A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: PERSPECTIVES ON THE

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES OF RURAL AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENTS

OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

by Barbara Ragin-Champagne

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2022

APPROVED BY:

Sharon Michael-Chadwell, Ed.D., Committee Chair

Tamika Hibbert, Ed.D., Committee Member

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Abstract

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore and ascribe meaning to African American parents' lived experiences in the education of their middle school students in rural east-central South Carolina. Two theoretical frameworks guided this study as they related to the levels and the effect of parental self-efficacy on parental engagement: Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's revised model of parental involvement and Bandura's self-efficacy theory. The central research question for this study was "What are the perceptions and lived experiences of rural African American middle-school parents and their involvement in parental engagement activities?" Three subsequent sub-questions on parental self-efficacy, role construction, and invitations for engagements were: (a) "How does African American parents' self-efficacy influence their decisions to become involved with the school? (b) "How do African American parents describe their parental role construction in their children's education? (c) "How do African American parents describe their response to the school's invitations to become involved?" Data on the phenomenon was collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a focus group. This study concluded that rural African American parents' perspectives on parental engagement are influenced by their parental self-efficacy, role construction, communications with and from the school, and influences on community members. The findings on the influence of the community on the parental engagement of rural African American parents and child-specific non-academic related invitations to parents are the basis for future investigation as there is a scarcity of research literature addressing this issue.

Keywords: lifeworld, parental engagement, parental involvement, parental self-efficacy

Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to my best friend, my mother, Jeanie Isaac Brown Jefferson. She is a preeminent educator who has instilled in me an unwavering faith in God and an unquenchable thirst for learning.

My biological and stepchildren, son-in-law, stepdaughter-in-law, Dr. Monica Ragin Hughley, Faneisha and Ben Alexander, Raymond and Allison Champagne, Timothy Myles Champagne, and Erin Vaughn bring boundless joy into my life. I am grateful for their belief in possibilities and the power of prayers.

My grandchildren, Michelle, Nandi, Bria, and Aaron are my motivation for creating enduring legacies of what can be achieved when one walks and trusts the Lord. They are my heartstrings, morning joy, and nighttime lullabies. They will make the world better because of their callings as future servant leaders and lives dedicated to the Lord.

My intellectually and artistically gifted sister Melba B. Payne and my brother-in-law, Ricky, have always inspired me. My brother, Lee Ernest and his partner Francene, Robert and his partner Flora Mae, and my brother Ronnie have always believed I could complete this journey.

To my nieces and nephews- may they be inspired by my tenacity to achieve this terminal degree.

Finally, this manuscript is dedicated to my caring, compassionate, God-fearing husband, Timothy L. Champagne, who always had a word of encouragement when I was in "doctoral desert places." He has always been my number one supporter by giving me space to pray, write, think, and just be me.

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There are not enough words to express gratitude to Dr. Sharon Michael-Chadwell for being my chair. She was always there, giving sound advice, encouraging words, and praying with me. It was not by chance that she became my chair. Her acceptance of my request to serve as my chair was an answered prayer. I thank God for moving in her spirit and saying yes. I could not have completed this journey without her constant communication, words of wisdom, and inquisitive spirit that challenged me cognitively. I will forever be grateful for her steadfast resolve and kindred spirit, ensuring I complete the doctoral journey.

I also thank Dr. Tamika Hibbert for her dedication, suggestions, and commitment to helping me complete this doctoral journey. Her contributions to my dissertation team and as an adviser made it easier to complete this journey.

I dedicate this dissertation to the enduring memory of my late husband, Willie Aaron Ragin, my father, Robert L. Brown, and my beloved uncle, Jefferson T. Isaac. They are forever loved and will always be remembered.

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Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Parental engagement is often viewed as a panacea for some of the problems associated with educating students in the United States (Couch-Jenkins, 2017; Jung & Sheldon, 2020; Peurach et al., 2019; Stefanski et al., 2016). In the United States' educational system, where 79% of preprimary to secondary teachers are White, and only seven percent are of African American descent, African American students are subjected to a myriad of critical academic and social disparities (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2021; Woods, 2020). More startling are the actions of educators and school officials that ostracize African American parents, limit their access to information, and impede their quest to be co-partners in their children's education (Marchand et al., 2019; Williams & Sánchez, 2013).

The actions and mindsets—deliberate or unconscious—that limit access of African American parents to their children's education are perpetuated through deficit thinking and social, emotional, communication, and physical barriers (Anthony, 2008; Yull et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the literature proposes that if African American parents are engaged, racial disparities in education can be eradicated (McCarthy Foubert, 2019; Simons & Steele, 2020).

One of the most effective responses to educational and social development disparities in educating African American students is the cultivation of a meaningful relationship between the home and school (Bartz et al., 2017; Stefanski et al., 2016). This hermeneutic phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of African American parents of middle school students in the Buckscott School District (pseudonym) in a rural school district in east-central South Carolina. Chapter One examines the parental engagement of African Americans from a

historical, social, and theoretical perspective in the context of parental engagement. The chapter presents the purpose, significance, research questions, and definitions of key terms.

Background

Empirical studies theorized a positive relationship between parental engagement and student achievement (Barnes, 2017; Massucco, 2020; McGowan-Robinson, 2016; Sylvestre, 2018). Historically, African American middle school students have faced seemingly insurmountable academic success and social development obstacles. Parental involvement is essential to address the social and cultural impediments to academic growth and social development (Barnes, 2017; Rose, 2021). Short- and long-term benefits for African American students, parents, and communities may occur when parents are informed and engaged. These benefits may include improved academic achievement; enrollment in rigorous courses; achievement of a post-secondary degree; and better job possibilities (Annunziata et al., 2006; Mattison, 2005).

In contrast, negative repercussions, including a lack of academic productivity, may result from the absence of meaningful engagement (Rose, 2021). One of the difficulties in understanding and addressing the needs of parents and cultivating an effective home-school partnership is the paucity of literature on the barriers to the engagement of African American parents. Therefore, it is imperative to explore parental engagement through the lived experiences of African American parents and historical, social, and theoretical contexts.

Historical Context

McGowan-Robinson (2016) noted that the history of parental engagement for African Americans began with the transatlantic slave trade and can be traced through several milestones in this nation's history. Allen (2018) contended that parental and community engagement could

be traced through oral histories and narratives of African Americans (Allen, 2018). Rife (2007) supported this historical fact with primary data on the life and legacy of Prince Hall (1735/8 to 1807). Hall, an African American veteran of the Revolution, petitioned the Massachusetts legislature in 1787 for a separate school for African American students because of their constant exposure to a barrage of racist abuse in majority white schools (Moultrie, 2016; Rife, 2007). There is no doubt that Prince Hall's early act of petitioning constitutes an example of parental involvement. It is necessary to examine the historical framework of the parental engagement of African Americans through the segregated years of public education before Briggs v. Elliott (1951) and the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA,1965).

Before and After Briggs v. Elliott (1951)

Hine (2005) posited that African American parents, faced with systematic structural, institutional, and individual racism perpetuated by the oppressive federal and state laws promoting "separate but equal" education, maintained a vested interest and engagement in their children's education in the face of insurmountable odds. Indeed, the case of *Briggs v. Elliott* (1951), the precursor to *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), is illustrative of African American parents and students working with school leadership to ensure access to equal educational resources and opportunities. Importantly, this case demonstrates parental engagement and cooperation between the home and school to pursue equality and equity of educational resources and opportunities.

Briggs v. Elliott, like the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, supported the assumption that African American parents were vital in the educative process of their children. African American parents formed partnerships with the schools in their communities by providing essential resources and fostering fictive kin relations with the African American

African educators who served as activists, communicators, and protectors for African American students during the years of educational segregation (Cook, 2010).

Elementary and Secondary Act (1965)

Before 1960, the federal government had limited involvement in developing educational policies (Kantor, 1991). In 1965, as part of President Johnson's "War on Poverty," the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was signed into law. Paul (2016) posited that the ESEA demonstrated the federal government's interest in equality and access to quality education for all students to eradicate poverty. Federal funds were allocated to school districts for professional development, instructional materials, and other resources (Paul, 2016; Yarrow, 2009). By 1966, in implementing the Title I legislation of the ESEA, federal officials urged local school officials to involve parents (Mizell, 1980). According to Mizell (1980), a 1967 program guide from the United States Department of Education suggested that parental involvement is a collaborative and cooperative partnership between the home and school for the child's educational, social, emotional, and physical well-being.

According to Yarrow (2009), policies enacted for children and families were based on the changing cultural values and the Great Society initiatives during the Reagan and Bush presidencies. Bartz et al. (2017) attributed the federal government's interest in decisions and policymaking to rapid changes in a global society, changes in family dynamics, and the entrance of more adults into the workforce (Bartz et al., 2017). Parental involvement has become a topic of discussion among practitioners, researchers, and political leaders and has been reflected in 21st-century educational federal reforms (Bartz et al., 2017; Hahn, 2021). Couch-Jenkins (2017) pointed out that with the federal government's vested interest in educational reforms, states were challenged to improve public school students' academic performance while acknowledging and

advancing the role of parents as critical stakeholders in the educative process. According to Bartz et al. (2017), these reforms were a clarion call from politicians to advocate for increased parental involvement and hold states more accountable for students' academic improvement.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

Frerichs (2008) argued that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), signed by President George W. Bush in 2002, inaugurated a new era of educational accountability and parental involvement. This law emphasized the importance of positive parent-school relationships, effective communication, and school-based parental engagement opportunities (Hahn, 2021). Notably, NCLB required the inclusion of parents of children with disabilities, those with limited English proficiency, and parents of migratory students in the planning and implementing of programs, activities, and policies (Hahn, 2021; Lavery, 2016). The NCLB also emphasized the development of school-based parental involvement programs and activities.

In this context, from Prince Hall's petition before the Massachusetts legislature in 1787 to the enactment of federal legislation requiring or inferring parental involvement, African American parents have been involved in their children's education. This historical perspective contradicts literature that perpetuates the misconceptions that African American parents are disinterested, uninvolved, unconcerned, lazy, and apathetic regarding their children's education (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008; Moultrie, 2016). Parental involvement and its residual effects cannot be fully understood outside of the context of institutional, individual, and structural racism (Brown, 2018; Condon et al., 2021; DiAngelo, 2011; Leath et al., 2019; Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2019). Conversely, as delineated in the historical context of this study, the United States' discriminatory practices

regarding equality and equity of educational opportunities for minority students have influenced the types and degrees of parent engagement among African American parents (Woods, 2020).

Social Context

According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2021), in 2017, White students in Grade 8 scored 25 points higher on a national reading assessment than their African American counterparts (de Brey, Musa, McFarland, et al., 2019). The salient point is that data extrapolated from 1992 to 2017 reveal a narrowing in the achievement gap in reading between the two groups. In contrast, the achievement gap over 15 years remained constant in a comparative analysis of mathematical assessment results between White and African American eighth-grade students. By 2017, the gap in achievement between White and African American eighth-grade students in mathematics remained at 32% (de Brey et al., 2019).

If African American students are to be successful in a rapidly transforming global society, a partnership between home and school is essential (Jeynes, 2016). Furthermore, school officials, particularly those who effect policy changes, must collaborate with African American parents on racialized strategies that promote parental engagement and have a residual impact on student achievement and social growth (Huguley et al., 2021). Hahn (2021) theorized that when educators cultivate parent-school partnerships, parents become more engaged in inclusive school practices that support their children's academic achievement and acquisition of 21st-century skills. It is also imperative for the school community to engage African American parents whose middle school-age children are entering puberty, adjusting to a transition in the school context, and developing their autonomy and independence within family relationships (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Huguley et al. (2021) articulated that factors such as social isolation and economic

challenges have negative consequences for the engagement of African American parents. School officials and educators also see language barriers, cultural and social deficits, and other restrictions as legitimate hindrances to parental engagement (Foley, 2015). It is critical to conduct further research on the constructs of African Americans' parental engagement in terms of their social and cultural norms (Yull et al., 2018).

Theoretical Context

Yamauchi et al. (2017) argued that the overarching importance of a theoretical context is to inform the quality and the scope of the interpretive nature of a research study. The researchers further contended that four theories are primarily used in the empirical research on family-school partnerships (Yamauchi et al., 2017). According to Yamauchi et al. (2017), there are four prominent theoretical frameworks that researchers rely on to methodize family-school partnerships, including parental involvement and engagement. However, each theory has limitations. Notably, neither Bronfenbrenner's (1986) bioecological theory, Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory, Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence, nor the funds of knowledge theory propounded by Moll et al. (1992) address the gaps in the literature on parents perspectives on parental engagement (Yamauchi et al., 2017).

Brown (2013) argued that the construct of parental involvement should be analyzed through various lenses, including behavior, goal, attitude, self-efficacy, and motive. It is also necessary to understand parents' active and passive engagement so that innovative practices can be implemented to meet their cultural, social, and self-efficacy needs. Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, et al. (2005) conducted an empirical study on many convergent factors that influence parental involvement, including the parents' attitudes, behavior, and activities. The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler parental involvement model will be the theoretical foundation for this hermeneutic phenomenological study.

