior in school until my mentor explained it to me. I never knew what I did in school could affect me for the rest of my life. I do what I have to do to succeed.

Ing

Ing was born in New York and attended public school during his elementary and middle school years. His parents migrated to central Florida in search for a better location to raise their children. Ing was happy because of the care, love, and inspirational talks he received from his mentor. He believed in himself, thought positively, made good decisions, and felt good being African American because his mentor encouraged him to accept himself because he is special and intelligent. He attended school regularly, understood his purpose, and worked hard to get better grades in math and reading. He was encouraged to be on his best behavior, respect everyone especially adults, and be a good role model to his peers. Ing argued, "The structure at the school, the environment, caring teachers and staff, and the mentoring programs changed my behavior towards school and everything."

Jab

Jab felt empowered and supported during his mentoring sessions. He used to feel afraid of being African American but now he feels confident and has a positive approach to life Jab

said, “I am a better student with a focus. I feel connected to my mentors and understand my purpose at school. My mentor is great, shows a lot of care, and makes me believe in me.”

This was his first relationship with an adult male because he grew up with his grandmother. He credited his mentor for teaching him to make good decisions, study skills, how to collaborate, and showing him how to be responsible. Jab disclosed,

All of us need self-control to stay out of trouble. Mentoring has helped me control my emotion. I got mad very easily and was ready to fight with everyone. I used to get so angry that I could not think and I would do anything that came to my mind. I am very optimistic that I will graduate with a high GPA and pursue a law degree. I get better grades because I learned to face my challenges. I have to work hard to get a good GPA and go to college.

Jal

Jal was born and raised in a small rural town in North Carolina. He attended elementary and middle school in a small school district that was predominantly African American. His parents migrated to central Florida when he graduated from middle school. Jal was awarded a McKay scholarship that was used to pay for his high school education at Zuzu High School.

Jal’s childhood was lonely and frustrating since he grew up without a dad and his mom worked very long hours. He felt life was hopeless and meaningless and he had no one to talk about his challenges and inner conflict. He yearned for someone to love and care for him, provide him with guidance, and teach him to navigate the difficult stages of life. He learned to make decisions confidently, felt good being African American, and had a strong motivation to succeed. He realized that math is not as complex as he perceived. A mental block deterred him

from achieving high grades in math. His desire was to successfully complete high school, attend college, study medicine, and return to his native rural town to serve his community. Jal argued,

Mentoring has illuminated me and gave me a renewed sense of purpose, made me comfortable with myself because I know someone loves and cares about my wellbeing and is always there for me in my darkest moments. I read about 30 minutes every day.

Lut is a multilingual student from Haiti who spoke English, French, Spanish, and Creole. He migrated to the US when he was a ninth grader and socially mastered the English language within one year. He is a serious student who worked hard to be successful and hoped to graduate from high school and pursue a college degree. Mentoring has helped him obtain better grades. He feels more confident and is proud to be an African American. Lut said his mentor always demonstrated love and compassion, was always present when he needed him and as a result, he loves him as a dad. Mentoring made Lut feel joyous, happy, and the feeling of belonging to a family. According to Lut,

My mentor made me discover my potential and be proud of who I am. I learned from the story of Ben Carson who did well when his mom made him believe in himself. I am working hard because I believe I will be successful if I work hard.

Lut also attributed his new-found love for reading, the expansion of his knowledge, his ability to focus, his academic discipline, the enhancement of his comprehension, and his improved ability to solve math word problems to the encouragement and support from his mentor.

Nur

Mentoring increased his confidence to solve math problems, helped him make the right decisions, and enhanced his self-esteem of being African American. He also improved his social and interpersonal skills and can now better relate to his peers, adults, and teachers. In addition,

he felt more comfortable to communicate in a respectable manner with adults about his emotions, doubts, and fears. He was optimistic that he would be able to complete his high school career at Zuzu High School and attend college to study marine biology. Nur expressed,

I exercise more self-control and improve my behavior towards school. I want to do better so that I can graduate from high school. I am able to manage my stress from peer pressure, reduce frustration, and stay focus. I have a good relationship with my mentor and he treats me like his son.

Sab

Sab was born and raised in south Florida. His mother relocated to central Florida prior to the commencement of his ninth-grade year. The academic school year 2017-2018 is his third year at Zuzu High School. Upon graduation from high school, he intended to pursue a bachelor's degree in psychology at the University of Central Florida. Sab believed that mentoring has helped him to make wise decisions, ignore distractions, and focused on his destiny. Sab also said, "The mentoring program made me realize that I have the ability to be successful, but I must activate the power inside of me." He loves going to school, talking to his mentor, and is confident that he will accomplish his dreams.

Sad

Sad was born in Virginia but lived with his grandmother in central Florida. His mother was incarcerated, and he was raised without a father. Sad was a troubled student in public school in Virginia. As a result, his grandmother registered him at Zuzu High School after securing a scholarship for him. Sad said, "I feel loved, safe, and secure at my new school. My teachers understand me, they tell me that I am smart, and I can be academically successful." Sad praised his mentor for helping him develop a new perspective on life, modifying his value system, and

improving his academic success. He had an excellent relationship with his mentor and could speak to him about any problem. This was the only adult in his life who encouraged him to stay focused and positive despite life's obstacles. He recognizes that there were many challenges and conflicts in life, but he must have the self-confidence to be victorious.

Taj

Taj, the eldest of six children, live with his mother, who was originally from Alabama. This was his second year at Zuzu Christian High School. He was excited about his school environment and wished that his mother would be able to obtain scholarships for his five siblings. Taj believed that getting a good education would help him secure a good job, break the vicious cycle of poverty, and prove that he could succeed in the face of adversity. He had very low self-esteem and self-efficacy, and this created a negative impact on his academic performance. His mentor helped him to accept himself, made him realize that he had the potential to succeed, and encouraged him to stay focused on the positive. Taj said, "When I feel I can't go, my mentor, says you can make it, let's go." As a result, he attended school regularly, focused on his work, respected his teachers, and improved his grades.

Yav

Yav believed he was smart but did not always apply himself. Being an African American male student made him think that his chances of succeeding were slim. His mentor made him feel proud of himself and view life from a positive perspective. Mentoring made him feel special, intelligent, and capable of making a difference in his life and the lives of others. The powerful message he heard impacted his perception and motivated him to achieve academically.

Yav argued that he always craved attention, care, and love throughout his childhood.

Mentoring was the mechanism that provided him with what he had desired for many years. As a result, he could focus on his academics, understood his purpose, worked towards achieving his goal so that he can have a better life, and got better grades. Yav summarized his mentoring experience saying, “My mentors filled the void that affected my motivation to learn, desire to achieve, and even the will to live.”

Zac

Zac has been attending Zuzu High School for two years in the tenth and eleventh grade. He always felt marginalized when his friends spoke about their dad because he was unable to identify with a dad. The connections he developed with his mentor felt like a father and son relationship. His mentor helped him to understand life in a positive way, gave him a sense of purpose, and a reason to succeed. Mentoring helped him develop self-efficacy, aspire for greatness, develop an action plan, and work hard to fulfill his dreams. He learned the steps to be a successful student during mentoring. As a result, he felt that he had control of life and his learning because he could manage his time wisely, avoid the distractions, and stay focused on his work.

Results

The study was predicated upon one central research question and four research sub-questions. The research questions addressed the participants’ experiences with mentorship and the perceived impact of mentoring on their motivation to learn, their self-efficacy, and their behavior. In addition, the research questions addressed college readiness and career selection process, the effectiveness of mentoring as an intervention strategy, and its impact on closing the achievement gap. The themes and subthemes that emerged are delineated below. Finally, how

these themes answered the central research question and the four subquestions is explicated. The themes, subthemes, and codes are delineated in Table 1.

Through the data analysis process, five main themes and 15 subthemes emerged. The main themes were empowerment, enhanced self-efficacy, strong desire to succeed academically, college readiness and career path selection, and mentoring as an academic intervention.

Table 1*Codes and Themes*

Main Themes	Subthemes	Codes
Empowerment	Take ownership of learning Academic Behavior Autonomy Inspirational speeches	Responsible Collaborate Proactive Stay focused Academic engagement Class participation Control Ignore distractions Self-determination Right choices Face challenges Reduce stress level and frustrations Overcome fears Assurance
Enhanced Self-efficacy	Self-esteem Self-confidence Attitude to succeed	The proud feeling being African American Improved behavior Use time and energy to improve academic scores Maintain focus Change mindset Positive perspective Effect change
Strong Desire to Succeed Academically	Authentic relationships with mentor Enhanced academic behavior	Connectivity with mentors Qualities of mentor Respect for adults/teachers Love for reading and learning Cooperative learning Collaboration

		Do homework Attentiveness in class
Mentoring as Academic Interventions	Improved grades in math and reading. Interventions	Extrinsic motivation Learning Environment Growth mindset Persistence Tutoring Talks Motivational speeches Small group
College Readiness and Career Path Selection	Ability to stay focused Time management Career path selection The development of a positive attitude	Talks Schedules To-do list Parents Coaches Teacher Talks Inspirational speeches Small group activity

Theme One: Empowerment

The first and third theme provided an understanding for the central research question, “How does at-risk African American male high school students’ perceived mentorship impact their motivation to learn?” The participants identified numerous ways in which they have benefitted from participating in the school-based mentoring program. The first set of outcomes delineated characteristics that are directly related to empowerment. Four distinct sub-themes were identified within the main theme: (a) the ability to take ownership of learning, (b) improved academic behavior, (c) developed autonomy, and (d) the role of inspirational speeches. When at-risk African American high school male students enter the classroom, they possess a multiplicity

of cultural experiences, values, skills, and abilities. To become an academic success and competent in math and reading, such students needed additional layers of emotional, social, and academic support, and interventions to help them persevere throughout their high school career, graduate from high school with a 3.0 GPA or higher, and pursue post-secondary education (Watson et al., 2015).

Taking ownership of learning. The first sub-theme was students taking ownership of one's learning. African American male high school students carry a wide range of experiences and skills to the classroom. Some of these students are also more physically, emotionally, and mentally stable, while others have misguided perceptions of education, and what their classroom experience will be (Wilson, 2014). When participants were asked to delineate the impact of mentorship on their motivation to learn, they mentioned that responsibility, collaboration, and being proactive were essential elements that influenced them to take ownership of their learning.

Several participants described a feeling of empowerment and a strong desire to succeed academically because of participating in the mentoring program. They also asserted that mentoring impacted their strength and increased their confidence in taking control of their lives and not allowing people's perceptions and ideas about them to determine their identity

During the individual interview, Sab expressed,

I now have the strength to do what is right and the things I plan to do. I don't care what people think or say about me. I believe people have they own view of me and I should stay focus and do not let people's ideas about me affect my goals.