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of parental involvement will be used to identify pertinent data and evolving themes from the perspectives of African American parents. Specifically, parental role construction and self-efficacy will be explored in the context of participants' lived

experiences. Because of the apparent disparities perpetuated through negative and biased mindsets, the salience of race and overt or subtle discriminatory practices to the actual practice of involvement and engagement, whether active or passive, will be explored through the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler parental involvement model.

Problem Statement

The problem with this proposed hermeneutic phenomenological study is that little is known about the perceptions and lived experiences of rural African American parents of middle schoolers. If this problem continues to manifest, it is reasonable to conclude that African American youth will be more likely to exhibit negative behavior patterns. These patterns can include a decline in school attendance, a disproportionate number of suspensions and expulsions, higher rates of dropping out and teen pregnancy, a strong likelihood of being assigned to special education classes, and a general decline in the academic performance of African American students (Foley, 2015; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Johnson, 2020).

In this study, internal professional documents, including records of attendance at parent and teacher conferences, meeting agendas, social media, and written communication on invitations to school events, meetings, and opportunities for volunteerism, as well as a review of a compilation of external documents, strongly indicate the consistently low rate of African American parents in their children's education. This finding is validated by a compilation of data from the South Carolina Department of Education (2018). This 2018 annual report by the South Carolina Department of Education indicates that less than .25% of parents indicated involvement in their children's school. The data reviewed suggested that approximately 21.1% of 54,095 parents surveyed volunteered or participated in school improvement council meetings, a parent-teacher association (PTA), a parent-teacher organization (PTO), or attended parenting workshops.

According to the data retrieved from the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2021) on family and parent involvement in education, during the 2019-2020 academic year, 89% of the respondents favorably reported participation in at least one PTO/PTA meeting (Hanson & Pugliese, 2020). The disparity in participation widens when viewed as volunteering, serving on a school committee, or attending a school event. Across the United States, 43% of parents surveyed indicated that they served as volunteers or participated on a committee, and 79% attended at least one school event (Hanson & Pugliese, 2020). In contrast, 35% of African American parents volunteered or served on a committee (Hanson & Pugliese, 2020). Likewise, 76% of African American parents attended at least one school event (Hanson & Pugliese, 2020).

The economic condition of parents can be a mitigating factor for involvement or participation. According to socioeconomic and educational status data extrapolated, analyzed, and categorized from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2021), less educated or financially challenged parents are less likely to be engaged with the school in any form of involvement. Parents with a high school diploma or equivalent volunteered or attended an event at a rate of 28% and 69%, respectively (Hanson & Pugliese, 2020). Conversely, the compilation of data by Hanson and Pugliese (2020) indicates that 28% of parents below the poverty level served as a volunteer or on a school committee. The data also indicates that 66% of parents below the poverty line attended at least one school function. A plethora of migrating factors can inhibit or motivate parents' engagement in their children's educational process.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of rural African American parents and their involvement in parental engagement activities in the Buckscott School District (a pseudonym). Parent engagement is defined here as the involvement of parents or guardians and the school in partnership for the improvement of the development, academic, or social/emotional growth of the child. (Couch-Jenkins, 2017; Goodall, 2018; Jeynes, 2016; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016; Nokali et al., 2010; Yulianti et al., 2020). This research study will address a gap in the literature on African American parents' perceptions of parental engagement. It will inform practitioners how African American parents' perspectives, parental engagement, and participation in their children's educative process are influenced by their parental self-efficacy, social and cultural capital, and communication skills (Bandura, 1985; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Lilliedahl, 2021). The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler theoretical framework will guide this hermeneutic phenomenological study in understanding how parental role construction affirms and strengthens African American parents' involvement as co-partners in their children's education.

Significance of the Study

This hermeneutic phenomenological study on African American parents' lived experiences of parental engagement has empirical, theoretical, and practical significance. Each area of significance, supported by literature, illustrates the study's relevance for African American parents, school and district administrators, classroom teachers of all ethnicities, school boards, policymakers, and educational practitioners. Furthermore, the study contributes to the emerging body of research on the parental engagement of African American parents of middle school students in rural school districts.

Theoretical Significance

The study's findings may have theoretical significance for educators and social science practitioners. Butler and Le (2018) posited that, historically, most research on parenting has yet to thoroughly examine the influences of race/ethnicity, social and economic status, and culture on family functioning and the development of children and adolescents. Understanding parenting behaviors through the lived experiences of African Americans may yield valuable data on how to foster meaningful engagement of all parents.

This study will use Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of parental involvement. Research findings achieved using this model may provide results that can deepen our understanding of parental engagement and increase parental involvement (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, et al. (2005). The embeddedness of van Manen's four existential dimensions — the lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived human relations — may provide significant results in understanding parental engagement through the perspective of African American parents (Rich et al., 2013). Although the study focuses on the engagement of middle school parents, its practical nature is applicable to parents of all school-age children.

Empirical Significance

There is a notable scarcity of qualitative research studies on the perspectives and lived experiences of rural African American parents regarding their collaborations with school and district personnel to effect positive academic outcomes and promote the social-emotional growth of their children (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Hughes et al., 2006; Moultrie, 2016; Robinson & Harris, 2013). This hermeneutic phenomenological study will address the conflicting literature on African American parents' role construction in relation to the home and school and the ambiguous use of the terms *parental engagement* and *parental involvement* (Mursaloglu, 2018).

Since culture, school, and community can influence parental engagement, it is also necessary to explore this phenomenon through parents' social and cultural capital and parental self-efficacy (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Lilliedahl, 2021). Ultimately, the desired outcome of the research is to understand how a better knowledge of the lived experiences of African American parents may contribute to meaningful, authentic, reciprocal home-school partnerships and communication for the benefit of children, families, and the school.

Practical Significance

In practical terms, the study has the potential to be a source of information for understanding the dynamics of parental engagement strategies that African American parents display in guiding their children's physical, social, emotional, and academic development and growth. This study is particularly relevant in understanding how limited parental engagement can negatively impact the unique transitional experiences of middle school minority students as they navigate puberty, school context, and changing family relationships (Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Hill & Tyson, 2009). By attuning to and synthesizing the voices of minority parents through their lived experiences, meaningful partnerships and reciprocal relationships may emerge that can result in transformative and culturally sensitive approaches, policies, and practices for engaging and communicating with African American parents.

Research Questions

Agee (2009) posited that a good research question should be explorational and inquisitive. Agee (2009) contended that questioning and re-questioning provide insight into the participants' lived experiences and perspectives. Each question will be relevant to understanding the phenomenon of parental engagement from the participants' perspectives.

Central Research Question

What are the perceptions and lived experiences of rural African American middle-school parents and their involvement in parental engagement activities?

Literature on African American parents' perceptions and experiences regarding parental engagement is often distorted and based on superficial standards of white superiority and cultural values (Gillins, 2019). The idea perpetuated in empirical studies that advance the premise that parents of color have relegated and neglected their vested interest in their children's education does a disservice to the learned communities, practitioners, and society (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Larmie (2018) asserted that failure to understand parents' cultural and ethnic differences would harm all parties, including school administrators, classroom teachers, and parents. This central research question will explore African American parents' perceptions and lived experiences.

Sub-Question Two

How do African American parents describe their parental role construction in their children's education?

According to Harpaz and Grinshtain (2020), African American parents are not deferential to parental involvement (Harpaz & Grinshtain, 2020). These parents are more likely to be involved and engaged in their children's education if school officials and educators make them feel welcome and appreciated as co-partners (Harpaz & Grinshtain, 2020). Most poignant is the position and attitude that school officials and educators exhibit impact the role construction of African American parents (Park & Holloway, 2018). This question will examine parental role construction in affecting parental engagement.

Sub-Question Three

How do African American parents describe their response to the school's invitations to become involved?

Paulynice (2020) suggested that the schools' and parents' expectations for parental engagement are diabolically opposite. This misunderstanding can impede parent and school partnership and engagement (Paulynice, 2020). Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, et al. (2005) suggested that parental engagement can be predicated on the invitations received from the school. This question will explore the role of school invitations to parent engagement in light of African American parents' lived experiences and perceptions.

Definitions

Terms pertinent to the study are listed and defined below:

1. *Academic performance:* The term is synonymous with academic achievement are. Both terms describe students taking ownership of their learning and performance (Johnson, 2020).

2. *African American:* A person of African (diaspora) descent born in the United States of African or Caribbean descent (Couch-Jenkins, 2017).

3. *Parent engagement:* A 21st-century term that describes two-way and transparent communication between parents/guardians and school. The result is advancement of the child's academic, cultural, and social/emotional benefits (Couch-Jenkins, 2017, p. 35).

4. *Parental engagement:* This is a continuous and reciprocal process of engagement that is diametrically opposed to a deficit-based ideology of parental involvement. Parental

engagement benefits the child's academic, cultural, and social/emotional development (Couch-Jenkins, 2017, p. 35; Mursaloglu, 2018).

5. *Parental involvement:* The term encompasses parents' participation in school activities and functions, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) or Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs,) meetings, or parent-teacher conferences (Johnson, 2020; Smith, 2017).

6. *Phenomenology: Phenomenology:* A research methodology that takes the perspective of those who live and experience something (Neubauer et al., 2019, p.91).

Summary

Chapter One explores the perceptions and lived experiences of African American parental engagement through historical, social, and theoretical lenses. This chapter includes the problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, and research questions, key terms, and a summary.

Parental engagement is often viewed as a panacea for some of the pervasive problems associated with educating students in the United States. One such problem is the lack of meaningful and intentional parental engagement opportunities for African American parents in a high-poverty, high-minority rural school district in east-central South Carolina ("Buckscott School District"). The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenology study is to interpret the parental engagement strategies of African American parents of middle school students in Buckscott School District through their lived experiences.

Huguley et al. (2021) suggested that parental engagement has positive outcomes for students, parents, and schools. In addition, it indirectly cultivates attitudes and behaviors conducive to academic success. These outcomes include lower propensity of children engaging

in negative behavior patterns, less likelihood of academic failure, greater motivation for learning, and increased attendance (Grady, 2016; Jeynes, 2016; Marcucci, 2020; Yan, 1999). Cultivating a positive relationship between the home and school through sustainable and active engagement that acknowledges African American parents' lived cultural and social experiences may result in positive residual outcomes (Fan et al., 2012; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Joe & Davis, 2009). These outcomes may include higher participation in math courses (McGee & Spencer, 2015), increased motivation for learning (Gordon & Cui, 2012), and academic improvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

When parental engagement is viewed from a Eurocentric perspective, many research studies use a cultural deficit model or race-conscious approach to present narratives on the collaborative partnerships between schools and African American parents (Delale-O'Connor et al., 2020; Gonzales & Gabel, 2017; Metzger et al., 2020; Sylvestre, 2018). According to Latunde and Clark-Louque (2016), African American parents have a strong desire to exercise their rights as custodians of their children's education. There is a pervasive gap in empirical studies on parental engagement, based on African American parents' perspectives and experiences, in cultivating relationships with the school system to effect positive academic outcomes for their children (Hughes et al., 2006; Moultrie, 2016; Robinson & Harris, 2013). Johnson (2020) and Marcucci (2020) theorized that school leaders are more inclined to solicit African American families' support on behavioral or discipline infractions.

Parental engagement is necessary to advance the nation's educational agenda to prepare citizens with possess the intellectual and social-emotional fortitude necessary to function in a fast-paced, global society. To this end, fostering a positive relationship between home and school through sustainable and active parental engagement that acknowledges African American

parents' lived cultural and social experiences will result in positive residual outcomes for children's learning, motivation, and academic improvement (Fan et al., 2012; Gordon & Cui, 2012; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Joe & Davis, 2009; McGee & Spencer, 2015).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter Two explores parental engagement through selected historical and theoretical frameworks. The chapter summarizes the theoretical framework of this hermeneutic phenomenological study on the lived experiences of rural African American parents of middle school students. The study also contributes to the paucity of literature on African American parents' role construction in parental engagement. The structure of the study is rooted in the conceptual framework of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of parental involvement. The ontological philosophical assumption is viewed from the paradigm of social constructivism. In other words, the ontological assumption is based on the "lived experience is an interpretive process situated in an individual's lifeworld" (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 92). The literature review also explores extant studies on the engagement of African American parents. The chapter concludes by exploring the influences of parental engagement on the middle school child and the importance of engaging parents in their children's education.