Seven participants expressed that mentoring did not only empower them but also helped them take ownership of their learning and develop a strong desire to succeed. They pontificated that they were always told what to do, but for the first time they were given the opportunity to

make an input in their education, be part of the decision-making process, and create an action plan that would facilitate the achievement of their goals. They further argued that mentoring helped them understand that they were accountable for their academic success or failure, enabled them to have control over their future, and reminded them of living with the consequences of their decisions. The shared experiences of the participants correlate with Bandura (1997), the perception of self and the capacity to take control of life experiences was fundamental to mastering or avoiding a threat, and succeeding or failing in life (Bandura, 1997).

Many participants agreed that academic success is contingent upon taking a serious approach to school, studying hard, submitting homework, and making learning a priority. During the individual interviews, Asa disclosed, he is serious and wants to be responsible for his work. Also, Yav echoed similar sentiments, “Feelings good, powerful, control, yes.” In addition, Zac argued, “Be in control of my life and decide on things I want to do.” During the direct observation, more than 70% of participants demonstrated cognitive engagement by asking the teacher and their peers questions and sharing ideas with their tablemates.

Academic behavior. The second sub-theme within the main theme of empowerment was students improving their academic behavior. The participants disclosed during the focus group interview that there is a need for collaboration in the classroom as well as outside the classroom. Many of the participants concurred that they learned better in cooperative groups, when they were being tutored in small groups, and when they worked with a mentor. Vygotsky (1978) purported that social interaction and collaboration are instructional strategies that are paramount to develop cognition. Thus, learning is contingent on one’s environment, the community, the process of socialization, and social experiences.

Ata summarized his thoughts on academic behavior by disclosing,

Togetherness and teamwork. I was self-willed and self-determined. I was filled with bitterness towards my mother because she never allowed me to be myself. There was constant conflict with her because I wanted more freedom to make decisions for my future. I can collaborate with others now.

Also, Awf asserted, “I never know what I did in school could affect me for the rest of my life. I do what I have to do to succeed.” Taj elaborated on Awf’s assertion by saying, “Peace, control, thinking ahead. Getting a good education is the only way I could get a job, break the cycle of poverty, and prove many haters wrong.” Awf summarized his academic behavior modification as,

I focus better and use my time doing my work instead of playing games, watching TV, texting, or talking. I do homework and study and stay positive because I want to go to law school as my grandad always say I must be a lawyer.

During the direct observation, the participants’ confirmed the data that were collected during the individual interviews and the focus group interview. Nine of 13 students observed were actively on task, ten exhibited self-confidence, 12 demonstrated enthusiasm, and 12 accomplished the assigned task. The change in participants’ academic behavior is indicative of the impact of mentorship on student empowerment.

Autonomy. The third sub-theme within the major theme of empowerment, was students developing autonomy. Some of the participants expressed that they needed more leverage to make decisions that would affect them in the future. During the individual interview, Sab commented that, mentoring empowered him, and increased his autonomy and self-determination. He said, “I now have the strength to do what is right and the things I plan to do.”

However, Taj remarked that he set his goals at a young age and he was persuaded that a college education was the vehicle to social mobility, break the vicious cycle of poverty, and silence the opponents. Nur also expressed similar sentiments as Taj by saying that mentoring confirmed his position on education but did not empower. Nur argued that his positive perception of education created a fundamental difference between him and his mother and the result was intense conflict. In his individual interview, Sab revealed,

I now have the strength to do what is right and the things I plan to do in the future. I don't care what people think or say about me. I have realized that people have they own perceptions of me and I should not allow their ideas about me to determine my destiny". Mentoring confirmed my position on education but did not empower me.

Most participants demonstrated their autonomy and ability to make wise decisions during the direct observation. More than 90% of the participants paid attention to the teacher, keenly listened to other students, asked the teacher and their peers questions, and shared ideas with other students during a group activity. Students exhibited their empowerment by enhancing their class participation, taking control of their learning, ignoring distractions, and making right choices.

Inspirational speeches. The fourth sub-theme within the major theme empowerment, was students being empowered by inspirational speeches from their mentors. Several of the participants delineated the significant impact the inspirational speeches and discussions about distinguished African Americans had on their motivation to learn. Lut described the life-changing impact the story of Ben Carson, a renowned African American neuro-surgeon, had on him during mentoring. He asserted that "My mentor made me discover my potential and be proud of who I am. I learned from the story of Ben Carson who did well when his mom made him believe in himself."

The inspirational speeches and discussions provided a forum in which Zac could receive inspiration and fortitude to effectively handle his challenges. He also recommended mentoring for other students who experienced problems and challenges like his. In addition, Zac expressed the impact the talks between him and his mentor had on his ability to think ahead, be proactive, and experience academic success. Finally, in the individual interview, Zac summarized mentoring as, “It is good for students like me with problems.”

During the individual interview, Ing disclosed similar sentiments to Zac about inspirational speeches. He asserted that the inspirational speeches from Black professionals had a significant impact on his desire to learn, and thus he recommended that mentees should receive more opportunities to hear motivational speeches from Black professionals and successful students who were mentored. Likewise, Jab recommended, “more discussions on how to become a better student like behavior and maybe study skills.”

During the individual interview, Lut argued that inspirational speeches during mentoring inspired him to become a serious student and it provided the motivation he needed to succeed academically. He said, “I am working hard because I believe I will be successful if I work hard.” The data collected during the direct observation correlated with the data collected on empowerment during the individual interview and the focus group interview. More than 90% of the students observed showed perseverance and enthusiasm in the classroom.

Theme Two: Self-Efficacy

The second major theme provided an understanding of sub-question one, “How does at-risk African American male high school students’ perceived mentorship impact their self-efficacy and behavior?” Self-efficacy is the belief a person has in his or her ability to successfully accomplish a task or succeed in specific situations (Bandura, 1997). Therefore,

students need to develop self-efficacy because it is directly related to academic achievement. As a result, students with high self-efficacy can achieve higher goals, higher assessment scores, and select more complex and challenging courses than students with low self-efficacy. In addition, Bandura (2000) asserted in his theory of self-efficacy that an individual's success or failure is dependent upon self-efficacy, and competence to effect change in one's life was paramount to a successful life. Three distinct sub-themes were identified within the main theme: (a) self-esteem, (b) self-confidence, and (c) attitude to succeed.

Self-esteem. Self-esteem describes an individual's overall sense of self-worth and is understood as a disposition that is stable (Watson et al., 2016). Self-esteem is also relevant to academic achievement because it protects and enhances students' feelings of self-worth and value (Bandura, 2000). Consequently, the development of self-esteem significantly impacts student self-efficacy, motivation, perseverance, and academic success in an educational environment. Also, students' improved self-esteem was manifested during the direct observation. More than 90% of the students observed displayed perseverance and enthusiasm in the classroom.

During the focus group interview, several participants reiterated that building their self-confidence allowed them to academically advance and approach life with a desire and attitude to succeed. Also, during the individual interview, Ing revealed that prior to participating in mentoring he lacked confidence and did not believe in his ability to succeed. However, mentoring changed the way he perceived himself and improved his self-efficacy, and as a result, he now believes in himself. He disclosed, "Thanks to my mentors for helping me to think positively and make good decisions."

Taj also expressed doubt in his competence and held a negative perception of himself. He said, “I use to doubt myself a lot and had a negative view of myself.” In his self-analysis, he correlated his poor academic grades with his low self-esteem. Furthermore, Nur articulated that mentoring had a profound impact on his self-efficacy in math. During his individual interview, Sab added to the discussion by stating,

The mentoring program made me realize that I have the ability to succeed, but I must activate the power inside of me. I always perceived that my life would be a failure and I did not possess the capacity to accomplish my dreams. Mentoring changed the negative mindset and belief system that impeded the progress of most of the participants

Some participants also thought of themselves as intelligent young African Americans who have equal potential like everyone else including the potential to excel in whatever they desire to accomplish. Several other participants also asserted that mentoring helped them develop pride in themselves as African Americans. Jab expressed similar sentiments by saying, “I had always believed in myself but felt afraid being African American.” However, his experience with mentoring changed his attitude and beliefs and thus he credited mentoring for having a positive perspective on life.

Jal further described how he learned to accept himself and realized that he has the cognitive ability to become an academic success story. He exclaimed, “I can make decision confidently and I know I can be successful if I work hard” Also, he demonstrated his self-esteem by saying, “I feel good about being African American and I want to prove we are smart like others.” Nur reverberated similar sentiments during his individual interview and he pontificated, “Mentoring gave me confidence to do math, feel capable of making the right decisions, and feel good about being African American.”

Yav expressed similar ideas describing how he was confident and smart yet he had a fear of failure because he was African American. Yav further explicated this paradigm shift by arguing that during his hopelessness, his mentor renewed his hope, ignited a positive perception of himself, and made him feel like a dignified African American. He praised mentoring for the enhancement of his self-esteem and self-efficacy by saying, “My mentor gave me hope and make me feel proud being Black.”

Self-confidence. Another subtheme under the major theme of self-efficacy that emerged among participants who experienced mentoring, was self-confidence. Self-confidence beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave (Bandura, 1997). In addition, one’s accomplishments and aptitude are not established on skills and expertise but on the belief in his or her capability or self-efficacy. Several participants acknowledged that they had low self-confidence but ongoing discussion about self-efficacy changed their mindset. Asa summarized these ideas by saying, “A change in the way I think about education and school got me serious so I study a lot and I’m focused.”

The participants described how their mentors used examples of individuals such as Thomas Edison, Mandela, and Obama and cited several influential quotes and expressions to enhance their self-efficacy and ability to take ownership of their lives. Bandura (1997) encapsulated the experiences of the participants when he postulated that mastering or avoiding a threat and succeeding or failing in life is contingent on our perception of self and our ability to take control of life experiences.

The collective experiences of the participants, substantiated by Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy, demonstrated a strong correlation between self-efficacy and academic success. This correlation was confirmed by the utterances of Awf who asserted, “Now that I feel more

confident in myself I am doing better in school. I make better decisions that will make me look good and feel smart like my mentor.” Moreover, Zac argued, “I feel confident in myself, have a positive attitude, and I can work hard to achieve my goals.”

Some other participants articulated similar experiences and attributed their self-confidence to mentoring. Ing argued that mentoring helped him think positively and acquire the ability to make better decisions. Jal also expressed that he developed the capacity to confidently make decisions and he is persuaded that success is achievable if he is consistent, focus, and works hard. Finally, Zac disclosed that mentoring developed self-efficacy; consequently, he can stay focus, create an action plan, and aspire to accomplish his goals.

During his individual interview, Lut expanded the discussion of self-confidence by stating,

My mentor made me discover my potential and be proud of who I am. I learned from the story of Ben Carson who did well when his mom made him believe in himself. I am working hard because I believe I will be successful if I work hard.