Theoretical Framework

Collins and Stockton (2018) found a plethora of terms or meanings for the term theoretical framework. Theoretical frameworks define how a phenomenon works (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Osanloo and Grant (2016) compared a theoretical framework to a blueprint; without one, a study lacks meaning and direction (Osanloo & Grant, 2016). A theoretical framework solidifies the researcher's conceptual idea of the study and aids in planning a methodical approach to researching, collecting, and analyzing data, key concepts, and theories (Osanloo & Grant, 2016). Lederman and Lederman (2015) made a more salient point that a

theoretical framework may not necessarily be a theory, as in quantitative research. Instead, they argued that a theoretical framework diverges from qualitative research paradigms such as grounded theory or studies of a descriptive and interpretive nature (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). Cai et al. (2019) suggested that a theoretical framework guides a dissertation inquiry.

Given a more general definition of theoretical framework, this qualitative study on the perceptions and lived experiences of African American parental engagement will be explored through Bandura's social cognitive theory (1994) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's revised model of parental involvement. Pajares (2002) noted that a social cognitive theory is based on the idea that individuals are instrumental in making things happen through development or cognitive maturation development. These theoretical frameworks will focus on the historical, social, and cultural implications of a holistic approach to a child's cognitive, social, emotional, and spiritual development (Lima & Kuusisto, 2019).

Bandura's social cognitive theory originated in 1963 when Bandura and Walters wrote *Social Learning and Personality Development*. Bandura realized that the early iteration of his social learning theory was missing a key element: self-belief (Pajares, 2002). In 1997, Bandura incorporated new insights into his social cognitive theory.

Nabavi (2012) offers a plausible explanation for another paradigm shift in Bandura's work. By the mid-1980s, Bandura's research had evolved into a "more comprehensive overview of human cognition in the context of social learning" (Nabavi, 2012, p. 11). Pajares (2002) identified two instrumental factors in altering Bandura's label of his theory of social learning to social cognitive. According to Pajares (2002), Bandura deliberately parted company with the prevailing social learning theories of the day to craft a social cognitive theory. Kihlstrom and

Harackiewicz (1990) asserted that the social-cognitive paradigm represented a "new wine" in the old social learning theory bottle.

Kihlstrom and Harackiewicz (1990) posited that Bandura's concept of triadic reciprocal or reciprocal determinism emerged within this new way of thinking. Dumka et al. (2010) stated that Bandura's social cognitive theory evolved into a transactional system of triadic reciprocal influences or reciprocal determinism. Dumka et al. (2010) asserted that triadic reciprocity occurs between an individual's internal personal factors, behavior, and environmental interactions to determine outcomes (Fig. 1).

Figure 1

Bandura's Triadic Reciprocality
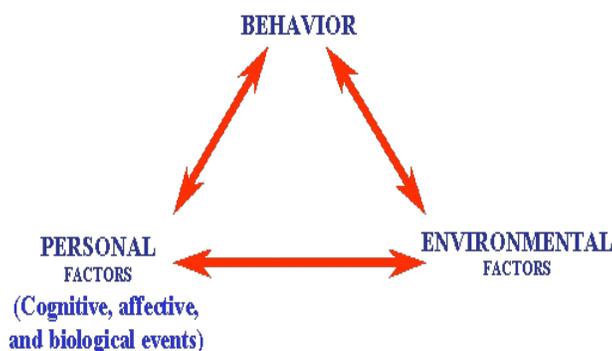
Note. Bandura's reciprocal determinism as illustrated by Pajares (2002).

Bandura's reciprocal determinism, or triadic reciprocity, is the interrelationship between an individual's personal and environmental factors and their impact on behavioral exhibitions (Kihlstrom & Harackiewicz, 1990). The researchers argued that "the environment shapes the people in it, as well as the feedback that people receive from the behavior they emit, and the changes instigated in the environment by the behavior that it elicits" (Kihlstrom & Harackiewicz, 1990, p. 87). In understanding how personal factors are linked to behavior and environment, Bandura (1989) asserted that "people are neither driven by inner forces nor automatically shaped and controlled by the environment… they function as contributors to their motivation, behavior,

and development within a network of reciprocally interacting influences" (Bandura, 1989, p. 8). This triadic reciprocality approach is relevant to the conceptual framework of how parents formulate their perspectives of engagement.

Self-efficacy

Bandura (1994) defined self-efficacy as the relationship between people's perceptions of their capabilities and influences in producing desirable outcomes that affect their lives. Bandura (1994) stated self-efficacy is how a person feels, thinks, behaves, and is motivated. Pajares (2002) and Kihlstrom and Harackiewicz (1990) argued that Bandura's self-efficacy theory suggests that people's actions, motivations, and affective states are directly related to what they believe to be accurate, not to what is objectively true. For this reason, Pajares (2002) posited that people's behavior often depends on their perceived capabilities, not on what they can accomplish.

While Pajares (2002) offered a simplistic view of self-efficacy, Bandura (1994) provided a more definitive concept. Bandura (1995) wrote that there are four influences on a person's self-efficacy: (a) mastery experiences, (b) vicarious experiences, (c) social persuasion, and (d) somatic and emotional state. Bandura (2008) asserted that mastery of experiences is the most effective method of building self-efficacy. Britner and Pajares (2006) discussed the mastery of experiences in relation to the cognitive process and concluded that a person's mastery of experience does not increase self-efficacy.

Pajares (2002) asserted that individuals must cognitively process their experiences and self-beliefs concerning personal and environmental factors and the perceived difficulty of a task. Self-efficacy, as seen in reciprocal determinism, relates to the amount of time and effort expended and the perception of and reaction to a task (Kihlstrom & Harackiewicz, 1990). This

interplay of perceptions, reactions, and effort is pertinent to this study of how African Americans may perceive parental engagement through their lived experiences.

Parent Involvement

In 1995, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler published a study on motivators for parental involvement and how such involvement can influence children's developmental and educational progress. In establishing a contextual framework, they included parental roles at home and school. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's initial model focused on three themes: 1) why parents become involved; 2) how they decide the type(s) of involvement; and 3) what results from their involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). In their quantitative research, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler focused on parents' perspectives of involvement, the types of interventions that school personnel can implement, and other variables that could be instrumental in improving student outcomes and increasing parental involvement.

Walker et al. (2005) argued that Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's theoretical model of parent involvement was based on a psychological perspective. Whitaker (2018) cites three questions that underpinned Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's theoretical framework: (a) why do (and don't) families become involved? (b) what do families do when they are involved? (c) how does family involvement improve student outcomes? Whitaker (2018) stated that the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model incorporates a cognitive component involving role construction for involvement and self-efficacy.

Earlier iterations of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model suggested ways for parents to engage meaningfully with educators to ensure favorable outcomes for their children (Dixon-Elliott, 2019). Initially, there were four prerequisites for parental involvement: the parents' sense of self-efficacy; an invitation from the teacher to the parent to become involved;

an invitation from the administrator to the parent for involvement; and the parents' construction of their parental role (Dixon-Elliott, 2019; Walker et al., 2005). Methods not typically associated with on-campus or participatory activities in a meeting or school-related event include encouragement, modeling, reinforcement, and instruction (Lavenda, 2011; Whitaker, 2019). More succinctly, these approaches to involvement include encouragement, modeling, reinforcement, and instruction (Lavenda, 2011; & Whitaker, 2018). Bettencourt et al. (2020) stated that the constructs of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model are motivational belief, perceived life context, and the parents' perceptions of the invitation(s).

The revised Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model reflected three changes in parents' decisions to become involved in their children's education. According to Walker et al. (2005), the model was revised to emphasize the psychological and contextual contributors to parental involvement. These contributors were predicated on motivational beliefs, an invitation for involvement, and life contexts (Walker et al., 2005). Parents' perceptions of involvement include their time and energy, skills and abilities, and the nature and details of the invitations (Dixon-Elliott, 2019). Like the revised model, the original Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) model depicts two types of involvement: home and school-based.

The revised theoretical framework (Fig. 2) has five levels. Level 1 consists of personal motivators, parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement, life context variables, and the forms of parent involvement. Level 2 includes the mechanisms of home and school activities. Level 3 focuses on students' perceptions of parental encouragement, modeling, reinforcement, and instruction. Levels 4 and 5 center on involvement outcomes relative to student proximal learning outcomes and achievement (Hoover- Dempsey, 2010).

Figure 2

Revised Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Parental Involvement Model

First level – Parents' basic involvement decision		
Motivational beliefs	Invitation for involvement	Life contexts

⬇

Second level – Parents' involvement forms	
Home-based behaviors	School-based behaviors

⬇

Third level – Mechanisms of Parental involvement		
Modeling	Reinforcement	Instruction

⬇

Fourth level – Tempering/mediating variables	
Developmentally appropriate strategies	Fit of parents' actions and school's expectations

⬇

Fifth level – Students' outcomes	
Skills and knowledge	Self efficacy for school success

Each level of the theoretical framework can yield valuable insight into African American parents' perceptions of engagement in their children's education. Understanding the levels of involvement and the motivations behind a parent's decision to become involved is imperative. This study concentrates on Levels 1 and 2.

Related Literature

Boote and Beile (2005) stated that a comprehensive literature review provides the foundation and impetus for practical, robust, and valuable research. According to Boote and Beile (2005), "the complex nature of education research demands such thorough, sophisticated

reviews" (p. 3). Randolph (2009) added that the literature review reflects a researcher's command of the field. In conducting a literature review, the researcher should exhibit knowledge of, among other things, the underlying theories and the historical context of the problem, key variables, and terminology (Randolph, 2009). This study offers new perspectives and provides a sound rationale for the research. The significance of the study is either explicitly stated or inferred in the elements of the literature review. The review also synthesizes the literature to generate insight into African Americans' engagement in the education of their middle school children.

Defining Parental Involvement

Before 1989, parental involvement was applied to any action, activity, or school-centric events and activities in which parents participated or supported (Couch-Jenkins, 2017). Jeynes (2016) asserted that this broad definition is ambiguous. Jeynes adds that parental involvement can mean different things to different people (Jeynes, 2016).

Bettencourt et al. (2020) noted that many terms describe parental engagement, including parent participation, parent involvement, and family engagement (Bettencourt et al., 2020). In research on African Americans, it is imperative to distinguish parental involvement from parental engagement. Both terms describe types of parental participation in their children's education. However, parental involvement has varied definitions and measurements in empirical studies (Curtis et al., 2021; Johnson, 2015; Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Ciblis (2017) stated that parental involvement has been embedded in school discourse through inclusionary federal, state, and local policies. Huguley et al. (2021) linked parental involvement to the children's home, school, and academic socialization. Schneider and Arnot (2018) and Fenton et al. (2017) described parental involvement in terms of parents' performance within the bounds and scope established by school personnel. They asserted that parent

involvement is often associated with middle-class parenting and good parenting strategies (Schneider & Arnot, 2018). Ciblis (2017) made an equally salient point that "parental involvement is unilaterally defined by the school and limited to those behaviors and attitudes which reflect strict alignment with school decisions and approaches" (Ciblis, 2017, p. 55). Juvonen et al. (2004) noted that defining parental involvement is problematic because it encompasses a broad range of parental behaviors.

The literature treats parental involvement as any activities that entail serving or helping, such as joining a parent-teacher association, organizing bake sales, volunteering, attending workshops on self-empowerment and parenting skills, or taking part in other activities directed by the school (Curtis et al., 2021; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Johnson, 2015; Lavenda, 2011; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Watson et al., 2012). The ambiguity of the term "parental involvement" has led to research that does not fully embrace African American parents' contributions to their children's education. The definitions of parent engagement here reflect a unilateral view, in which involvement becomes synonymous with a parent supporting or helping the school. Parent involvement is defined and quantified as having volunteered for at least one school-sponsored function during the academic year (Moore et al., 2016).

Baquedano-López et al. (2013) argued that the ambiguities of defining parental involvement have a detrimental effect on educational equity by restricting the roles of parents. They present a compelling argument that "these approaches often miss the multiple ways nondominant parents participate in their children's education because they do not correspond to the normative understandings of parental involvement in school" (Baquedano-López et al., 2013, p. 149). Many federal educational policies legislate parental involvement based on Epstein's six types of involvement for the home-school partnership model (Baquedano-López et al., 2013;

Epstein, 1987). This model delineates involvement activities in the home, the school, and the community. The drawback of this parenting model is its narrow focus on school-centric and individualistic approaches (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). Baker et al. (2016) concluded that "parent involvement has been perceived as being present in the school building or school-centric involvement… this was based on the idea that schools and teachers should direct parental involvement" (Baker et al., 2016, p. 163).

Henderson and Mapp (2002) contended that parental involvement improves students' enrollment in and preparedness for rigorous and advanced courses, attendance, social skills, behavior, graduation rate, and possible enrollment in a college or university. However, the limitation of parental involvement is the narrow group of parents invited to participate and the restricted number of activities (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003). Baquedano-López et al. (2013) examined parental engagement from the perspective of what the researcher coined as "nondominant" parents' participation. According to Baquedano-López et al. (2013), the constricted ideological principle of parental involvement does not consider cultural and social differences or how minority groups conceive parental involvement (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). Parental involvement must therefore be intentional, strategic, and systematic to engage parents and the community through efforts that consider the child's and family's time, energy, and cultural awareness.