Sab also contributed to understanding the profound impact mentoring had on the self-confidence of the participants by asserting that the mentoring program helped him to understand that he had to activate the ability to succeed which resided in him, stop focusing on failure, and strive to accomplish his dreams. Sad echoed similar thoughts about his self-efficacy by stating that mentoring changed his perception of life, shifted his core beliefs, and enhanced his academic success. Also, he purported, “There are many problems in life, conflicts inside, but we must have the self-confidence that we will win.” Students’ behavior during the direct observation was indicative of their self-confidence. Most student students observed were actively on task, demonstrated enthusiasm, and accomplished the assigned task.

However, Ata had a dissimilar experience to the other participants. He explicated that mentorship had no significant impact on his self-confidence. He asserted that he had not realized any significant difference in his academic outcomes even though he was repeatedly reminded to believe in himself while he attended middle and high school. The participant further remarked that some students have the capacity to improve their grades without mentoring, and obtaining better grades is contingent on one's maturity, vision, and available resources and not necessarily with mentorship.

Ata summarized his perceived impact of mentoring on his self-confidence in the following words,

Mentoring did not change my self-confidence. Believe in yourself, I hear this from middle school. That did not make a difference in my academic performance. I think some students can improve their grades without mentoring. You get better grades when you grow older, you know what you want, and have what you need, not necessarily with mentorship. It help me.

Attitude to succeed. The final subtheme that emerged in relation to the major them of self-efficacy, was the development of an attitude to succeed. The academic performance of the participants was enhanced when they started to believe in themselves and their competence to effect change in their lives and enjoy a successful life (Bandura, 1997). Zac agreed that mentoring helped him develop an attitude to succeed and a desire to fulfill his dreams. He was also motivated to create an action plan that would enable him to achieve his career goals.

On the contrary, people who do not believe they can produce the desired effects have a deficit in their aspirations. Moreover, students who do not have self-confidence lack intrinsic motivation and set themselves weak goals (Bandura, 2000). In addition, they lack perseverance,

consistent and active engagement in a productive struggle, and the ability to triumph over the challenges and obstacles in life (Bandura, 1997).

Lut argued that mentoring changed his perception of life and he discovered that he had the potential to be a successful African American male student. Therefore, he remarked, "I am working hard because I believe I will be successful if I work hard." Lut's remarks are substantiated by Bandura's (1997) assertion that the variables that function as motivators are rooted in our core system of beliefs. Thus, our core sentiments determine whether we are a success or a failure in life. Thus, self-efficacy determines students' academic success and not their cognitive ability.

Eight participants indicated during the focus group discussion that their behavior in the class had improved significantly because of their involvement in mentoring. Awf asserted, "I never really understood the consequences of my behavior in school until it was explained to me by my mentor." Awf realized that his academic success is dependent on a positive attitude and self-efficacy.

Moreover, Ing revealed that he used to behave poorly in public school and as a result, his mother withdrew him and sent him to a private school. He added that his mentors encouraged him to consistently exhibit appropriate behavior by being courteous and respectful to students, teacher, and adults. Ing also posited that he was a typical example of inappropriate behavior but he now has a changed mindset. He asserted, "The structured at the school, the environment, caring teachers and staff, and the mentoring programs changed my behavioral towards school and everything."

Several participants commended the mentoring program for teaching them how to make wise decisions. The participants were convinced that they could reduce aggression and amicably

resolve conflicts because of the knowledge they received throughout the mentoring program. Jab declared that self-control is a very important human quality that every student needs to stay out of trouble. In addition, he confirmed that mentoring equipped him with the tools to manage his anger and emotion. He further described himself as easily provoked and pugnacious prior to the mentoring experience and his uncontrollable anger resulted in him making poor decisions. As a result, he was perceived as insane and a menace to society, but mentoring helped him to redirect his energy, be composed, and focused. He summarized his attitude to succeed and self-efficacy by saying, “I get better grade now. I have to work hard to get a good GPA and go to college”

Lut confirmed Jab’s assessment of himself by commenting, “I used to get mad for everything, I mean everything, and it did not work. Now I am not easily distracted because I want to learn.” Both students have made significant progress in managing their anger, controlling their emotions, changing their attitude, and developing self-efficacy. They tried hard to be loyal and committed to the expectations and protocols of the mentoring programs.

Finally, the voice of three participants captured the perceived impact of mentoring on their attitude to succeed. During the individual interview the participants confirmed that mentoring changed their mindset, made them become serious students, helped them to complete assigned tasks and obtain better grades, and they were excited to attend class because they wanted to learn so that they would graduate and attend college. The descriptions of the participants’ experiences correlate with Bandura’s (1997) postulations that self-efficacy and not cognitive ability determines one’s success. Also, during the direct observation, more than 70% of participants were academically engaged in accountable talks and by asking their teachers and peers questions.

Theme Three: Strong Desire to Succeed Academically

The third major theme provided an understanding of the central question, “How does at-risk African American male high school students’ perceived mentorship impact their motivation to learn?” Sub-question one, “How do at-risk African American male high school students perceive mentoring impacts their self-efficacy and behavior?” and sub-question two “How does at-risk African American male high school students’ perceived mentorship impact their intrinsic motivation?” Two distinct sub-themes were identified within the main theme: (a) authentic relationships with a mentor, and (b) enhanced academic behavior.

Authentic relationship with a mentor. According to Simões and Alarcão (2014), mentoring has multiple benefits and it is a potential solution to many problems at-risk students face in school. Some benefits include improving at-risk student academic achievement and retention rates, and decreasing disciplinary referrals and unexcused absences (Bean et al., 2014; Tolan et al., 2014). Mentoring also enabled fostering of authentic relationship among students and their family, peers, teachers, and the community (Tough, 2016). Furthermore, mentoring enhanced assessment performance and helped to reduce stress and anxiety (Hobson & Malderez, 2014). Finally, mentoring improved student engagement and participation in academic activity (Tolan et al., 2014), increased student learning outcomes (Snowden & Hardy, 2012), and was an excellent intervention tool to be used to address a variety of needs of at-risk African American male high school students (Leidenfrost et al., 2014).

Several of the participants expressed how they felt motivated to learn because of a strong connection between them and their mentor. The establishment of a strong relationship between students and their mentors made them feel safe, belonged, loved, and secure. During his

individual interview, Zac asserted, “I enjoy the relationship with my mentor because he always praised me and encourage me, gave me a sense of purpose, and the desire to get grades.”

All the participants confirmed during the focus group interview that they developed a strong desire to succeed academically and worked extremely hard to obtain better grades because of the impact of mentoring. For example, Ata commented that he used to play around in class, did not complete class assignments and homework, and did not understand the consequences of getting bad grades. However, he realized the need to take a serious approach to his academics after his mentor explained the necessity to persevere, stay focused, and the remunerations of academic achievements.

Five participants experienced connectivity with an adult male for the first time in their lives. These participants were raised by their mother and had no father figure in their lives. Zac said, “I always felt marginalized when my friends spoke about their dad and I was unable to identify with a dad.” Zac also described his relationship with his mentor as a strong bond that connected them even though his mentor was not his biological father. The mentor-mentee relationship gave him a sense of purpose, helped him develop a positive outlook on life, and created a fervent desire to succeed. Seven participants said that the connections they developed with their mentors, as well as other mentees, have helped them to perceive life from a positive perspective.

There can be no significant learning if students do not develop significant relationships with their teachers (Stafford-Brizard, 2016). The presence of significant relationships between a student and a teacher or an adult is critical to the academic success and the exhibition of appropriate behavior (Seal, 2015). On the contrary, students who are unable to establish a strong connection with their teachers or whose relationships with adults involve some sort of skirmish,

have a greater tendency to obtain lower academic outcomes (Stafford-Brizard, 2016). Sab asserted that his mentor's guidance and encouragement enhanced his academic success. His mentor reiterated positive expectations, presented him with opportunities to participate in the discussions, and communicated confidence in his aptitude to thrive academically.

Nur also argued that he benefited tremendously from the healthy student-mentor relationship. During his individual interview, Nur divulged the benefits of his relationship with his mentor by arguing,

I was able to improve my social and interpersonal skills and now I have a better rapport with all my teachers. I have developed the ability to clearly communicate my emotions, doubts, and fears in a polite and respectable manner to adults. I am able to manage my stress from peer pressure, reduce frustration, and stay focus.

According to Watson et al. (2015), significant student-teacher or student-adult relationships have yielded numerous benefits particularly to specific categories of students. In addition, at-risk male African American students, students diagnosed with learning difficulties, English language learners, and students from low- income families benefit academically from significant relationships with adults. Many participants expressed how the relationships with their mentors, the consistent verbal praise and encouragements, and the acknowledgments of their academic accomplishments helped to develop their sense of self-worth and improved self-esteem. During his individual interview, Jal disclosed,

My childhood was lonely and frustrating. I grew up without a dad and my mom had to work two jobs to care for me and my siblings. Since she was working late hours, mom was sleeping when I left for school, and I was always asleep when she returned home late at night. There were times when I thought that life was meaningless and even had

suicidal thoughts. I never spoke to anyone about my challenges and inner conflict. What I needed was someone to love and care for me, give me some attention, and provide me with the necessary guidance I needed to navigate through the difficult stages of life.

Thanks to my mentor.

In addition, several participants identified qualities of their mentors they admired and appreciated. Some of these qualities included being inspiring, encouraging, supportive, positive, patient, and trustworthy.” Nuh asserted, “My mentor and I tight he got my back.” Sab also revealed during his individual interview, “I like school now because I look forward to talking with my mentor. That man understands me, he cares for me, you know like a dad.”

Similarly, during his individual interview, Sad disclosed, “The mentor always says to stay focus so I try but that’s tough. My mentor is tough and he wants me to do well.” Furthermore, Taj and Yav echoed similar feelings during their individual interview by describing how mentoring taught them to accept themselves and feel proud of who they are. Also, students demonstrated a strong desire for success during the direct observation. Most students observed were on task, demonstrated perseverance and enthusiasm, and accomplished the assigned task.

Enhanced academic behavior. The second sub-theme that emerged from the main theme of strong desire to succeed, was enhanced academic behavior. Several students who were interviewed delineated the perceived impact of mentoring on their academic behavior. Developing a love of reading and learning must be cultivated at an early age because reading is a prerequisite for all content areas. Based on the description of the participants, experience with mentoring indicates a strong correlation between mentoring and academic behavior. For example, during his individual interview, Awf purported,

I hated reading and math throughout my elementary and middle school years, but my

mentor has helped me to realize that reading is an important skill that will enhance academic performance in all areas.

In addition, during his individual interview, Lut asserted, “I used to read only when I had to, but now I read several books and articles to expand my knowledge.” Mentoring helped Lut develop the discipline to read at least thirty minutes a day. This reading habit has significantly impacted his ability to stay focus, comprehend new knowledge, and improve his ability to successfully solve word problems in math.

According to Maslow’s (1978) hierarchy of needs, people must feel safe, loved, secure, and cared for before their growth needs emerge. Most of the participants expressed that mentoring had a significant impact on their motivation to learn. Students feel safe in a learning environment that is organized, characterized by mutual respect, and risk-free. A conducive learning environment also makes it easier to teach effectively and guide students to academic success (Watson et al., 2015). Most students confirmed that when the mentors used interactive approaches such as small groups and cooperative learning, they felt safe and belonged. They also felt more comfortable to ask questions and contribute to the discussions without fear of being ridiculed or criticized. The feeling of security and belongingness stimulate students’ cognitive processes, enhance academic engagement, and inspire them to actively participate in planned activities.

Jal described his childhood as lonely and frustrating. He grew up without a dad and his mom held two jobs to care for him and his siblings. He thought that life was meaningless and even had suicidal thoughts but never spoke to anyone about his challenges and inner conflict. His mentor provided love, care, attention, and guidance that helped him navigate the difficult stages

of life. He disclosed, “I know someone loves and cares about my wellbeing and is always there for me in my darkest moments.”

Yav reiterated similar sentiments that confirmed many participants’ perception of mentorship. Yav pontificated,

Mentoring was the mechanism that provided me with the care and attention I craved for during my elementary and middle school years. My mentors filled the void that affected my motivation to learn, desire to achieve, and even the will to live. I am more focus and able to get better grades.

Thus, he is focused on academic achievement, determined to successfully graduate from high school, and motivated to pursue a bachelor’s degree in engineering. Furthermore, during the focus group discussion, seven participants agreed that the direct involvement of a mentor developed growth mindset. They described their mentors as a patient, skilled at building relationships that made them feel loved and belonged, knowledgeable, wise, and always willing to assist.

During the focus group interview 10 participants concurred that attending the mentoring sessions at school improved their capability to solve their problems. Their mentor developed transparent relationships with them in which they could discuss their challenges, problem, and fears. The mentors always listened to them patiently, empathized with them, gave them hope, and communicated to them that they can overcome all the impediments in their path if they remained focus and followed the principles that they were taught. Finally, mentoring gave them a sense of purpose, helped them to learn to love and appreciate those who loved and cared about their well-being, and provided consistent support. The experiences of the participants indicate a strong correlation between significant relationships with an adult and academic achievement.

Theme Four: College Readiness and Career Path Selection

The fourth main theme provided an understanding to sub-question three, “How does at-risk African American male high school students’ perceived mentorship impact their college readiness and career selection process?” What challenges do participants face in being able to make the correct decisions as it relates to their academic goals, meeting the academic requirements to graduate, to acquiring the skills needed to be college ready, and to satisfy the requirements needed to pursue their career option in college? Students described a variety of subthemes that represented the challenges they experienced when trying to master the content to the depth and rigor of the standards. The following subthemes emerged from sub-question three: Ability to stay focused, time management, career path selection, and the development of a positive attitude.

Ability to stay focused. The first subtheme to emerge from the fourth main theme, was the inability to stay focused to accomplish assigned tasks in class and at home. Students who participated in the study expressed the challenges they experienced daily to focus on the task and successfully complete it in the allotted time. Asa clearly shared his experience and disclosed, “I could not stay focus in class, got distracted and did not have self-control.” Jal expressed a similar sentiment by saying,

I used to misbehave in class and could not stay focus. My grades were poor most of the times. I did not care because school did not make sense to me. The mentoring program taught me how to behave well in class so that I can get better grades. I am glad I have mentors in my life.

All the participants concurred during the focus group discussion that they gained a better understanding of the importance to remain focused, particularly on their academics. Mentoring

also encouraged them to stay on track, implement their action plan, complete assigned tasks, and ignore all the distractions. Ata articulated similar thoughts, “It is good to help us stay focus and positive and do well in school stay out of trouble.”

Teaching at-risk students is more challenging because students lack the intrinsic motivation to learn. According to Marshall and Olivia (2010), at-risk students require temporary and ongoing interventions to succeed academically. Additionally, several participants’ experience with mentoring confirmed Mallet’s (2012) assertion that mentoring is an effective tool that can provide an extra layer of support for at-risk, disadvantaged, and unmotivated students (Mallet, 2012). Also, they revealed that their mentors taught them how to stay focused and as a result, they were able to complete their work and get better grades. The data collected during the direct observation corroborated with students ideas on the impact of mentorship on their ability to focus. More than 90% of the participants observed paid attention in class, actively listened to other students, and shared ideas with other students during group activity.

Many African American students are at a disadvantage due to the socio-economic status of the family (Tolan et al., 2014). The lack of resources may have a significant impact on their early childhood experience and learning and consequently, they may not receive adequate stimulation of their senses nor develop an age-appropriate vocabulary (Marshall & Olivia, 2010). Mentoring is, therefore, an excellent intervention tool that can be utilized to provide the comprehensible instructional strategies that can remedy areas of academic deficits, provide greater opportunities for at-risk students to have equitable access to master the content to the depth and rigor of the standards, and prepare for college and their college career.

Time management. The second subtheme that emerged from the fourth main theme, was time management. Many of the participants shared the challenges they experienced with time

management in their classrooms and at home. At-risk students lack the motivation to work in a structured classroom. It is more difficult for these students to stay focused and manage their time wisely when they are not in a well-structured environment with adult supervision.

Several of the participants expressed that they wasted time watching television, texting, talking on the phone, and playing games on their cell phones and computers. Mentoring allowed them to realize that they could effectively make use of their time by studying, completing homework, and reading to expand their knowledge. Furthermore, some of the participants indicated that they spent time conversing with girls rather than staying focused on school.

Also, Ata declared that he could not manage his time but now he can because of mentoring. He disclosed, "I got help to use my time wisely." Two other participants also stated that they manage their time wisely by spending most of their time on academics. Lut expressed similar sentiments saying, "I got better in using my time to push myself, think positive, be focused, I have a positive attitude."

In addition, some participants could use their time more wisely by creating to-do lists and keeping their schedules. They all credited the mentors for teaching them how to manage their time wisely, create a schedule, and held them and their peers accountable for adhering to their plans. The relationship with their mentors enhanced students' time management skills and consequently their academic performance. Also, students took the initiative to solve problems using multiple strategies and stayed on task during the direct observation which is an indication of their college readiness.

Career path selection. The third sub-theme that emerged from the fourth main theme, was career path selection. Many of the participants shared their dreams and aspirations for the future. However, to pursue degrees in their career path, they needed to obtain a required GPA to

qualify for the program. Based on the information the participants divulged during the focus group discussion, they did not have a clear understanding of the academic commitment and dedication that was required to meet the requirements to enter their programs at a college.

Most of the participants had already decided their career paths prior to high school. Some were passionate about playing football or basketball at the professional level. Their decisions to play professional sports were influenced by their parents, family, friends, and coaches. Mentoring, therefore, had no significant impact on their career path selection.

However, some participants disclosed that they had decided their career path but mentoring assisted them in creating a contingency plan. Jal said, "I have learned from my mentor that one must always have a Plan B in the event Plan A does not come to fruition." Some students also argued that mentoring aided them in understanding the benefits of pursuing an education in the disciplines they had chosen but did not impact their career path selection. In conclusion, mentoring did not impact the participants' career choices but helped them plan more effectively by creating a contingency plan.

The development of a positive attitude. Developing a positive attitude towards school can be a serious challenge, yet it is imperative to academic success. The participants commented that going to school every day sometimes resulted in fatigue and frustration. Because of their frustration, they displayed negative behavior in class and obtained poor grades. However, mentoring assisted the participants to improve their attitude and approach to their academics. Several participants shared they experience growth in terms of developing a positive attitude. Asa clearly described his experience by asserting, "I learned to substitute more positive words in my conversation". Jab shared similar sentiment by saying, "My mentor encouraged me to

monitor what I say and avoid using negative language. It is very important to reframe negative thoughts into positive words because it helps to control and avoid outbursts.”

Asa described the impact of mentoring on his attitude by disclosing, “A change in the way I think about education, and school got me serious so I study a lot and I’m focused.” Finally, the participants agreed that mentoring helped them developed the correct attitude they need to be successful in high school and in college. Zac’s summarized the opinions of the participants with the statement, “I feel confident in myself, have a positive attitude, and I can work hard to achieve my goals.”

Theme Five: Mentoring as an Academic Intervention

The fifth main theme provides an understanding for the central research question, “How does at-risk African American male high school students’ perceived mentorship impact their motivation to learn?” Also, for sub-question four “How do at-risk African American high school students perceive the effectiveness of mentoring when used as an educational intervention strategy to close the achievement gap between Caucasian and African American males?” The following subthemes emerged from the final theme: improved grades in math and reading and intervention.

Improved grade in math and reading. Academic improvement in the areas of math and reading was the first sub-theme that emerged in relation to the main theme of mentoring as an academic intervention. At-risk African American male students who participated in the study noticed a significant improvement in their motivation to learn math and reading, likewise in their grades. Maslow (1948) purported that growth needs or self-actualization will emerge when basic needs are gratified. Certain conditions must be satisfied for effective learning to occur.

Several participants indicated that math is an important subject, but they experienced enormous challenges to maintain a letter grade C or higher. They also revealed that they got low grades in math when they were in elementary and middle school. Although they were convinced that they had to take a serious approach to math in high school, they still lacked the motivation and the confidence that was needed to be successful. Thus, mentoring as an intervention helped them build confidence, enhanced their motivation, and kept them focused on their academics, and consequently enhanced their grades in math and reading.

Jal argued that his math grade had improved since he started to participate in the mentoring program. “I have come to realize that math is not as difficult as I thought. It is really a mental block or a mindset that prevented me from achieving high grades in math.” Seal (2015) asserted that mentoring provides mentees with a stable environment, a risk-free environment in which they can feel safe, secure, love, a wiser adult who can guide a younger less experienced youth. Also, Maslow (1978) posited that students would be able to accomplish their academic goals if they feel safe, secure, belonged, loved, and their physiological needs are met. In addition, the motivation they received from the mentors provided them the impetus to aspire to greatness in math. Asa remarked that he struggled with math, just as his mother did. He associated this struggle with a mental block but praised mentoring as an effective academic intervention. Hence, he said, “My mentor encouraged me and now I have better grades in math and reading.”

Nur described his mentoring experience as a light bulb turned on while being in darkness. Thus, he declared, “I hated math and did not pay attention in class because I knew I would get a bad grade.” Mentoring as an intervention helped him realize that he had the potential to do better and proved that he could be successful if he tried a little harder. His understanding of the math

concepts improved exponentially when his mentor taught him and he realized that he had to succeed since his mentor held him accountable.

The participants improved their grades after they were repeatedly reminded that they were smart and similarly capable of getting high grades in math like their peers. Therefore, the guidance of an adult mentor proved to be impactful in redirecting at-risk African American male high school students, changing their mindset, and enhancing their academic outcomes in math. The lived experiences of the participants showed a strong correlation between mentoring as an academic intervention and enhanced performance in math and reading.