Defining Parental Engagement

Parental engagement suggests a more focused and intentional parental role in interactions with the school (Fenton et al., 2017; Schneider & Arnot, 2018; Stefanski et al., 2016). Schneider and Arnot (2018) described parental engagement as a two-way interaction between the home and

school. They added that parental engagement encompasses changes and opportunities for parents and the school (Schneider & Arnot, 2018).

Pushor (2007) characterized parental engagement as a mutually respectful sharing of roles between the school and family. According to Pushor (2007),

> educators are entering a community to create with parents a
>
> shared world on the ground of school – a world in which parent
>
> knowledge and teacher knowledge both inform decision-
>
> making, the determination of agendas, and the intended
>
> outcomes of their efforts for children, families, the community
>
> and the school landscape (p. 3).

Pushor (2007) theorized that parental engagement is the shared power and authority of educators and parents, mutually determined and mutually beneficial for the home and school. Schneider and Arnot (2018) described Pushor's theoretical framework as one in which the knowledge of the teacher and the knowledge of the parent work in concert for the benefit of the home, school, and community.

Auerbach (2009) suggested that family and community engagement ensures that schools are "more equitable, culturally responsive, and collaborative" (p. 9). According to Auerbach (2009), parental engagement closes gaps between parents with more resources, time, and social and cultural experiences and parents with less. However, Auerbach noted a disparity in what is being performed relative to the access of parents to school-community connections or engagement. Auerbach (2009) declared that schools' commitment to ensuring meaningful engagement between the school and the home "is poorly documented in the literature and insufficiently addressed in training for administrators" (p. 3). Shakur (2012) and Barton et al.

(2004) also argued that the imposition of added responsibilities and a constricted set of principles regarding parental engagement, coupled with the responsibilities of operating a school, may lead to parents' unwelcome and limited participatory engagement.

Although Pushor (2007) broadened the scope of parental engagement, Emerson et al. (2012) noted an inconsistency in the literature over what it is and is not. Baker et al. (2016) contrasted parental involvement to parental engagement, arguing that the former connotes a presence in the school building, while parental engagement is multiple constructions of how parents are involved beyond school-centric approaches of involvement. Barton et al. (2004) succinctly defined parental engagement as a relational phenomenon involving interactions in the lives and experiences of parents within the school and the community.

Unlike parental involvement, parental engagement has a greater tendency to be associated with academic and social development outcomes. Goodall (2018) suggested that parents' engagement in their children's learning should be associated with a "broad sphere of their children's learning" (p. 143). In contrast to involvement, Goodall (2018) stated that parental involvement is "the agency for action remains with the school, rather than with the parents or family" (p. 143). Both terms are used interchangeably in this study.

Influences on Parental Involvement

Watson et al. (2012) asserted that in the early years of public education in the United States, parents were children's first teachers. Hiatt (1994) wrote that in the pre-colonial and colonial eras, parents instilled rudimentary skills, a work ethic, and cultural values in their children. Schuman (2017) provided insight into economic influences on parent involvement, proposing that the United States' colonial laws during the early infancy of this nation were based on the same premise of British laws designed to reduce the likelihood of children being idle or a

burden on society (Schuman, 2017). Hiatt (1994) stated that children's education has traditionally been a parental responsibility. Jensen and Minke (2017) formulated a historical, conceptual framework in which parental involvement focuses on beliefs valued that educators believe will be academically beneficial for students.

In the United States, the idea of child employment persisted. Children worked on farms, in factories, or for African American youth before the Reconstruction Era as enslaved people. According to Watson et al. (2012), the expansion and transformation of American society following influxes of immigrants and the migration of farmers to urban areas led to children as factory workers. Schuman (2017) noted that during the colonial period in the United States, the only children who did not work were the children of northern merchants and southern plantation families. Reyes (2020) suggested that one of the residual effects of the shift toward industry was expanding education from a resource for a limited few to a hierarchical system. Watson et al. (2012) postulated that the outcry of organized unions over the use of child workers led to the prohibition of child labor.

As the United States became industrialized, parents' role as their children's first teachers diminished. Watson et al. (2012) suggested that parents' employment necessitated this role change. This led to a lack of parental supervision, resulting in children getting into trouble. By the late nineteenth century, public schools because accessible to children in almost all regions of the country (Kober, 2020). Maranto and Wai (2020) added that with the rise of mass schooling in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century, the position of educational administrators and school boards regarding the roles that parents play in the education of their children changed. According to Maranto and Wai (2020), the schools aimed to prepare children to work in factories.

It has also been argued that most parents were too poorly educated to offer educational support and training (Watson et al., 2012). Bandiera et al. (2019) maintained that one of the factors contributing to the reduction of parents' roles in their children's education was the rise of compulsory education. Low-income families and immigrants are incapable of teaching their children academic and vocational skills. Bandiera et al. (2019) detailed that 20th-century advocates of compulsory schooling believed that the state was more capable of educating children.

Hiatt (1994) and Reyes (2020) suggest that compulsory attendance and truancy laws were detrimental to parental involvement. According to Hiatt (1994), "such laws spelled the death knell for parent involvement and control over their children's education" (p. 251). Reyes (2020) stated that "compulsory school attendance made significant shifts in the functions of families, children, and youth in a movement to establish public institutions as superior to the private influence of families in the social and individual development of children" (p. 3). Trainor (2010) also argued that compulsory attendance laws and federal mandates influenced parental involvement.

Watson et al. (2012) contended that parents' control over their children's education diminished with the establishment of schools. Hiatt (1994) elaborated that as education changed, so did parents' involvement in their children's education. Hiatt postulated that "too many, it seems parents have lost control over their children's education. Public educational institutions usurped and supplanted this parental function, some say to the detriment of the children and the family" (p. 248). Only in the National Congress of Mothers, founded in 1897 and later called the National Parent Teacher Association in 1908, were parents invited to be more actively involved

in their children's education and to have their contributions valued and respected. (Hiatt, 1994; Watson et al., 2012).

The professionalization and licensure of teachers and administrators exacerbated differences in the cultural norms of educators and parents (Hiatt, 1994). The licensure requirements had negative consequences. Hiatt (1994) asserted that parents of lower socioeconomic status were less active in their children's education because they believed that the schools belonged to middle- and upper-class professionals. Zellman and Waterman (1998) hypothesized that by the 19th century, parents had not only relinquished their role, but parental involvement was also scrutinized by education reformers who wanted to insulate students from unsavory influences, including parents.

Zellman and Waterman (1998) concluded that by the 1920s, parents' role in their children's education was expanded. School professionals limited parental involvement to what they considered appropriate (Zellman & Waterman, 1998). Parental involvement became limited to an auxiliary role (Zellman & Waterman, 1998)

Desimone (1999) identified the four influences on parental involvement to explain the disparities in the educational outcomes of students, particularly minority students. These influences viewed parental involvement as an investment and a remedy to societal and cultural impediments to the advancement of the child or family. It perpetuates the belief that the responsibility for children's well-being rests with their parents. Parental engagement plays a crucial role in children's future success (Mayer et al., 2015). Barton et al. (2004) observed that parental involvement is predicated on many factors influencing parental participation, including communication-related barriers. Barriers to African American parents' engagement in their middle school children's education will be explored later in this study.

African American Parents and Parental Engagement

School leaders often view parental engagement as preventing or intervening in the problems in public schools (Shuffelton, 2017), such as students' lack of motivation, disciplinary infractions, or inconsistent attendance (Foley, 2015). Koonce and Harper, Jr. (2005) asserted that African American parents face many barriers in becoming involved in their children's education, including their own negative experiences in school, a lack of respect from and acceptance by school personnel, and inconvenient meeting times. Many studies have suggested that African American parents, especially at the middle school level, have not been welcomed or recognized as valuable contributing partners in their children's education (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008; Bartz et al., 2017; Foley, 2015).

Conversely, many African Americans view parental engagement with skepticism and reluctance (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008; Bartz et al., 2017). Research on parental engagement has focused on the perspectives of parents and teachers (Bartz et al., 2017). This approach is predicated on the belief that the engagement of African American parents should be limited (Bartz et al., 2017). There is a gap in the literature on the engagement of African American parents within their cultural and social context and lived experiences in partnership with school systems. Most literature has adopted a school-centric or cultural deficit model (Allen, 2018; Bartz et al., 2017; Newchurch, 2017). Bartz et al. (2017) suggested that an outward mindset on understanding parental engagement among African American parents will yield greater insight.

Influences on Parent Engagement of African American Families

Whitaker and Hoover-Dempsey (2013) maintained that parental engagement positively affects students' academic and social growth. Latunde and Clark-Louque (2016) and Rattenborg

et al. (2018) argued that school administrators and teachers often take a deficit stance on the involvement of African American families and their capacity to support their children's learning. This limited view of parental engagement has contributed to the literature on the misconceptions of the roles and responsibilities of African American families and schools in terms of children's learning, development, and engagement (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016).

Whitaker and Hoover-Dempsey (2013) expounded on why voluminous studies have been devoted to various parental engagement, but literature is scarce on factors that motivate parents to become involved. Rattenborg et al. (2018) also noted that there needs to be more information on how administrators and teachers can foster parental engagement among culturally diverse families. Rattenborg et al. (2018) stated that systemic barriers, including structural inequities and biases, affect school climate and parental engagement. Other barriers to parental engagement include lack of time, lack of interest, and parents' negative recollections of their own school experiences as an adult or a student (Baker et al., 2016; Rattenborg et al., 2018).

Parents may have different perspectives on the best use of their time and energy (Rattenborg et al., 2018). Fruchter (1984) listed several inhibitors to parental engagement, including socioeconomic challenges, authoritative control of participatory structures by school personnel, cultural differences between the school and community, parental self-efficacy, and lack of communication and clarity on how to be engaged and improve children's outcomes. This study is concerned with the influences of social and cultural differences, parental self-efficacy, and lack of consistent, understandable, and two-way communication between the home and school. Each of these barriers provides insight into parents' perspectives on the hows and whys of engagement. What is significant, despite empirical studies that promote the misconception that African American parents are reluctant partners in their children's education, Jeynes (2016)

asserted that, on average African American parents are consistently engaged in their children's educational journey.

Social and Cultural Influences on African American Parental Engagement

McKenna and Millen (2013) postulated a fallacy about culturally diverse children and families. These "untested" assumptions are detrimental to the educational environment and parent involvement (McKenna & Millen, 2013). McKenna and Millen (2013) advocated that the inclusion of parents can address issues of parental engagement. They claim that parents encompass the "desires, dreams, goals, and hopes for their children" (McKenna & Millen, 2013, p. 12). Contrarily, parents can express frustration or apathy (McKenna & Millen, 2013).

The term parent presence is indicative of involvement within or beyond the "classroom and school context that supports and allows a child's educational success" (McKenna & Millen, 2013, p. 12). This study surmises that parents' voices and presence can mitigate any negative social and cultural capital influences. Indeed, this statement can be inferred from the findings of McKenna and Millen (2013). They concluded that the advancement of education would occur through meaningful parent engagement that is novel in approach and rejects preconceived ideas based on the race or social and cultural capital of students and their parents (McKenna & Millen, 2013). At the same time, social and cultural capital affect parental engagement in their children's education.

Fenzel (1994) contended that social and economic barriers make it difficult for parents to encourage their children's school success. Fenzel (1994) specified that African American parents must also counter the strong cultural view that academic success is equated with "acting White." Therefore, appearing intelligent or academically gifted is stigmatized (Fenzel, 1994).

Diamond and Gomez (2004) contended that parental involvement might be directly related to parents' social class or racial backgrounds. Wilson and McGuire (2021) contended that numerous empirical studies propose that their own experiences with school personnel often influence the role of parents in the education of their children. Gonzalez et al. (2013) stated that middle and upper-class parents could navigate a school system to benefit their children. The situation for low-income families is often the opposite.

Hong et al. (2020). Gonzalez et al. (2013) and Powell and Sánchez (2013) found a relationship between barriers to parental involvement and student achievements, such as family income, cultural resources, linguistic resources, and time. Garcia et al. (2016) and Wilson and McGuire (2021) hypothesized that cultural differences can influence parental engagement and the interactions between parents and schools. Garcia et al. (2016) argued that the cultural lenses of educators and parents cultural lens reflect their perceptions of parental engagement. Similarly, Wilson and McGuire (2021) claimed that low-income parents are often stigmatized and struggle to engage with the educational system, to the detriment of their children. According to Smith (2009), normative perspectives on parenting suggest that low-income African American parents are often characterized as indifferent to and absent from their children's educational experiences. Smith (2009) argued that this characterization is based on unfounded biases and a scarce body of literature on African American parents' role construction.