At-risk students who feel loved and receive care from adult mentors are likely to cultivate persistence and motivation to learn (Dawson, 2014; Tough, 2016). Mentors who are trustworthy (Seal, 2015), model behavior (Hobson & Malderez, 2013), and demonstrate care and compassion (Dawson, 201) have a positive impact on their mentees. Several participants expressed that they were embraced by their mentors despite their behavioral deficits. The mentors helped them develop ethical values and assisted in developing a love for learning (Watson et al., 2014).

The data collected from the individual interviews and focus groups demonstrated a strong relationship between mentoring and an improvement in academic achievement. The enhancement of academic performance among at-risk African American male students is significant to closing the achievement gap between Caucasians and minority students. Therefore, mentoring may be an effective mechanism that may close the achievement gap between Whites students and their African American and Hispanic counterparts. Leidenfrost et al., (2015) recommended mentoring as an intervention tool that can redirect students and help them to be focused and consequently close the achievement gap. The impact of mentoring

resulted in more than 60% of students complied with class rule and procedure, stayed on task and took the initiative to solve problems during the direct observation.

Interventions. Simões and Alarcão (2014) argued that mentoring was an effective strategy for addressing many of the challenges at-risk students experience because of its multiple benefits, including developing the building blocks students need to succeed academically. These non-cognitive skills are the building blocks for healthy development and future academic achievement (Stafford-Brizard, 2016).

Mentoring is an intervention that provides students with attachment a significant building block for the healthy development of children (Stafford-Brizard, 2016). Attachment creates a profound emotional bond that unites a student to an adult or mentor. Therefore, building professional relationships with at-risk students is imperative to their well-being and the improvement of their academic progress. Students will not achieve academically if they are not in a safe learning environment (Maslow, 1948), or if they have no significant attachment or relationships (Stafford-Brizard, 2016). Rios-Ellis et al. (2015) also asserted that mentoring provides socio-cultural and socio-emotional support for students who suffer from attachment deficits and stress.

Healthy childhood development and stress management provides students with the ability to persistently alter their cognitive and behavioral energies so that they are capable of coping with external and internal difficulties. However, many at-risk students may not have the resources needed to meet those demands and are most likely from low-income families and neighborhoods (Tolan et al., 2014). Because of mentoring, Nur disclosed, “I can manage my stress from peer pressure, reduce frustration, and stay focus. I have a good relationship with my mentor and he treats me like his son.” Nur’s experience with mentoring was substantiated by the

assertion of Lindt, & Blair (2016) who argued that mentoring reduces stress and anxiety. Several participants also articulated that mentoring helped enhance their engagement and participation in academic activities. Similar findings were asserted by (Wilson et al., 2014).

In addition, Snowden & Hardy, (2012) posited that mentoring increases student academic outcome. Therefore, mentoring may be an effective intervention that can satisfy the diverse needs of at-risk male African American male students who are at risk for failure (Watson et al., 2015). Finally, mentoring can also help develop self-regulation, which is the ability to adequately control attention, emotion, and executive functions so that the action taken will facilitate the successful accomplishment of the projected goals (Stafford-Brizard, 2016). Sab encapsulated Stafford-Brizard's (2016) assertion and the sentiments of several participants by saying, "I use to have low self-esteem but now I think differently, see life in a whole new way, and think positively."

Central Research Question

The central research question of this study sought to discover how at-risk African American male high school students' perceived mentorship impacts their motivation to learn. The themes that emerged from the study during the data analysis that specifically address the central research question for this study include empowerment, enhanced self-efficacy, and a strong desire to succeed. Several subthemes emerged within those three themes as the participants delineated their experiences with mentoring administered by a school-based mentoring program. Many participants described mentoring as an essential mechanism in augmenting their learning outcomes.

Yav disclosed, “I am motivated to fulfill my dream of graduating from high school and pursuing a bachelor’s degree in engineering.” At-risk students who experienced mentoring while they were in school tend to have a more prolific academic experience and more meaningful learning than those who do not experience mentoring (Leidenfrost, 2014).

The data collected indicated that participants’ motivation to learn was significantly impacted by mentoring. The impact was manifested in the participants’ improved behavior and cognitive engagement, and their exhibited perseverance and enthusiasm in the classroom. More than 50% of the participants were cognitively engaged in the classes where they were observed.

The participants of this investigation were impacted by this mentor-mentee relationship in multiple ways, including developing a strong desire to succeed academically, making better use of their time, exhibiting the ability to remain focused, persevering, successfully completing assigned tasks, and enhancing their perspective of life. Participants also received love, care, and attention that filled a void caused by the absence of a father and the limited parental role played by their mother due to the economic constraints. As a result, participants discovered their sense of purpose, developed a positive attitude towards their education, and enhanced their academic accomplishments.

The discussions held during mentoring gave participants the opportunity to develop their communication skills, and consequently gave them the ability to express their emotions, thoughts, ideas, doubts, and fears. In addition, they were equipped with tools that assisted them with managing their stress levels, reducing their frustration, and improving their behavior. The mentoring experiences were strategically designed to support the participants’ academic program. Mentors who served as role models and motivational speakers was paramount to the experiences of the participants. The participants frequently referenced mentoring as a critical

variable to their academic success. Together, these themes provided an understanding of how at-risk African American male high school students' perceived mentorship impacted their motivation to learn.

Sub-Question One

Sub-question one of this study sought to discover how at-risk African American male high school students' perceived mentorship impacts their self-efficacy and behavior. The themes that emerged from the study during the data analysis that specifically address sub-question one include: self-efficacy, a strong desire to succeed, and improved grades in math and reading. Several participants described self-esteem as one of the major benefits of mentoring. Sab added to the discussion by stating,

The mentoring program made me realize that I can succeed, but I must activate the power inside of me. I always perceived that my life would be a failure and I did not possess the capacity to accomplish my dreams. Mentoring changed the negative mindset and belief system that impeded the progress of most of the participants.

Sab expressed similar sentiments saying, "I use to have low self-esteem but now I think differently, see life in a whole new way, and think positively." Yav echoed similar sentiments by asserting, "I manage my time much better and realized that I feel empowered and responsible for my learning and for my future." Self-confidence improved participants' engagement, participation in class, and their academic performance. Several participants described how their mentors used examples of distinguished individuals and cited several influential quotes and expressions to enhance self-efficacy and the ability and to take leadership of their lives.

Most participants explained how building self-confidence allowed them to academically advance and developed a desire and attitude to succeed. Several participants demonstrated

perseverance and enthusiasm in class because of mentoring. Participants actively participated in class, accomplished assigned tasks, sought teacher guidance, and confidently used multiple strategies to solve problems during observation.

Sub-Question Two

Sub-question two of this study sought to discover how at-risk African American male high school students' perceived mentorship impacts their intrinsic motivation. The themes that emerged from the study during the data analysis that specifically addressed sub-question two included empowerment, self-efficacy, and a strong desire to succeed. Several subthemes emerged within those three themes as the participants delineated their experiences with mentoring that provided insights into this question.

Many participants described mentoring as an essential experience that developed their intrinsic motivation. Ing expressed that he was intrinsically motivated and finally understood the purpose of attending class. He said, "I come to school because I want to succeed and learn new things."

During his individual interview, Jab reflected on the impact of mentoring on his motivation in high school compared to his lack of motivation in high school. He disclosed that he made good decisions, understood why he had to work hard in school, and got ideas on steps that can be taken during his high school years to be successful. I also used an observation protocol to observe student cognitive engagement, behavioral engagement, and demonstration of perseverance and enthusiasm. More than half of the participants observed were behaviorally engaged, the majority demonstrated cognitive engagement, and most participants showed perseverance and enthusiasm in their classrooms.

Moreover, most participants explained how mentoring significantly impacted their strength and confidence to take control of their lives and dismiss people's perceptions and ideas about them. Taj described the participants' motivation by saying, "they are more interested in learning and the teachers don't have to ask them to do their work in class." The participants demonstrated cognitive engagement and enthusiasm when observed in the classroom.

Sub-Question Three

Sub-question three of this study sought to discover how at-risk African American male high school students' perceived mentorship impacts their college readiness and career selection process. The themes that emerged from the study during the data analysis that specifically addressed sub-question three include empowerment, self-efficacy, and career selection. Several subthemes emerged within this theme as the participants delineated their experiences with mentoring which provided insights into this question.

Participants' prior experiences influenced their decision to go to college and their career path selection. Several of the participants decided their career path on their own volition or were influenced by their family, teachers, and coaches. The participants were also motivated to pursue a college degree to attain social mobility, which would make them more marketable, enhance their job opportunities, provide financial stability, and ultimately improve their quality of life.

Jal articulated, "It felt a way I can't explain. Nobody had talked to me about going to college." Initially, he decided to pursue a doctoral degree in medicine. However, he disclosed that mentoring helped him to formulate a contingency plan in the event his first plan does not work. Sab also said that his teacher influenced him to attend college and guided him into his

career selection. He said, “My middle school teacher said you like to read minds you will be a good psychologist. That was when I made the choice to become a doctor.”

Several participants indicated that mentoring equipped them to stay focused and effectively accomplish their goals. The knowledge they acquired in mentoring empowered them to create and implement an action plan and complete assigned tasks. Also, they can use their time wisely so that they could be adequately prepared for college. Although mentoring had no significant impact on the participants’ career path selection, it enabled some participants to develop a contingency plan in the event their original plan did not come to fruition.

Sub-Question Four

Sub-question four of this study sought to discover how at-risk African American high school students perceive the effectiveness of mentoring when used as an educational intervention strategy to close the achievement gap between Caucasian and African American males.

The themes that emerged from the study during the data analysis that specifically addressed sub-question four include empowerment, enhanced self-efficacy, improved grades in math and reading, and a strong desire to succeed. Several subthemes emerged within these themes as the participants delineated their experiences with mentoring which provided insights into this question.

Several participants expressed how mentoring impacted their self-efficacy, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation to learn, strong desire to obtain better grades, and their academic performance. Mentoring also gave them hope that they could compete with students from other ethnic groups particularly their Caucasian counterparts. During the focus group interview several participants delineated the effects of mentoring as an academic intervention. Lut asserted, “I felt good and proud to be African American.” This opinion was echoed by several

participants who expressed how they felt confident in themselves, motivated and realized that they were intelligent. Also, the participants developed a positive attitude and were convinced that they can work hard to enhance their performance.

Participants expressed the effects of mentoring in developing a growth mindset. Jab said, “I used to be angry now I have more self-control and think more positively.” Sab further explicated the impact of mentoring by saying, “My mentor helped me to develop a positive mindset, be positive, and hopeful.” Thus, mentoring as an intervention, helped students improve their self-esteem, self-efficacy, developed a positive mindset, and the drive to succeed academically.

However, limited data was available on sub-question four because students did not participate in national assessment tests during the data collection process; state standardized assessments were administered during April and May 2018. However, the participants noted that there was an improvement in their assessment scores between August and December 2017. Their behavior in class correlated with the information divulged during the individual interview and focus group interview.

Summary

The impact of mentoring on all the at-risk African American male high school participants’ motivation to learn was similar. They were willing to discuss their areas of weakness and the ways mentoring had impacted their motivation to learn. They unequivocally expressed the need and articulated the benefits to collaborate and develop relationships with an adult mentor. The participants appreciated interactions with colleagues, administrators, and mentors because it provided them connectivity, stability, and hope; it made them feel loved and

secure and gave them a sense of belonging. As a result, they agreed that mentoring influenced their study or academic habits.

They all felt empowered, autonomous, and equipped to be successful. In addition, they expressed an improvement in their self-image, self-concept, and self-efficacy. They felt positive about themselves, and believed mentoring helped them develop a positive attitude towards their academic work, teachers, and themselves. Moreover, mentoring helped them make better decisions, stay focused, set goals, create and implement action plans, and enhance their academic progression. As a result, the participants enjoyed the open discussions about life issues. It helped them to confront the challenges African American males face in the American society. They described changes in their lives and the lives of their peers and suggested expanding mentoring to all students particularly in elementary schools. Finally, they credited their development and shift in their thought process to mentoring.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how at-risk high school male African American students' perceived mentorship impacted their motivation to learn. The study sought to determine the effectiveness of school-based mentoring as an academic intervention tool. Understanding the perceptions and lived experiences of at-risk African American male high school students was the basis for the study. This study focused on providing at-risk African American male high school students a voice in understanding how the implementation of mentoring in schools catered to the learning needs of this subgroup.

The data collected and analyzed from the individual interviews, focus group interview, and observation of the participants in the classroom, provided the answers to the five research questions. The research questions sought to elicit the perception of the impact and lived experience of mentoring on the motivation to learn from at-risk African American male high school students who were at risk for failure. The individual interviews and focus group interviews were transcribed and analyzed using Moustakas (1994) horizontalization method, and subsequently coded into significant themes. All the emerged themes are thoroughly delineated in this chapter and the lived experiences of the participants are discussed.

The findings of the five research questions are briefly summarized and discussed in Chapter Five. Furthermore, the implications, limitations, delimitations of the study, and the recommendations for future research are discussed.

Summary of Findings

This study was based on five research questions. Five main themes emerged from the data, with multiple subthemes within each main theme. The first question was, "How does at-

risk African American male high school students' perceived mentorship impact their motivation to learn? The answer to this question came through the first and third themes: empowerment and a strong desire to succeed.

The first sub-theme was taking ownership of learning. Eleven out of 12 students who participated in the focus group discussion expressed how mentoring helped them take ownership of their learning. Taking ownership of learning helped students develop responsibility and accountability, the ability to work collaboratively, take a proactive approach to their work, and ultimately a stronger desire to succeed.

Academic behavior is the second sub-theme that emerged to answer the central research question. Participants articulated how their academic behavior changed because of being mentored. Students' academic behavior was influenced by interactive activities and motivational speeches planned by their mentors. The observation of students in class correlated with the information provided during the interview and focus group interview.

During the observation, 70% of participants were on task and took the initiative to solve problems in their math classes. Most of the participants complied with class procedures and followed directions. However, at the time of the observations, three students attempted to answer questions. This may have been due to the limited number of questions that were asked by teachers. Most participants described the third subtheme, autonomy, as an element that gave them control to make their own decisions and the ability to ignore distractions. In addition, self-determination and the knowledge of how to make right choices gave them that sense of independence.

The fourth and final subtheme that emerged from the data in relation to empowerment was inspirational speeches. All the participants disclosed that inspirational speeches were a

favorite activity during the mentoring sessions. The participants learned tremendously from the real-life discussions with their mentors and other distinguished guests who were invited to speak to them. They also enjoyed small group activities where they discussed a wide range of issues, got help with homework, and studied collaboratively. These talks motivated students and consequently improved their scores on assessments.

For this research question, most of the participants shared similar experiences about empowerment. All four sub-themes related to this question were mentioned by more than 75% of the participants or more. Academic behavior was mentioned more than it was observed in the classroom. One student indicated that he had not observed a major change in behavior in all of the participants. However, all the participants mentioned and demonstrated a stronger desire to succeed because of their experience with mentoring. Finally, the role of mentors in influencing students' motivation to learn was mentioned by all the participants. This may be the reason why the participants wished to continue to be mentored and to expand the mentoring programs to other students. At-risk students who do not receive mentoring and the extra layer of support needed may lack the motivation to learn and as a result may not perform to the full potential.

The second research question asked, "How does at-risk African American high school students' perceived mentorship impact their self-efficacy and behavior?" The second themes provided information about this research question. Based on the data, three sub-themes emerged in the theme of self-efficacy and behavior.

More than 80% of participants observed in the classroom exhibited an improvement in cognitive behavior. My observation of students' behavior confirmed the information they disclosed during the interview and focus group discussion. The improved cognitive behavior among students can be correlated to their impact of mentoring on students' motivation to learn.

The participants paid attention in class, listened to other students, asked the teacher questions, asked other students questions to clarify their understanding when they worked in groups. They actively participated in group discussions, and shared ideas with other group members.

Participants demonstrated the ability to stay focused on the task assigned, because they developed a positive approach to their education due to feeling empowered and motivated by their experience with mentoring. Work ethics improved, and children's attitudes were more positive. The students improved their academic performance because of their improved behavior.

Additionally, the sub-theme of self-esteem emerged in answer to this research question. Most participants admitted that they had a low self-esteem prior to participating in the mentoring program. Participants also disclosed that their low self-esteem stemmed from various influences including home, the community, and being a male African American. Most of the participants also said that mentoring helped them accept themselves as African American and now take pride in themselves. Students also realized that they had the power to construct their identity, change the perception of themselves, and become an academic success. Most participants concurred that mentoring helped them to change their mindset, set goals, and work hard to accomplish them.

The next sub-theme that appeared in the data was self-confidence. Most participants referenced the role their mentors played in the development of their self-confidence. There was a direct correlation between the improvement of students' self-esteem and self-confidence. As students' self-confidence increased, there was evidence of academic growth among them.

This third subtheme related to this question was the attitude to succeed. Participants who engaged in mentoring had multiple opportunities to reflect on their attitude towards their academics. The discussions about Thomas Edison, President Obama, Dr. Ben Carson, and other accomplished persons significantly impacted their attitude towards their education. They learned

that to be successful one must work hard, avoid distraction, stay focused, and develop a positive attitude. A positive attitude helped students create a positive environment that reduced stress, increased their achievement goal, elevate high school career success, and bolster academic performance. All participants said that they enjoyed working in groups and the collaboration provided them the opportunity to discuss ideas and improve their academic performance. A positive attitude helped to improve their self-esteem and confidence in themselves and presented them with the ability to face the obstacles and difficulties they would encounter.

The third question asked, “How does at-risk African American high school students’ perceived mentorship impact their intrinsic motivation?” This question was answered by the first and third themes. Participants described how the authentic relationships they developed with their mentors played a critical role in their motivation to learn. Significant learning took place because of the quality relationships that existed between the mentor and the mentee.

Based on the data derived from the students, mentors strategically intervened in their learning. This sub-theme was a key factor that impacted students’ motivation to learn. Most of the participants articulated that connectivity with mentors played a significant role in their motivation to learn. Many participants had a relationship with an adult for the first time in their lives and they compared it to a father and son relationship. The mentor-mentee relationship gave them a sense of purpose, helped them develop a positive outlook on life, and created a fervent desire to succeed.

Seven participants said that the connections with their mentors, as well as other mentees, helped them perceive life from a positive perspective. This relationship gave them the opportunity to discuss their issues and challenges with their mentors who could make suggestions, recommendations, and offered solutions to their problems. All participants

confirmed during the focus group discussion that they developed a strong desire to succeed and worked hard to obtain better grades because of the impact of mentoring. Their mentors taught them to manage their time, stay focused, complete class assignments and homework, and made them understand the consequences of getting bad grades.

Participants believed that the qualities the mentors displayed were critical to their motivation to learn. The mentors made them feel loved, belonged, and secured. They received the attention they needed in a positive way. Care and compassion were shown to them, and guidance was provided every step of the way. The patience of the mentors made them feel comfortable to discuss their issues and find solutions. As a result, the participants developed self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-control that are the fundamental building blocks to academic success.

The next sub-theme was enhanced academic behavior. Participants described the role of mentoring in the enhancement of their academic behavior. Students' motivation to learn may have been enhanced because of the improvement in their self-esteem and self-efficacy. Nine of 13 students requested help from the teacher to better understand the concept that was taught. Students also collaborated better with other peers by requesting help from each during group activities. All students disclosed during the focus group discussion that they enjoyed working in groups because they learned from each other and they better understood their work. Students also demonstrated major improvement in their academic behavior by engaging in the use of multiple strategies to solve problems. Some students argued that they could solve word problems because of the guidance from their mentors and the peer interaction during group activities. The use of multiple strategies to solve math problems is indicative of mental tenacity and cognitive endurance.

More than 80% of the participants exhibited self-confidence while they were observed. Students tried to solve the problems and continued to try even when they got an incorrect answer. They maintained their focus, worked collaboratively when needed, and sought guidance until they found the answer to the problems. Finally, twelve of thirteen students completed the tasks that were assigned to them. Students worked hard to complete the work, discussed their answers with their groups, and made changes after peer review.

The fourth research question that framed this study was, “How does at-risk African American male high school students’ perceived mentorship impact their college readiness and career selection process?” This research question produced two main subthemes within the main theme of college readiness and career path selection: ability to stay focused, time management, career selection, and a positive attitude.

The first difficulty that emerged as a subtheme was the inability for participants to stay focused to complete tasks assigned in class and at home. Most of the students who participated in the study expressed the challenges they experienced to stay focused and complete tasks. All participants concurred that their mentors helped them develop the ability to stay focused and successfully complete their work. Many of the participants were easily distracted and did not understand the need to seriously approach their education. All participants said during the focus group discussion that they gained a better understanding of the importance of focusing.

Students’ lack of motivation to learn and lack of interest in school contributed to their inability to focus. Several participants who experienced mentoring improved their motivation to learn. They became interested in school, and consequently, developed the ability to focus. They all revealed that they viewed life from a different perspective because their mentors taught them how to stay focus and as a result, they were able to complete their work and get better grades.

The next challenge for participants was time management. It was difficult for the participants to manage their time wisely and get their school and homework done. Many times students did not complete their classwork and homework because of the many distractions they encountered. Due to the lack of motivation to learn, they engaged in activities that were entertaining but not educational.

In addition, time management was a challenge because the participants came from environments that were not as structured as the school. Mentoring provided students with the skills to structure their time so that they could accomplish tasks in the required time. Most participants also praised their mentors for helping them to redirect their energies to do their work rather than engaging in activities that were not educational. The participants learned how to manage their time wisely by creating a schedule and a to-do list which they used to hold themselves accountable as well as their peers.