Miller (2019) is equally critical of the stigmatization of parents from diverse social and economic backgrounds by the educational institutions that are ostensibly the great social and racial equalizers. Miller (2019) maintained that school systems predominantly staffed with White and middle-class educators have a deficit view of African American parental engagement (Fields-Smith, 2005; Miller, 2019). Fields-Smith (2005) added that after the Brown decision, the

"discourse on parental involvement tends to favor the perspectives of White, middle-income families and to marginalize the views regarding African American parental involvement. Teachers often perceive African American parents as uninvolved and disinterested in their children's education" (p. 129). Powell and Sánchez (2013) suggested that teachers' racist attitudes may contribute to African American parents' perceptions of being treated as "second-class" citizens (p. 3). Bridges et al. (2012) concurred that low-income African American parents are generally viewed as less engaged than their White and high-income counterparts. Roberts (2012) explained that because culturally distinct behaviors of African American parents are not explored in the literature on parental involvement, there is a misconception that African American parents are less involved in their children's academic lives.

The lack of diverse educators negatively impacts African American parents, as White middle-class educators have difficulty relating to culturally and linguistically diverse families (Miller, 2019). Young et al. (2013) found that teachers tend not to encourage parental engagement, and when they do, it usually involves an issue between the child and the teacher. More significantly, Young et al. (2013) contended that educators want parents to be involved based on their preconceived ideas of parental engagement or their parents' experiences of involvement. Thus, if parental engagement and the academic achievement of middle school students are to be increased, schools must improve educators' attitudes to families' cultural, social, and linguistic differences.

West-Olatunji et al. (2010) suggested that it is necessary to explore the cultural gap between parents' behavior and engagement when considering parental engagement. According to West-Olatunji et al. (2010), teachers' expectations of parent behaviors can influence parents' actions as engaged partners. Culturally insensitive teachers have a greater propensity to view

culturally diverse parents as "disinterested, incompetent, or unfit" (West-Olatunji et al., 2010, p. 138). West-Olatunji et al. (2010) also claimed that there are contradictory studies suggesting that African American parents are indeed interested in and desire to be engaged in their children's education (West-Olatunji et al., 2010). Smith's (2009) study demonstrates that African American parents, mainly single and low-income parents, are viewed from a deficit perspective.

Smith (2009) argued that African American single-parent families had been denigrated as dysfunctional. This deficit view on African American culture and African American parents' ability to be engaged and their approaches to engagement "typify a paradigmatic point of view that interprets 'differences' as 'deficits' (or cultural deficit)" (Smith, 2009, p. 4). Notably, culturally deficit perspectives are embedded in public policies based on the fallacy that African and Latino parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds do not value education (Smith, 2009). Indeed, educators and school administrators design parental engagement programs based on normative perspectives based on the two-parent, mainstream Anglo-American family (Smith, 2009).

Wimberly (2013) theorized that a barrier to engagement is how engagement is viewed regarding social and cultural capital with race. Howard and Reynolds (2008) theorized that conceptualizing parent involvement through a social capital lens is "congruous with values and norms of White families and communities" (p. 86). Cultural capital, relative to this research study, is embedded "in an individual ideology, norms, values, and lifestyle" (Wimberly, 2013, p. 42).

Schools reflect the cultural capital of the dominant race (Wimberly, 2013). Lareau and Horvat (1999) maintained that race plays a significant role in how African American parents negotiate their relationship with schools. Lareau and Horvat (1999) explain how Bourdieu's

theory of social and cultural capital pertains to parental engagement. However, there are different social and cultural capital definitions in the school setting. According to Lareau and Horvat (1999), school personnel (campus administrators, educators, and others) equate cultural capital with an extensive vocabulary, the right of parents to see teachers as their equals, and the resources to participate in school activities and functions (Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

Social capital involves networking between parents to obtain information, including details about teachers, to make the best decisions on behalf of their children (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). This capital is primarily relational (Wimberly, 2013). School social capital results from students' cultural, human, and economic culture (Wimberly, 2013). Lareau and Horvat (1999) asserted that parents' social and cultural resources become valuable or useful when parents adhere to the dominant norms for interactions with the school. However, African American parents are subjected to the rules of parental engagement based on the desirable family-school relationships of "trust, partnership, cooperation, and deference" (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 42).

Howard and Reynolds (2008) and Cooper and Smalls (2010) proposed that African American parents use non-traditional social and cultural strategies to navigate obstacles that may affect their ability to be roles as advocates and teachers for their children. Cooper and Smalls (2010) contended that African Americans resort to a plethora of culturally distinctive socialization approaches, beliefs, and engagement behaviors that have a positive residual effect on academic outcomes. Nonetheless, when these approaches are used, they are often viewed as needing transformation or acculturation (Howard & Reynolds, 2008).

It is crucial to explore the integral role of African American administrators and educators in engaging African American parents. The findings of this study will explain how African American parents embrace their cultural and social backgrounds to act as equals of teachers in

facilitating their children's education. The study will also explore how a rural setting contributes to parenting styles, how parents are engaged, and how parents perceive schools as embracing their cultural and social identities and accepting them as partners in education.

According to Parks (2018), many rural parents reported positive feelings about their involvement in their children's education. These feelings were predicated on long-term relationships with the school staff (Parks, 2018). Exploring how social and cultural contexts in a rural setting with parents of adolescents have relevance in understanding how alienation, isolation, and communication barriers may further impede engagement.

Parental Self-Efficacy and African American Parental Engagement

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model identifies three constructs that influence parental engagement. The first construct focuses on parents' perception of their parenting. In this construct, the interplay between parents' perceptions and beliefs about parenting guides their engagement in their children's education (Ingram et al., 2007). The second construct is parental efficacy, which is a determinant of whether or not parents become engaged in their child's education. The third element is how parents perceive schools to welcome parental engagement through invitations, requests or requirements, or opportunities (Ingram et al., 2007). Each construct provides the impetus for parents to become engaged in their children's academic life (Ingram et al., 2007). Because parental self-efficacy is a determinant of parental engagement, this study will explore Hoover- Dempsey's model of engagement and Bandura's general self-efficacy theory.

According to Hoover-Dempsey (2011), Bandura's self-efficacy theory is based on two guiding beliefs. The first belief is a parent's purpose and degree of personal control (Hoover-Dempsey, 2011). The second belief is the individual's perception of whether or not he or she can

complete an action or task (Hoover-Dempsey, 2011). Hoover-Dempsey (2011) asserted that both schools and communities must support the development of self-efficacy among parents and understand the importance of parents' involvement in their children's academic success (Hoover-Dempsey, 2011). Reynolds et al. (2015) asserted that parents who believe they can affect positive changes in their child's education are more likely to participate actively in thebehavioral, cognitive, and personal domains of involvement. However, there are noted barriers to parental involvement and self-efficacy.

Overt or subtle disregard for parents often hinders meaningful parental engagement (Miller, 2019; Powell & Sánchez, 2013). Hornby and Lafaele (2011) argued that educators often view minority parents as lacking. Through this lens, parents are perceived as "problems," "vulnerable," or "less able" and are, therefore, best kept out of schools (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 45). The researchers asserted that print and visual media often portray parents with negative images or narratives.

According to Hornby and Lafaele (2011), these forms of communication present negative images and examples of African American parents as emotionally and psychologically unstable, lacking competency, and having multiple social and economic problems. Such images can impact the relationship and parental engagement between the home and school.

Miller (2019) suggested that parents tend to transfer their negative feelings and experiences as students to their children's schools. These negative experiences of feeling devalued may weaken parents' sense of self-efficacy. Thus, the more self-efficacy parents possess, the more likely they are to be engaged in their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey, 2011; Mursaloglu, 2018).

Feeling of Alienation and African American Parental Engagement

In addition to a lack of self-efficacy, many African American parents also feel alienated from schools (Brandon, 2006; Erickson, 1996; Hannon, 2020). Seeman (1959) and Purnell (2000) listed five descriptors of alienation: powerlessness; meaninglessness; normlessness; isolation; and self-estrangement. Hascher and Hagenauer (2010) and Purnell (2000) defined alienation as social isolation, powerlessness, and normlessness. When viewed in the contextual framework of parental engagement, five compelling problems deter African American parents from fully engaging in their children's education. Although generalizing a study on exceptional children, Harry (1992) stated that several factors contribute to African American parental alienation associated with school engagement. Harry (1992) maintained that there are four common interpretations of alienation: "trust, parental apathy, logistical constraints or stressful life circumstances, and parents' disagreement with special education classifications" (p. 124).

The presence of one or confluence of all of these factors has a negative impact on interactions between African American parents and schools (Brandon, 2006). Alienation also results from educators' lack of respect for the parenting styles of African Americans and other ethnic minorities (Shearer, 2006). Students, the school system, and families all suffer when schools and parents are alienated from each other (Trotman, 2001).

Communications and African American Parental Engagement

Overstreet et al. (2005) and Ankrum (2016) agreed that a parent's characteristics should not be a determinant of engagement. Rather, outreach efforts and the school's receptiveness to parents can be predictors of engagement. The school's influence on students is often based on the relationship between their parents and teachers (Ankrum, 2016). Overstreet et al. (2005) stated that the school should signal that it welcomes parental engagement by asking parents to become

involved. The power of communication has positive residual effects. Communication with parents should not be based on extraneous factors, such as socioeconomic status, according to Ankrum (2016).

Martin (2003) listed communication as one of four ways to increase parental engagement. Effective communication should be based on openness and honesty (Martin, 2003). There are many benefits to honest and consistent communication between home and school (Ozmen et al., 2016). These benefits are not limited to students' cognitive development but also contribute to trust and cooperation between the home and school and parents and teachers (Barnes, 2017).

For parents to believe they are equal partners in the educational process, two-way communication is imperative. Two-way communication also lends itself to the cognitive growth and motivation of the middle school child. It should ensure that parents have access to resources and knowledge about ways to assist in the learning process. Poor and sporadic communication can create barriers between parents and the school (Barnes, 2017). Conversely, effective and continued communication can build trust among the school and parents, improving students' academic performance (Emerson et al., 2012).

The school should therefore foster a communicative relationship with parents. Likewise, educational professionals should be especially attentive to reaching out to minority parents. Because of structural socio-psychological obstacles, parents are often reluctant to initiate conversations about their children's goals (Conus & Fahrni, 2017). Meier and Lemmer (2015) observed that parental engagement is contingent on two-way communication between the home and school. However, this relationship is sometimes marred by one-way communication from the school (Meier & Lemmer, 2015). Parents are also often negligent in communicating with and responding to schools. Briggs (2017) asserted that the lack of information on policies and

practices and the absence of communication create barriers that often leave African American parents at a disadvantage in interacting with school personnel. Yan (1999) asserted that schools should no longer ignore African American parents' methods to promote their children's academic success.

Among these methods must be conversations centered on understanding the perspectives of African American parents and guardians concerning cultural differences (Couch-Jenkins, 2017). Couch-Jenkins (2017) postulated that collective conversations must focus on understanding African American parents' and guardians' perspectives regarding cultural differences in parenting engagement. Hannon (2020) stated that the collective conversations between the home and school had often been neglected, resulting in disruptions in the academic success of minority students.

Parental Engagement and the Middle School Student

Adolescence is a period of physical, social, and emotional changes coupled with the stressor of becoming acclimated to having several teachers during the school day (Cook et al., 2008; Malone et al., 2017). Understanding these changes is paramount for parents, educators, school leadership teams, and district office personnel, particularly in the context of parental engagement. Hill and Tyson (2009) stated that physical maturation, school context, and family relationships could adversely affect students' academic performance. During adolescence, there are changes in the adolescents' and parents' beliefs about parental authority and a decline in parents' engagement in their children's education (Murray et al., 2014). However, parental engagement can enhance students' academic performance, improve behavior at school and at home, and foster a more purposeful parent-teacher relationship (McIntyre & Garbacz, 2014).

Mo and Singh (2008) viewed parental engagement as active involvement in the education process, which is a necessary part of a parent's responsibility for a child's psychosocial and educational development (Mo & Singh, 2008). This study explores how parental engagement can have a consequential impact on the academic performance of middle school minority students. Hill and Tyson (2009) stated that despite the emerging literature on the parental engagement of middle school parents, there has yet to be a consensus on the types of involvement most closely connected to academic performance. However, Mo and Singh (2008) and Spear et al. (2021) asserted that parental involvement in adolescents' education is integral to students' academic achievement, even when some intervention is needed. However, Howard and Reynolds (2008) postulated that the lack of parental involvement contributes to middle-class African American students lagging behind their White and Asian peers in academic performance. Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2004) have suggested that healthy parent-adolescent relationships positively influence students' academic performance more than parents' educational values.

There is a relationship between parental engagement and parenting style (Mo & Singh, 2008; Smalls, 2009). This study focuses on two styles of parenting — authoritarian and authoritative — that affect students' academic outcomes and social-emotional growth. Mo and Singh (2008) reported that authoritarian parenting is less effective for parental engagement because it is demanding, assertive, and not responsive. In contrast, authoritative parenting is more conducive to parental engagement (Mo & Singh, 2008). Authoritative parenting, according to Mo and Singh (2008), contributes to the "development of school engagement, academic performance, and future social competence" (pp. 1-2).

Darling and Steinberg (1993) noted that the effectiveness and impact of authoritative or any other parenting style are predicated on the social milieu of the family. West-Olatunji et al. (2010) asserted that more recent studies on African American parenting found it to be more authoritarian. The authoritarian style contributes to the underachievement of African American children (Young et al., 2013).

The appropriateness of parenting styles also depends on the child's age and developmental stage (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Mo & Singh, 2008; Smalls, 2009). Smalls (2009) claimed that middle school students might be resistant to any parenting styles that inhibit independence and autonomy. Studies suggest that parents are less engaged with their middle school students, no matter their parenting style (Sadberry, 2016). Mo and Singh (2008) proposed that adolescents' interest in their peers and the lack of structured activities for parental engagement explain declining participation. Smith, Reinke, and Herman, et al. (2021) stated that "increases in youth prosocial skills and decreases in youth concentration problems, disruptive behaviors, and emotional dysregulation" (p. 363) are related to family-school engagement. The literature thus demonstrates a significant and positive relationship between parental engagement and their children's academic achievement (Jeynes, 2016).

Summary

An extensive body of empirical studies has shown that parental involvement is associated with positive outcomes for all students regardless of their grade or school configuration (Catsambis, 2001; Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Stevenson & Baker, 1987; Wilder, 2014). Positive outcomes include enrollment in rigorous courses, higher academic performance, better test scores, lower dropout rates, and better socialization skills (Murray et al., 2014; Wong & Hughes,

2006). Gutman and Midgley (2000) suggested that exploring the school and family factors that may affect engagement and, ultimately, student achievement would be prudent.

Schools must affirm parents' self-efficacy if parental engagement is to have meaningful and positive outcomes for student academic performance and achievement (Hahn, 2021). However, there are limited extant studies that ascribe meaning to the perspectives and lived experiences of African American parents of middle school students. Significantly, the voluminous empirical data present a negative view of African American parental engagement (Foley, 2015). Smith (2017) and Woods (2020) have contended that low-income families, particularly African Americans, are not engaged because of their lack of time, ability, interest, and undereducation.

This literature review also reveals several lacunas that merit closer investigation. Thus, this literature review aims to examine two existing gaps in the literature on the phenomenon of the lived experiences of rural African American parents of middle school students, parental role construction, and parental self-efficacy, which merit further study. These two components will be analyzed through the theoretical lenses of Bandura's self-efficacy and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's parental involvement model.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of rural African American parents and their involvement in the Buckscott School District. Given the paucity of literature on the parental engagement of African American parents in the education of their middle school children, the study generates insight into how self-efficacy, parental role constructions, and the actions of school personnel influence the lived experiences and perceptions of African American parents' home-school partnerships. This chapter describes the research methodology for this study, including the research design, research questions, participants' information, study location, design procedures, data collection, and data analysis method. The chapter also discusses some ethical concerns.

Research Design

Yin (2011) asserted that all research has an implicit or explicit design. Maxwell (2013) argued that research designs could be understood in two ways. A fixed design follows a logical and coherent approach (Maxwell, 2013). The second design follows a logical order of tasks similar to a flowchart (Maxwell, 2013). Maxwell (2013) concluded that both designs are better suited to quantitative than qualitative research.

Yin (2011) supported this assumption that qualitative research is not fixed or restrictive to particular categories or types of design. On the one hand, qualitative research design allows phenomena to be understood deeper (Heale & Twycross, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). Quantitative research, on the other hand, uses an objective and formal process. Noyes et al. (2019) stated that quantitative research is based on what is to be measured in advance. Quantitative methods rely

on anticipating what must be measured. Quantitative research tests relationships, determines causes and effects, and tests hypotheses.

Creswell and Poth (2018) elaborated on the comparative differences between quantitative and qualitative research. They stated that qualitative research defines and examines a problem or issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that qualitative research allows for individuals' stories to be told and their voices to be heard. In providing a rationale for using a qualitative research design, Chandler et al. (2015) stated that qualitative research methodologies should be used when social science researchers wish to understand a social phenomenon. Tomaszewski et al. (2020) concurred by postulating that qualitative research values the participants' lived experiences. Thomas and Magilvy (2011) and Busetto et al. (2020) asserted that the qualitative approach helps answer the how and what questions by collecting detailed data on the phenomenon under study. Qualitative research methods are appropriate for this hermeneutic phenomenological study on parental engagement as viewed through the rural African American participants' lived cultural and social experiences.

There are five kinds of qualitative research: case study, narrative, grounded, ethnology, and phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Harrison et al. (2017) and Yazan (2015), a case approach allows for an investigation and an understanding of a single unit, entity, or issue within its real-world settings. There are three types of case studies: single instrumental, multiple or collective, and intrinsic (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Narrative research is concentrated on one or more individuals. This approach is prevalent in science, literature, history, and education studies. There are four types of narrative research: biological, life history, oral history, and autoethnography. Moen (2006) argued that narrative research emphasizes collecting stories and experiences. Moen (2006) added that the narrative

approach is a collaboration between the researcher and the participants (Moen, 2006). In narrative research, there is no single story of the participants' lived experiences. Instead, in a social context, the participant's story is told through numerous voices (Moen, 2006).

Ethnography is a kind of qualitative research rooted in cultural anthropology. Its most prominent theorists are Boas, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, and Mead (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Reeves et al. (2013) defined ethnography as research that studies social interaction and culture groups and is rooted in empiricism and naturalism. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that realist and critical ethnology is time-consuming.

Creswell et al. (2007) advised that philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology) should be considered in the research study. Accordingly, Creswell et al. (2007) posited that researchers should consider how they know what is known (epistemology). Finally, "the inclusion of their values (axiology), the nature in which their research emerges (methodology), and their writing structures" (Creswell, Hanson, et al., 2007, p. 238) should be factors for consideration in considering a design approach.

A hermeneutic phenomenological research study was conducted to explore the perceptions and experiences of African American parental engagement in the education of their middle school children. Oerther (2020) defined hermeneutic phenomenology as a qualitative research method that allows researchers to study "how experiences, traditions, and culture shape ordinary, everyday practices" (p. 293). van Manen (2007) theorized that phenomenology is a thoughtful reflection of participants' lived experiences.

According to van Manen (2007), these reflections are not restricted to "theoretical, prejudicial and suppositional thinkings" (p. 11). Cash (2021) argued that the objective of a hermeneutic phenomenological research study is not to elicit random responses from

participants. Instead, a hermeneutic phenomenological study aims to understand participants' shared experiences of a particular phenomenon (Cash, 2021; Laverty, 2003).

In the evolution of varying forms of phenomenology – transcendental, existential, and hermeneutic – the latter's genesis began with Husserl's new conception of philosophy (Bauer, 2014; Kafle, 2013). Husserl's descriptive phenomenology centered on questions of epistemology, or what knowledge is, and methods of acquiring knowledge (Gringeri et al., 2013). Husserl's phenomenology allowed for bracketing or setting aside the researcher's lifeworld beliefs or preconceptions and biases about a phenomenon to gain the essence of a phenomenon (Krumwiede, & Krumwiede, 2012; Santiago et al., 2020; Trace, 2017).

Heidegger, a former student of Husserl, viewed philosophy from the conscious and phenomenological approaches to a philosophy encompassing existential and hermeneutic (interpretive) dimensions (Kafle, 2013; Neubauer et al., 2019; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Heidegger's hermeneutic or existential phenomenology focused on ontological questions or the nature of reality. Heidegger emphasized presuppositions or pre-understanding as part of being or human existence (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Santiago et al., 2020). Instead, there is a suspension of the researchers' understanding of reality (Lauterbach, 2018). Kafle (2013) added that hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the subjective experiences of individuals or groups through their lifeworld stories.

van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological structure will guide the design of this hermeneutic study. The structure proposed by the phenomenologist consists of six non-linear actions for the methodological structure of research: (a) turning to the phenomenon or nature of the lived experience; (b) investigating experiences as they are lived rather than having a preposition of the experiences; (c) reflecting essential themes of the phenomenon; (d)

realistically investigating the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting; (e) maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the lived experience; and (f) balancing the research with relativity to the whole and the parts (Krumwiede & Krumwiede, 2012; Magrini, 2012).

The hermeneutic phenomenological design provided a praxis for exploring and collecting narratives of the participants' lived experiences based on their lifeworlds (Neubauer et al., 2019; van Manen, 2007). The lifeworld is how the environment influences an individual's reality (Neubauer et al., 2019). Laverty (2003), Nelson (2000), and Neubauer et al. (2019) theorized that a hermeneutic method must include an understanding of participants' lived experiences through the historicity or the culture that individuals experience. According to Neubauer et al. (2019), hermeneutics focuses on the relationship between an individual and his/her lifeworld. George (2021) stated that hermeneutics, as a study of interpretation, has an essential role in several disciplines. van Manen (2007) described phenomenology as a study of an individual's lived experience. The study combined qualitative research methods with a phenomenological design.

Sloan and Bowe (2014) postulated that hermeneutic phenomenology research is not a search for the truth but a study of how participants' experiences mold their perceptions of their truth. Neubauer et al. (2019) theorized that hermeneutic phenomenology is not limited to analytical techniques. Instead, (Neubauer et al. (2019) posited that hermeneutic phenomenology "is an interpretive process involving the interplay of multiple analysis activities (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 95)

This careful interplay of prior experiences and the interpretive approach of hermeneutic research was vital in analyzing data or interpreting emerging themes or findings. Thus, a hermeneutic phenomenological method was appropriate for understanding African American

parents' perspectives on parental engagement based on their social and cultural lived experiences. This approach allowed the researcher and the participants to "explore and develop their understanding of the phenomenon being studied" (Lauterbach, 2018, p. 2883).

Cash (2021) suggested that phenomenology offers philosophical interpretations of the participants' responses. Stones (1986) asserted that the method, approach, and content of any study on human phenomena did not function as separate entities in the research design process. Stones insisted that any phenomenological study should include a description of the phenomenon in its lived world; the participant's perspective should be embedded in the analysis of the data; essential themes should be extracted from coded chunks of data, and the discourse among approach, method, and content should be maintained (Stones, 1986, p. 121).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study.

Central Research Question

What are the perceptions and lived experiences of rural African American middle-school parents and their involvement in parental engagement activities?

Sub-Question 1

How does African American parents' self-efficacy influence their decisions to become involved with the school?

Sub-Question 2

How do African American parents describe their parental role construction in their children's education?

Sub-Question 3

How do African American parents describe their response to the school's invitation to become involved?

Setting and Participants

Site (or Setting)

This study occurred in a rural, high-poverty, high-minority community in Buckscott, South Carolina. This county, the 29th most populous county of 46 counties in the state of this study, meets Schaefer et al.'s (2016) criteria of a rural community. In Buckscott County, "where poverty rates have been high for generations, where economic investment in schools and infrastructure is negligible, and where pathways to success are few" (Schaefer et al., 2016, p.1). According to the 2021 United States Census Bureau data, the county has a population of 31,024 with a negative growth rate of 11.2%. The racial/ethnic composition of the county is 45.6% African American, 48.8% White, 3.4% Hispanic, and 2.2% two or more races. On July 1, 2022, Buckscott School District was consolidated with another school district.

According to the district's webpage, Buckscott School District has eleven schools with varying grade configurations. The district has two early childhood centers (pre-K-1 and PreK-2), one primary (grades 2-3), three elementary schools (pre-K-5; 3-5, and 4-6), two middle high schools (6-12), one junior high (7-8) one high school (9-12), a career/technical center, and an alternative school. The demographics of the Buckscott School District reflect the county. During 2020-2021, the year of the most current enrollment data on student enrollment district prior to county-wide consolidation was 4,516. Buckscott School District's African American enrollment at its 11 schools is 55.43%, significantly higher than the state's public school average of 32.61%.

A nine-member elected school board governs the school district. The district's day-to-day operations are managed by an African American male superintendent with more than twenty

years of teaching, coaching, and leadership experience. The superintendent has served in the executive position of one of the consolidated districts for approximately three years before assuming the position as superintendent of the new district. The district office includes a staff of eleven department leaders. The school district also employs four full-time parent educators.

The middle school campus in Buckscott School District was selected because of its accessibility to potential participants, relevance and connectivity to the phenomenon being studied, and the unrestricted cooperation of the district office staff (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Other selection criteria included external and internal data extrapolated from student achievement data and school climate data from the 2020 South Carolina Report Card. Additional considerations regarding the selection of the research site included the population's ethnicity, the community's socioeconomic status, and the historical trend of low parental engagement, particularly at the middle school level. Finally, the site has limited cultural and recreational amenities, making the school the hub of the community. The selection of this site provided insight into how this hub encourages parents to engage more readily with the school.