The third sub-theme that emerged during data analysis was career path selection, which indicated participants were very comfortable with and had already made their decisions. Students were influenced by their teachers, family, and coaches to decide their career. A few students decided what degree they wanted to pursue in college. Mentoring did not impact students' career choices but most students learned to have a contingency plan in the event their first plan failed. Furthermore, some participants did not fully understand the prerequisites for the degrees they wanted to pursue. Their mentors guided them to the requirements, including getting good grades and a high GPA so that they could be competitive.

The final sub-theme which emerged as a difficulty for participants was a positive attitude. Many students begin school with a lack of foundational academic skills and an attitude that does not facilitate the correction of these deficits. Communication skills, social and personal skills,

and the building blocks for academic success is also lacking. Teachers may not be equipped or knowledgeable to handle these attitudes in class and they may interpret such behavior as defiant and inappropriate. Teachers may also escalate situations that they could easily handle if they were equipped to handle at-risk students or students from a different race or ethnicity.

Behavior patterns are programmed into our brains at a tender age. The information recorded by one's brain could be inaccurate or damaging to one's future. At-risk students are usually in an environment in which they continue to hear negative information that may program into their brains. Attitudes are therefore the product of past experiences and they are difficult to change. It is a critical factor in determining our success or failure. One must be willing to consciously take responsibility for and control of life to succeed.

The role of parents in the development of positive attitude is critical to the well-being of children. However, many parents in low-income facilities face many challenges in cultivating such behaviors that will support cognitive stimulation, appropriate academic behavior, and socially acceptable attitudes. Most of the participants experienced a shift in their attitude because of the pivotal role mentors played in their lives. Mentors provided an additional layer of support that the classroom teachers were unable to accomplish.

The fifth and final research question that framed this study was, "How do at-risk African American high school students perceive the effectiveness of mentoring when used as an educational intervention strategy to close the achievement gap between Caucasian and African American males?" This research question produced two main sub-themes within the main theme of improved grades in math and reading.

The first challenge for participants was getting good grades in math and reading the two core subject areas in which students are tested on statewide standardized assessments. It was

difficult for students to obtain good grades because they did not have the discipline to pay attention in class, maintain their focus, and complete their assignments. Students had low self-esteem, self-efficacy, and lacked the motivation to learn. Teachers must get to know students, their cultural background, and their socio-economic status so that they have a better understanding of the students' behavior and values. In addition, teachers must be trained in using specific strategies and instructional support to maintain at-risk student engagement, equal access to the content at the depth and rigor of the standards, and the opportunities to experience academic success.

The lack of self-efficacy made students feel that they lacked the developmental readiness for the complex content taught in math and reading. Several participants indicated that math is an important subject, but they experienced enormous challenges to maintain a letter grade C or higher. They got low grades in math while attending elementary and middle school, and this impacted their self-esteem. Most students improved their grades when they started to participate in the mentoring program. The participants received help from their mentors and peers to deepen their understanding of the concepts and as a result, they enhanced their academic performance in the areas of math and reading.

The final sub-themes that emerged in relation to math and reading grades were interventions. All the students who participated in the study experienced challenges in math and reading. However, when mentoring was used as an intervention tool, students could obtain higher scores in both math and reading. Mentoring was an effective intervention tool geared towards addressing many of the challenges at-risk students experienced because it has multiple benefits including developing the building blocks that are needed for academic success. Non-

cognitive skills are the building blocks for healthy child development and their future academic achievement.

The inspirational speeches, small group activities, one-on-one tutoring, and group tutoring were very effective in helping students improve their self-esteem, self-efficacy, their identity as African American, time management, and ability to stay focused. When students were empowered and made to realize that they were special, intelligent, and capable of succeeding, they experienced a change in perspective, developed a growth mindset, and a positive attitude towards their academic goals and life in general.

Mentoring increased the participants' academic outcome. Therefore, a well-structured mentoring school-based program may be an effective intervention tool that can meet the diverse needs of at-risk male African American male students. Finally, many at-risk African Americans come from low-income homes and neighborhoods that are lacking in resources. They also lack relationships that would cushion the effects of a turbulent childhood and all the social ills associated with these early childhood experiences. Mentoring served as an excellent intervention that met the needs of all participants including social, psychological, and academic needs.

Discussion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how at-risk high school male African American students' perceived mentorship impacted their motivation to learn. Through interviews, a focus group interview, and an observation this research provided insight into the lived experience at-risk African American male high school students who were at risk for failure had with the phenomenon of school-based mentoring. Themes emerged related to the types of experiences students had, the benefits they derived from mentoring and the difficulties

and challenges that impeded their academic accomplishments. This study has theoretical, empirical, and practical implications.

Empirical

The research also validated many areas of research on mentoring. The participants' experience with mentoring coincided with the findings from prior research. Previous research demonstrated that mentoring improves student self-esteem, self-efficacy, enhances engagement, increases motivation, and improves academic achievement (Watson et al., 2016). Participants in this study also described similar benefits and experiences as found in other studies. Students described how mentoring empowered them to take ownership of their learning, manage their time wisely, make positive decisions, and developed a positive perspective. All participants were intrinsically motivated and had a stronger desire to succeed academically. These findings have a strong correlation with other findings that showed mentoring increases student academic behavior and achievement (Seal, 2016; Watson et al., 2016).

Mentoring is an extra layer of support and academic intervention that cater to the diverse needs of at-risk students (Leidenfrost, 2016). All the students who participated in this research articulated the pivotal role mentoring played in their academic career. The findings of this study augmented previous research findings, which advocated for the need of differentiated teaching methodologies to meet the needs of at-risk African American male students (Wilson, 2016). According to Bandura, (1997), a child's environment has a significant influence on his or her learning experience (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, it is paramount for teachers to create a conducive classroom environment in which students can feel safe, secure, belonged, and loved. Teachers must also develop authentic and transparent professional relationships with students so that significant learning can occur (Marshall & Olivia, 2010). Teachers must also take time to

know their students, understand their cultural background, socioeconomic status, and socio-emotional needs so that they can better serve the students entrusted into their care (Marshall & Olivia, 2010).

Moreover, Vygotsky (1978) asserted that social interaction is extremely important to the development of cognition. Structured interaction under the supervision and guidance of an adult or mentor increases the achievement of a student. Several participants disclosed the guidance, encouragement, the use of inspirational speeches, and group discussions illuminated their understanding of themselves, their purpose, and the need for education, and strategies to be successful. Students felt comfortable with their mentors, and could discuss their problems, challenges, and issues. As a result, they could overcome stress, frustration, and fears; they muster the courage to face the challenges.

The participants shared numerous benefits of mentoring including cognitive, social, and behavioral. Mentoring helped the students better handle stress, frustration, and many of their challenges both in school, at home, and in the community. They were also able to discuss their problems with an adult or mentor who guided them in the right direction. The participants also developed self-esteem, authentic relations with their mentors and peers, and received support from their group members.

The participants learned to focus, and developed a strong desire to succeed. They also gleaned motivation to learn. They improved their understanding of math and reading, could solve math word problems, developed a love for reading, and improved their grades in math and reading. All students enhanced their self-efficacy, and consequently, they took ownership of their learning, developed autonomy, improved their time management skills, and able to make more informed decisions.

Finally, students improved their behavior, paid attention in class, demonstrated greater enthusiasm and perseverance, worked collaboratively with other peers, and developed a positive mindset. In addition, the participants improved their attitude towards their academics, enjoyed school, and were cognitively engaged in class. The findings of this study support the findings of previous research and theories that focus on social learning (Bandura, 1997; Maslow, 1948; Vygotsky, 1978).

Theoretical

This study confirmed that the theories of Maslow (1948), Bandura (1978), and Vygotsky (1978) are relevant to 21-century education. Maslow's (1948) theory of the hierarchy of needs explained that the basic needs of love, safety, and belongingness must be gratified before growth needs emerge or an individual becomes self-actualized. Bandura (1977) purported that a student's success is not determined by his or her intelligence but by the belief in his or her ability. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social learning emphasized the importance of social interactions, cooperative learning, and collaborative group activity.

Many participants explained how mentoring provided them with love, care, and attention for which they longed. As a result, students could develop significant relationships with their mentors and consequently enhanced their academic accomplishments. These ideas all support Maslow's (1948) hierarchy of needs theory has implications for the education of at-risk African-American male students.

Several participants associated the improvement of self-esteem and self-efficacy with the role of their mentors. The students disclosed that their low self-esteem and self-efficacy affected their academic performance. However, their academic achievement was improved after their participation in mentoring because their self-efficacy was enhanced. These ideas support

Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, and demonstrates the importance of self-efficacy in the improvement of academic achievement among at-risk African American male students who are at risk for failure.

Most participants explicated the importance of group interactions and how it facilitated their learning. Students could better understand the concepts when they discussed the content with their mentors and other group members. Vygotsky (1978) asserted that social interaction is important to the development of cognition. He also asserted that the potential to develop cognitively is contingent upon the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky described ZPD as a level of development one can achieve through engagement in social behavior.

Therefore, students were more likely to develop their full ZPD because mentoring provided them with the opportunity to engage significant interactions. Also, students can achieve much more under the supervision and guidance of a mentor (Vygotsky, 1978). Maslow (1948), Bandura (1977), and Vygotsky's (1978) theories have influenced pedagogy for several decades. The description of the lived experience of the participants with mentoring and the findings from this study indicate the continued relevance of these theories.

Implications

Theoretical

This study has a multiplicity of implications for educators working with At-risk African American students. This research offered a more profound understanding of how the theories of Maslow (1948), Bandura (1977), and Vygotsky (1978) are still relevant to students' motivation to learn. Components of all three theories were delineated by participants when they explicated mentoring gratified their basic needs, and consequently, their growth needs to emerge. They experienced the development of self-esteem and self-efficacy, improved academic achievement,

relished the role of cooperative learning and significant relationship in their learning process. However, none of the participants specifically referenced the theorists by name. The role of these theories in this study and the impact they had on the motivation was vital to the academic success of at-risk African American students at levels of the education system particularly from kindergarten to 12th grade. Teachers need to be cognizant of the implications of these educational theories, understand how to apply them and how to effectively utilize these theories to inform their educational practices and instructional delivery. Finally, it is paramount that administrators, instructional coaches, counselors, and other policymakers have a comprehensive understanding of these theories when planning and implementing curriculum, determining the expectations for teachers and students and providing extracurricular supports. This study enhanced the awareness of the relevance and implications of these theories to at-risk students in the 21st-century educational system.