Data extrapolated from the South Carolina Department of Education's (2021) source, School Enrollment Disaggregated by Subgroup (135-day Count), Buckscott Middle School has an enrollment of 370 students. Ninety percent of the student population of 172 students is African American, 8% White, 2% Hispanic, and other ethnicities. The administrative staff at Buckscott Middle consists of a principal, one assistant principal, and a curriculum instructional leader. During the 2021-2022 academic year, there were 19 certified teachers. The school's employees mirror the student population, with 84% of the teaching staff of African American descent.

One disturbing characteristic of the school is the high turnover rate among certified teachers. The 2021-2022 teachers' attrition rate at Buckscott Middle was a troubling 42.9%. However, before the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020-2021, the number of returning teachers was 80%. Only 28.7% of the students met or exceeded reading/language arts standards as rated on the 2021-2022 South Carolina State Report Card (South Carolina Department of Education, 2022). Equally dismally, only 10.3% of students met or exceeded the standard in math, according to data extrapolated from the same reporting document published by the South Carolina Department of Education (2022).

Participants

Participants in this study were African American parents of middle school students. This study explored their lived experiences through shared social, historical, and cultural contexts. Tomaszewski et al. (2020) suggested that participants must have different views from the researcher. However, in this hermeneutic interpretive approach, the researcher did not distance herself from the participants but reflected continuously shared experiences related to the phenomenon being researched. have shared experiences (Laverty, 2003). As such, all participants selected were African American parents or legal guardians of a Buckscott Middle School student. The sampling method included parents of children who recently transitioned to middle school as a sixth-grader or who have been enrolled in middle school for at least one year. The sampling size of nine African American participants of diverse genders, ages, and social/economic statuses was sufficient to reach data saturation.

Researcher Positionality

Holmes (2020) defined positionality as the researcher's worldview on the topic that he or she will explore or investigate from a political or social context. Smith, Blevins, et al. (2021)

suggested that the "emic" (the insider's perspective of the depth and breadth of a study) provides a broader and better contextual understanding of the problem. As Smith, Blevins, Werse, et al. (2021) postulated and concurred by Holmes (2020), more scholars chose a practical subject. Guided by that premise, I acknowledge that this research was influenced by my positionality and former role as an educator. Therefore, I engaged in continuous self-reflections before and throughout the data collection process.

I began my unexpected path to a superintendency position as a second-grade teacher and later taught upper elementary and middle school students. In nearly 40 years in education, I served as a Title I coordinator, director of innovative dropout prevention and acceleration program for middle school students, and a teacher specialist for a state-level education department. For over 12 years, I served as an assistant superintendent of federal programs, curriculum and instruction, and accountability.

One of my most relevant positions related to this study was as a coordinator of a state-funded early intervention innovative home-based parent education program. This professional experience as a parent educator informed my philosophical belief in the importance and impact of parental engagement. As a participant in family involvement events and activities and an observer of family engagement, I remain intrigued by how African American parents use their lived experiences to shape their perceptions of parental engagement.

Interpretive Framework

Creswell and Poth (2018) claimed that researchers use paradigms or interpretive frameworks of pragmatism, social constructivism, and post-positivism. The hermeneutic phenomenological study was explored and framed in social constructivism theory. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), social constructivism is an interpretive framework wherein individuals

seek to understand their world in light of their experiences. Boyland (2019) contended that social constructivism allows individuals to see and interpret their world through a subjective lens. Creswell and Poth asserted that these meanings or interpretations are not stagnant. Instead, these interpretations are varied, multiple, and fluid and are developed through interactions with others (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Social constructivism guided the data analysis of this hermeneutic phenomenological study on rural African American parents' lived parental engagement experiences. The use of open-ended questions allowed participants to describe their own experiences candidly. My task as the researcher involved listening to the participants' lived experiences, interpreting the oral narratives, and applying the interpretations to the phenomenon.

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions influence how the researcher frames the problem, poses the research questions, and develops the subjective meaning of the phenomenon (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). The philosophical assumptions in the social constructivist framework are ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological. Each assumption guides the action and worldview of the researcher (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Mingers, 2003). This study applies all four assumptions. This qualitative research used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to gain insight into the participants' lived experiences from a subjective perspective.

Ontological Assumption

Ontology studies the nature of existence (Ataro, 2020; Kamal, 2019). Creswell and Poth (2018) claimed that ontology is how the researcher embraces reality in its simplistic nature. Ontology is concerned with social entities and the nature of what is. Ataro (2020) theorized that the kind and nature of reality and the social world are essential features of ontology or an

ontological assumption.

Kamal (2019) argued that in ontology, social entities exist independently from social actors or constructions, developed or conceptualized through interception, perceptions, or actions. Bryman (2016) suggested that in considering a social phenomenon, a conceptual framework must be established on how the actors or entities in the study influence a phenomenon. Thus, in an ontological assumption, the researcher must embrace all realities that the participants bring to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kamal, 2019; Peay, 2012).

The ontological assumption of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is embedded in the philosophical belief that multiple realities exist relative to the nature and perceptions of parental engagement. Symon and Cassell (2012) identified two ontological assumptions: realist and subjective. This hermeneutic phenomenological study was conducted through the lens of a realist, based on the assumption that a phenomenon exists to be explored (Symon & Cassell, 2012).

This study's realist assumption focused on parents' perceptions and actions. Through realist assumptions, the participants' perceptions and actions were independent of my perceptual or cognitive structures (Symon & Cassell, 2012). These realities were discovered during the research process, with participants having no restrictions in describing their experiences and perceptions. The researcher and the participants constructed a profound, illuminating reality of the phenomenon through the focus group and semi-structured interviews.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemology, like ontology, is concerned with the concept of reality. However, the terminology is different. Epistemology deals with the breadth and process of knowledge (Kamal, 2019; Peay, 2012). Epistemology is how the investigator uncovers truth and reality (Ataro, 2020;

Kamal, 2019). Symon and Cassell (2012) and Ataro (2020) identified two dominant

epistemological assumptions: the acquisition of knowledge and the interpretation of reality

(Ataro, 2020). The latter was used during the data analysis process.

Epistemological assumptions allowed me to engage with the participants from an

interpretive perspective. This perspective afforded me the flexibility and personal engagement

with the participants (Ataro, 2020). The actions of a district, school leaders, and classroom

teachers can profoundly affect parental engagement. Therefore, I limited the scope of the study

and data collection to the perspectives and experiences of the research participants.

Axiological Assumption

According to Peay (2012), axiology is concerned with how values and assumptions

influence the research process. Peay (2012) pointed out that most qualitative

studies are influenced by the researcher's values, orientation, or personal qualities. Thus,

axiological assumptions consider the biases and values the researcher brings to the study. As

necessary, I will bring my values, experiences, and subjective views to the study. As an engaged

parent in the education of my two daughters, I understand the residual effects of parental

engagement on children's academic success and social growth. As a researcher, however, I was

keenly aware of how school personnel's treatment of parents could contribute to parents'

perceptions and actions as they attempt to engage in their children's education

Researcher's Role

Simon (2011) postulated that the researcher has a non-existent role in a qualitative study.

Instead, the researcher is merely the collector of data (Simon, 2011). As the researcher, I must

reflect on any experiences, preconceived assumptions, experiences, or expectations that may

influence the trustworthiness of my research and the validation of its findings. My role in this

study was transformative. I approached this study as an emic with full participation in the phenomenon. Later, I became more of an objective outsider or etic (Simon, 2011). This transformation of roles was necessary, given the nature of this research and my professional experiences.

In the interest of full disclosure, I spent four years, from 2017-2021, as the district superintendent. Before assuming the executive position, I served as the assistant superintendent for instruction, federal programs, and accountability. My personal biases were reflected in a journal so that the participants could describe their experiences unburdened by my biases. However, according to Sloan and Bowe (2014), a researcher's background, prior knowledge, and experience of the research subject may influence the collection and analysis of data.

The motivation for conducting this study is rooted in my firm conviction on the positive residual effects of parental engagement on children's academic growth and social-emotional development. Parent engagement goes beyond the school-centric activities, such as "Muffins for Moms," "Donuts for Dads," or attendance at PTA or PTO meetings. Nonetheless, in understanding my biases, my research was conducted ethically and with no direct or indirect influences on the participants' freedom to be transparent and candid.

Procedures

Site Permissions

I obtained permission to conduct this study from the district superintendent. Initial emails, telephone calls, and a follow-up email with an attachment of the approval letter from the Institutional Review Board were sent to the chief executive officer of Buckscott's School District requesting permission to conduct this study. I received written approval to conduct the study. Permission letters are in Appendices B and C. The recruitment and consent letters included the

nature of the study, how the study will be conducted, criteria for participation, the benefits for parents, students, and the school, and confidentiality. When I received approval from the Institutional Review Board, the district superintendent and campus were notified, and permission to begin the data collection was granted.

Institutional Review Board

Once the superintendent granted permission to conduct the study, I sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University. The final IRB approval document is included in Appendix A. In addition to obtaining the approvals from the superintendent and IRB, letters seeking consent were sent to participants within one week of the recruitment and selection process. All data collection methods were initially planned to be face-to-face. However, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted via videoconferencing, specifically through Zoom. Lobe et al. (2020) have stated that Zoom can be used for research. In preparation for a transition from face-to-face to remote interviewing, a line was inserted in the consent document advising participants that withdrawal from the study is permissible at any point during or after the data collection process. All signed consent letters will be locked and housed away from the study site for three years (Appendix E).

The collection of data and the selection of the number of participants were components of the study procedures. According to Elo et al. (2014), there is no uniformity in the number of participants to constitute a sample size; the optimal size depends on three factors: (a) the nature or purpose of the study, (b) the research questions, and (c) the richness of the data. Seetharaman (2016) stated that the primary goal of qualitative research is to "understand a phenomenon, not to represent a population or make generalizations from study samples to population" (p. 41). Seetharaman (2016) added that, unlike quantitative research, qualitative research does not have a

mathematical formula for participant size. However, Elo et al. (2014) contended that an appropriate sample size is essential for ensuring the credibility of a study.

Boddy (2016) asserted that the sample size should be based on a scientific paradigm. Guest et al. (2013) argued that there is no numerical guideline but remarked that Morse (1994) proposed six participants for phenomenological studies. Guest et al. (2013) cited Creswell's (2009) suggestion of approximately five to 25 interviews for a phenomenological study. Closely adhering to the recommended number of participants by Guest et al. (2013) and Morse (1994), nine participants diverse in gender, age, and social/economic status were selected. All participants were African American parents of middle school students.

Soliciting Participants

The proposed hermeneutic phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of African American parents of middle school students attending a rural school in east-central South Carolina. Participants who meet the following inclusion criteria were invited to interview:

1. African American parents of middle school students

2. Parents of children attending Buckscott Middle School

3. Either male or female parents or legal guardians

Recruitment Plan

The recruitment pool was exclusive to individuals meeting the initial criteria. This inclusionary pool of participants was a sampling frame (Taherdoost, 2016). After establishing the sampling frame of all eligible participants, nonprobability sampling was used. Taherdoost (2016) posited that non-probability sampling tends to use a small sample size for exploring real-life phenomena.

Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was used for this qualitative research (Palinkas et al., 2015). Yin (2011) concluded that purposeful sampling allows for gathering relevant and copious data. Yin (2011) added that "a purposive sampling strategy is most commonly used in phenomenological research as it allows selecting participants who have rich knowledge of the phenomenon" (p. 6). Patton (1990) and Frechette et al. (2020) argued that purposeful sampling is designed to provide rich and meaningful data on issues of central importance to the study or phenomenon.

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that to achieve data saturation, at least six to 10 participants are needed in a nonprobability sample or purposeful sample method. Fusch and Ness (2015) argued that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to data saturation. Rather, they claimed that theoretical saturation in a phenomenological study could be achieved through methods that provide depth of data rather than a selected number of participants. Gentles et al. (2015) noted that there should be fewer than 10 participants in hermeneutic phenomenology if engaging in an intensive, in-depth study. According to Malterud (2016), data saturation is the point in analysis in which no new data emerges or no benefit comes from adding participants to the sample.

In this study, data saturation was achieved from the sample size of nine participants. Care was taken to ensure that the shaman effect did not compromise data saturation. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), the shaman effect is the inclusion of someone who may be well-versed on the topic and can skew the data. Yin (2011) suggests that people with an informed opinion about the study should also be interviewed to eliminate the possibility of bias.

Recruitment strategies were based on the study's type and the number of data collection activities. Upon receiving an official approval letter, participants were recruited through letters,

fliers, and through gatekeepers. The non-probability sampling of snowballing became one of the most effective methods for recruitment for this cultural group of participants (Sadler, 2010).

The research study began immediately after the participants signed and returned their consent forms. I notified the campus administrator of the commencement of the study before formally contacting the participants. An introductory meeting was embedded in the interview sessions with selected participants via the Zoom platform. The introduction described the nature of the study, procedures, confidentiality, and safeguards. Participants were also informed how they could terminate their participation at any time. As an incentive, all participants were given a gift card of $25.