Empirical

There were several areas where the experiences of the participants in this investigation enhanced the body of knowledge about the perceived impact of mentoring on the motivation to learn. This research provided new understandings from the participants' lived experience of the phenomenon that confirmed much of what was already in the literature about the impact of mentoring. In addition, this study augmented the body of literature because it provided qualitative data from the participants' perspective to the large body of quantitative data on the phenomenon. However, the problem that framed this research was the absence of the participants having a voice in the investigation. An advanced empirical understanding was procured about how at-risk African American male high school students who are at risk of failure perceive how mentoring has impacted their motivation to learn. The students who

participated in this study clearly delineated the challenges they experienced being at-risk African Americans, the cultural, social, and mental struggles they constantly faced, and the multiplicity of benefits mentoring yielded with this group of students. Comprehending the difficulties these at-risk students experienced have implications for all stakeholders in the educational enterprise. This new knowledge will equip all educators so that they can provide adequate support and create a conducive learning environment that will meet the diverse needs of these students so that they can enhance their academic performance and ultimately close the achievement gap.

Practical

There are a several challenges at-risk African American male students described that provided some practical implications for ensuring their academic success. Administrators, instructional coaches, counselors, and other policymakers need to understand challenges at-risk African American students faces at home, the school, community, and the society in general. It is imperative to consider the needs of these students when determining instructional supports, activities, and classrooms environment.

Instructors must also be very tactical in how the school day is structured so that at-risk students are not marginalized, and their diverse needs are satisfied. Policy makers may have limited knowledge about needs of at-risk African American students, may not be knowledgeable about the characteristics, values, and behaviors of these students, or may not be equipped to handle students with such challenges. Additionally, policymakers and teachers may misinterpret the behavior of these students as having a cognitive deficit and behavioral disorder. Thus, students' situations may be exasperated by teachers because of a lack of knowledge or unconscious ideology of teachers. Policymakers should incorporate the needs of at-risk African-

American students when determining student expectations. Counselors must advocate for at-risk students and provide additional layers of support to help them adhere to the expectations.

Moreover, at-risk students bring a wealth of knowledge and experiences to the classroom. However, they may have numerous deficits because of many variables including socioeconomic status, family structure, stereotypes, and lack of resources. School personnel must be aware of the existing deficits and cater for at-risk students' diverse need to ensure their academic success in the classroom. Teachers should be equipped through professional development with the understanding of students' diverse needs and how to provide educational experiences to alleviate their deficits. Likewise, they must provide counseling and structured mentoring services to guarantee their academic success.

Delimitations and Limitations

The study was delimited to the use of participants who were all male, of high school age, African Americans, were at risk for failure, from a single site, and from the lower socioeconomic class. All participants lived in the same geographical region and were involved in the mentoring program.

This study was limited because it was conducted at a private Christian high school that promoted mentoring as a strategy to enhance academic achievement. All participants in the study were at-risk African American high school male students who were at risk for failure. The participants lived in the same geographical area and were from low-income families. Therefore, the results cannot be used to generalize for other categories of African American students, students from other ethnic groups and races, or for female students. Informed consent forms were forwarded to parents via the school administrators. All participants were required to be involved in the mentoring program at the school site. The parents who agreed for their children

to participate and the students who were willing to participate were required to have some level of interest and confidence in the research process.

The sample size of 13 participants was small and did not include the perceptions of most of the students who participated in the mentoring program. Many potential participants may not have been granted permission by their parents or were probably unwilling to participate. Therefore, the participants may have been those students who enjoyed the mentoring program and have benefitted significantly from it. Finally, some of the participants were very reserved and did not speak or spoke very little during the focus group discussion. This may have limited my ability to verify information.

A final limitation of the research study was the time constraint for conducting interviews, focus groups interview, and direct observations. Once I received IRB approval, I was allowed three weeks to collect the data because of the school's preparation for state assessments. Frequent interruption of the normal schedule during that time affected the length of some observations. As a result, the quality of the data collected may have been limited because some responses were not detailed and comprehensive.

Recommendations for Future Research

While the findings of my study are relevant and contribute to the larger body of knowledge regarding mentoring, further research is still needed. For example, further studies should be conducted on at-risk African American male high school students who are at risk for failure at a different setting such as geographical area, elementary and middle school level, middle and upper-class African American families, public schools, and at the post-secondary level. Perhaps the results could be different if the students were from a different setting, socioeconomic background, geographical area, or school age range.

Although a well-structured mentoring program might be implemented at a school, the program must be implemented with fidelity and the mentors must be role models to achieve the goals of the mentoring program. More qualitative research is needed to study the phenomenon of mentoring. There is a large volume of quantitative data on mentoring, but there is a dearth of qualitative data in the body of literature. Other studies should investigate how other variables work together with mentoring to impact students' motivation to learn. Some contributors cited other factors such as the structure of the school environment, the compassion exhibited by teachers, administrators, and mentors, poverty, and the positive encouragement they received from family, friends, coaches, and mentors.

Based on the results of my study, future research should be conducted to continue the thrust of implementing mentoring as a highly engaging collaborative learning model in school. Central Florida is a rapidly growing metropolitan area with greater levels of student diversity. Mentoring could enhance students' learning experiences, academic achievement, and graduation rates. Mentoring may provide an additional layer of support for at-risk students of all races and ethnicities in the general education program, English language learners, and special education students.

Responses from the participants' interviews and focus group discussion calls for greater scrutiny and research in the planning, designing, and implementation of school-based mentoring programs that are used as an intervention learning model. Schools need to provide professional development opportunities for teachers and mentors to better understand the needs of at-risk students and what measures that can be taken to meet the diverse learning needs of this subgroup. These mechanisms may reduce the inequalities and inequity issues in the education system, enhance at-risk student academic outcomes, and close the achievement gap.

Summary

The findings of this study indicate the need for schools to implement well-structured school-based mentoring programs that can serve as an intervention tool (Leidenfrost et al., 2014; Tough, 2016). Also, mentoring can be used to improve the academic achievement of at-risk African American male high school students' and their motivation to learn (Williams & Nelson-Gardell, 2014). In addition, mentoring will help to develop significant relationships between adult mentors and students who would facilitate the enhancement of cognitive engagement, perseverance and enthusiasm, and behavior that supports academic advancement (Apprey et al., 2014; Watson et al., 2015).

According to Vygotsky (1978), a conducive learning environment must be characterized by a culture of collaboration. In addition, mentoring develops the building blocks needed for academic learning (Stafford-Brizard, 2016), and it adds value to students' academic learning experiences (Cole, 2015; McCoy et al., 2015; Seal, 2015; Wyatt, 2009). Mentoring can help at-risk adolescents transition into adulthood with the skills required for academic success (Castellanos et al., 2016; Karcher et al., 2002) and to become prolific members of society (Bandura, 2000; Tough, 2016; Watson et al., 2015).

The participants benefitted in a multiplicity of ways from mentoring, including learning to manage their time wisely and taking a more serious approach to their academic career. Due to mentoring, they also maintained their focus, developed perseverance, completed assigned tasks, and developed a stronger desire to succeed academically. The participants built authentic and transparent relationships with their mentors and other adults that resulted in them discovering their purpose, developing a positive perspective of themselves and life, developing their social and personal skills, and enhancing their communication skills.

Furthermore, mentoring enhanced the participants' self-esteem and self-efficacy and made them feel proud to be African American. As a result of their improved self-efficacy, participants developed a love for reading, improved their comprehension and ability to solve math word problems, and ultimately improved their grades. The praise and acknowledgment students received from their mentors significantly impacted their self-worth. The participants' basic needs according to Maslow's (1948) hierarchy of needs were met by their mentors. The participants revealed that they felt loved, cared for, belonged, and secure with their mentors. This risk-free environment gave them the courage to express their emotions, doubts, and fears. It also afforded them to manage stress, reduce frustration, improve their behavior, make better decisions, and take ownership of their learning.

However, mentoring had no significant impact on career selection as most of the students had already decided their career path. In addition, mentoring did not change participants' prior career path selection. Rather, it influenced some participants to create a contingency in the event their first choice did not come to fruition. There was no evidence to prove that mentoring impacted the overall educational achievement since students had not taken state and national exams and thus no comparisons could have been made.

Although the participants perceived multiple benefits from mentoring, numerous other variables may have contributed to the paradigm shift they experienced. Some of the influences include lesson planning, instructional delivery, the school's structure and culture. Other influences include the structure and implementation of the mentoring program, the qualities of the mentors, the caliber of the instructor, and the maturity of the students. In conclusion, mentoring proved to be an excellent academic intervention, a strategy to enhance the motivation

to learn, an extra layer of support for at-risk students, and an emotional, social, and cultural infrastructure for African American male high school students who are at risk for failure.

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APPENDICES**APPENDIX A****LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 18, 2018

Godwin Prospere

IRB Approval 3091.011818: The Impact of Mentorship on the Motivation to Learn: A Phenomenological Study of High School African American Students at Risk for Failure

Dear Godwin Prospere,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

The Graduate School

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APPENDIX B

Face-To-Face Interview Questions

The following open-ended interview questions were used to solicit responses from the participants to answer the research questions of the study.

1. What feelings were generated by your mentoring experience?
2. How do you believe mentoring has influenced your self-confidence and self-esteem?
3. Describe a successful academic experience since you began participation in the mentoring program?
4. How do you believe mentoring has changed your interest in school and desire to learn?
5. What mental changes do you believe you are experiencing because of mentoring?
6. What experiences from the mentoring program would you like to share with others?
7. How do you believe mentoring has influenced the grades you get?
8. What do you believe you would have done differently in middle school if you had been mentored then?
9. Describe how you became aware you needed to change your academic behavior?
10. How did you feel the first time your mentor encouraged you to go to college?
11. How do you believe mentoring has impacted your plans for going to college and getting a career?
12. What do you believe are some changes that can be done to the mentoring program to help you become more successful?
13. What other significant thoughts about the mentoring experience would you like to share?

APPENDIX C

Focus Group Interview Prompts

1. What is your favorite activity during the mentoring session?
2. What have you noticed about other students who are in the mentoring program?
3. How do you believe mentoring has influenced your study or academic habits?
4. What do you believe to be the benefits or advantages of mentoring?
5. How do you practice what you have learned in mentoring?
6. How would you feel if you were told that the mentoring program will be cancelled?
7. How do you feel about yourself since you being mentored?
8. Is there anything else you would like to say about what you like or do not like about mentoring?

APPENDIX D

Observation Protocol

Observation Protocol				
	<i>0 - was not observed</i>	<i>1 - Attempted</i>	<i>2 - to some extent</i>	<i>3- descriptive of the observation</i>
Behavioral Engagement				
Complied to class procedures/ routines				
Answered questions				
Actively stayed on task				
Took the initiative to solve problems				
Cognitive Engagement				
Paid attention to the teacher				
Keenly listened to other students				
Asked the teacher questions				
Asked other students questions				
Shared ideas with other students				
Showed Perseverance and Enthusiasm				

Requested teacher's guidance				
Requested support from peers				
Tried multiple strategies				
Exhibited self-confidence				
Demonstrated enthusiasm				
Accomplished task(s)				