Data Collection Plan

An interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology methodology was used for this qualitative study. A homogenous sampling method was also used. According to Patton (1990), this method is more useful in describing a phenomenon being experienced by a subgroup. Patton (2002) suggested always using the smallest unit of analysis when collecting data. Patton recommended using either a unit of analysis that is people-focused, time-based, activity, geography or structure-focused, or perspective/world-based when collecting data (Patton, 2002). This study used people-focused analysis and perspective/world-based approaches. The former involved individuals and a small focus group. The latter entailed eliciting the perspectives of people who share an experience, experience, or perspective (Patton, 2002).

Moser and Korstjens (2018) suggested several standard methods of collecting data for qualitative research. These include observation, face-to-face in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Three data collection instruments were used in this study: semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a focus group. Multiple methods

in this study provided for methodological triangulation (Noble & Heale, 2019). The triangulation of research methods reduced the likelihood of biases (Noble & Heale, 2019).

Individual Interviews

Bauer (2014) cited the method of interviewing as a central tenet of phenomenological studies allowing a phenomenon to be viewed through participants' eyes. Kvale (1994) noted that qualitative interviews are person-dependent, explorative, and connected to the research questions. Semi-structured interviews are intended to "engage participants in a discussion that helped bring out their understanding and meaning" of the phenomenon (Bauer, 2014, p. 110). Kvale defined interviews as means of gathering descriptions from the interviewee to interpret a phenomenon.

These dialogical interviews allowed for the collecting of meaningful and sufficient data for transcript analysis (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). McIntosh and Morse (2015) suggested that semi-structured interviews are "uniquely oriented to assessing, confirming, validating, refuting, or elaborating upon existing knowledge and the discovery of new knowledge" (p. 1). This in-depth method was used to obtain data using an open-ended question format, allowing deeper probing and more insight into the participants' perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Jamshed, 2014).

When considering the number of participants for the individual interviews, Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that in a phenomenology study, the number of participants can range from three to 10. Gentles et al. (2015) noted that in hermeneutic phenomenology, the number of participants in an intensive in-depth study should be less than 10. For less intensive interviews, there should be at most 30 participants (Gentles et al., 2015). Nine participants were selected for the individual interviews. These semi-structured interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants and were conducted virtually.

During the individual interview sessions, participants were encouraged to speak openly. Jamshed (2014) stated that interviews should not be longer than 30 to 60 minutes. However, Frechette et al. (2020) recommended that individual interviews with in-depth discussions should be no longer than 60–90 minutes. Before the interviews, all participants were provided with information on the study's objectives, an explanation for recording the interviews, and how confidential information will be protected (Fazli et al., 2018). All interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder and Microsoft Word diction to ensure the accuracy of the responses. Interviews continued after data saturation was reached and phenomenological themes emerged.

Individual Interview Questions

Each interview began with an initial or icebreaker question that /was designed to engage the participant and elicit information about parental self-efficacy (Bloom-DiCicco & Crabtree, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following list of semi-structured interview questions was developed for this study:

1. In what ways have you been engaged in the education of your child at home? At school? (SQ1)

2. What are the tangible results of your engagement in the education of your child? (SQ1)

3. How would you compare your engagement with the school to that of your parents when you attended school? (SQ2)

4. In what ways do you perceive that your contributions as a parent and an equal partner in your child's education are acknowledged by school personnel? (SQ2)

5. What are your experiences with school personnel in supporting the engagement of parents? (SQ2)

6. What is one activity or program that you would like Buckscott Middle to implement to increase awareness and understanding of parental engagement? (SQ3)

7. How do you view your engagement in your child's education? (SQ3)

8. How can the district and campus leadership involvement with parents be strengthened? (SQ3)

Each question was designed to understand how participants' perspectives may affect their actions and mindset on parental engagement. Questions 1 and 2 inquired into the tangible benefits of parental engagement.

Questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 focused on the parents' experiences with the school and district. This series of questions also invited the participants to share their perceptions on developing a viable and sustainable partnership with the school and the district. Unlike many other qualitative studies on the parental engagement of African American parents, this study involved a homogenous group of participants of the same ethnicity and socioeconomic status, connection to the community as life-long residents, and alumni of the school district. The data gained from these responses allowed themes to be developed. These questions explored how parents believe they are valued and perceived by the school and district. These interview questions elicited responses on how parents perceive their voices are heard, and their presence is received or devalued within the school and the school district. McGowan-Robinson, (2016) asserted that when the perspectives of African American parents are understood, school staff will more readily offer meaningful opportunities for engagement.

Question 7 elicited respondents' attitudes and perceptions of parental engagement. The question allowed parents to discuss their children's perceptions of their engagement or lack thereof. Ford and Harris (1996) emphasized that African American students' academic

performance and optimism are often influenced by their positive view of their parents' engagement. Question 8 explored how parental engagement is integral to the school system. Question 8 encouraged parents to describe their own experiences so that they could explain how Buckscott School District is cultivating and maintaining meaningful, sustainable relations between home and school.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Lester et al. (2020) and Sloan and Bowe (2014) have stated that although there are standard analytic practices, there are many ways of analyzing data, each of which depends on the assumptions and expectations of the research study. Griffee (2005) described interviewing as a valuable method of collecting qualitative data. Griffee (2005) added that interviews are not based on presupposed statistical knowledge but on the literal words of the respondents. Griffee argued that interviews are influenced by the researcher's assumptions, biases, and questions. The data analysis process included collecting, analyzing, and coding the responses. Common themes and subthemes were analyzed to determine their significance.

Data collected from the interviews were designed and choreographed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) contended that a researcher engages in an analysis process and moves in a data spiral manner than a fixed linear approach or through analytic circles of reviewing and discovering meaning from the data. Data analysis included determining a pattern or themes and engaging in content analysis (Griffee, 2005; Hahn, 2021). The choreographic method or data analysis spiral approach included collecting, analyzing, viewing, re-analyzing, and reviewing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gellweiler, 2011). Griffee (2005) suggested that the data analysis process should include listening to and transcribing the interviews, reading and

re-reading the transcripts, coding the data, summarizing the coded data, and interpreting the data through memoing.

Data collected from the interviews were not analyzed in a prescriptive or structured methodical manner. During data analysis, I suspended my perceptions, preferences, judgments, and feelings to attain the epoché. The data analysis process involved describing things exactly as they appear and reducing the thick, rich data narratives into emergent themes (van Manen, 2017).

Document Analysis (Data Collection Approach #2)

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined a document as any item relevant to a qualitative research study that may be visually, digitally produced, or physical. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that notes to parents, formal board policies on parental involvement, school bulletin boards, correspondence to parents, and memos between and among teachers can be subject to analysis. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), these types of documents are referred to as public documents.

Busetto et al. (2020) defined document analysis as the researcher's review of the collected documents. Frey (2018) stated that document analysis should have a structured or defined method to answer the research questions. Morgan (2022) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that analyzing documents can be affected by bias and misinterpretations by the researcher. Bowen (2009) defined document analysis as "finding, selecting, appraising (making sense of), and synthesizing data contained in documents" (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). Data analysis can be organized into themes, categories, and case examples (Bowen, 2009).

Flick (2018) stated that four considerations are given in selecting documents to analyze: authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning (Flick, 2018). Morgan (2022) suggested that a researcher cannot have a preconceived idea of the number of documents to be

used before beginning the research. According to Morgan (2022), any document can be used for qualitative analysis. However, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argued that there are limitations to all documents. They claimed that documents are the product of the conditions that produced them and are therefore grounded in the real world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Other limitations to document use include limited information, insufficient data for the researcher to conduct research, and limited opportunities to check biases in the document and by the researcher (Morgan, 2022).

Document Analysis Data Analysis Plan

Physical evidence relevant to African American parents' perceptions and lived experiences were collected for this hermeneutic phenomenological study. Participants were asked to choose one or two announcements, invitations, or letters received from the school for review and personal reflection. The self-selected documents were used to elicit the lived experience of parents invited to participate in the research study. Data gathered from the physical documents addressed research questions 1 and 3. Immediately upon agreeing to engage in the study, participants were asked to begin collecting documents. They received instruction on how to select, reflect, and respond in a one-sentence statement on the relevancy of the documents to their parental role construction.

Focus Groups

Bush et al. (2019) suggested that multiple perspectives can be revealed through focus groups. This data collection method can provide convergent or divergent views on a phenomenon (Bush et al., 2019). Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed the use of focus groups to confirm and expand on patterns and themes revealed in the initial data analysis. Guest et al. (2013) wrote that a focus group "is a carefully planned discussion with a small group of people

on a focused topic" (p. 2). Ochieng et al. (2018) added that focus groups, although similar to semi-structured one-to-one interviews, allow the researcher to gain additional insight into the participants' perceptions and values (Ochieng et al., 2018). Fifteen participants were invited to participate in a virtual focus group. However, only three committed and participated. The researcher's role during the focus group meeting was passive, serving as the discussion facilitator (Ochieng et al., 2018).

Kitzinger (1995) stated that participants feel less inhibitive in talking to one another, asking questions, exchanging anecdotes, and commenting on their experiences in focus groups. Kitzinger (1995) noted that focus groups help elicit participants' perspectives on a phenomenon. The focus group was beneficial for exploring and understanding the participants' thoughts and insights into the phenomenon (Kitzinger, 1995).

Focus Group Questions

Focus group questions were aligned with the central research question and research questions 1 through 3. Questions were revised as necessary from data gathered during the semi-structured interviews and documents. The goal of the focus group was to distinguish common from divergent themes, to expand the participants' responses, and to support information gathered with examples. The following questions, reflective of the semi-structured interview questions, were asked (Appendix G):

1. How do you define parental engagement?

2. In what ways does the school validate parents' contribution or support parents in their efforts of being engaged in their children's education?

3. What factors or actions of the school may cause parents not to be involved in their child's education?

4. What are deterrents to parents becoming involved in their children's education?

5. How does the school invite you as a partner in your child's education?

6. What types of invitations seem to resonate with you and make you more inclined to participate in your child's education?

7. How can the school and home benefit from parental engagement?

8. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your involvement with the school and your child's education?

Questions 1 and 2 elicited responses from participants on their perception of parental engagement. Baquedano-López et al. (2013) stated that "educators and researchers, we are concerned with approaches to parental involvement that construct restricted roles for parents in the education of their children" (p. 149). Responses to these questions provided new empirical data on how parents and guardians view school personnel as influential in their parental role construction as partners in education. Questions 3 and 4 focused on parents' perceptions of contributors or inhibitors to parental engagement. Rodriguez et al. (2008) commented that many school administrators and teachers would like to partner with parents. However, these school personnel do not know how to cultivate productive partnerships. Questions 5 through 7 provided insight into the participants' interpretations of the benefits of home-school partnerships. Bartz et al. (2017) cited parental engagement as conducive to children's positive self-image and success in school.

Question 8 explored how parental engagement can be based on environmental factors, such as climate change or a pandemic. Anakwe et al. (2021) posited that the COVID-19 pandemic had revealed the importance of a viable collaboration between the home and school.

According to Anakwe et al. (2021), COVID-19 resulted in school closures and unfamiliar roles for parents in their children's education. As a result of school closures, online, or hybrid instruction, parents became facilitators, de facto teachers, and coaches (Anakwe et al., 2021). The researchers concluded that in this new educational environment, the relationship between the home and school must more intentionally foster increased collaboration and empowerment (Anakwe et al., 2021). Harper et al. (2021) also asserted that the pre-pandemic view of parental engagement had undergone a transformative change. Harper et al. (2021) supported this assertion by observing that there has been a linear reframing of parental engagement in what activities parents engage in and how they perform their parental role construction. One aspect of this question was to analyze data and explore how parents' mediation of space, social and cultural capital during the COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to the linear view of parental engagement (Harper et al., 2021).

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

When analyzing data collected from the focus group meeting, recurring words and clusters of phases identified emerging themes were identified and self-reflective annotations were done. In analyzing interview and focus group data, Kakulu (2008) postulated that data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, and tabulating data. Kakulu (2008) suggested that several considerations are necessary when analyzing focus group data from a phenomenological study (Kakulu, 2008).

According to Kakulu (2008), data analysis from focus groups should summarize the participants' dialogues or comments. Four types of data analysis can be used singularly or in combination: transcript-based analysis, audio and videotaped, note-based, and memory-based (Kakulu, 2008). For this study, transcript-based analysis was used. Data collected were subjected

to the Stevick – Colaizzi- Keen method of analyzing phenomenological data. This method analyzed the textural-structural descriptions of the participants' and researchers' experiences. A composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience was written into a universal description of the group's experience.

Data Synthesis

McKenzie et al. (2021) defined synthesis as a process where data is extracted and combined to formulate a conclusive position on the body of evidence gathered. Thorne (2000) noted complexities in conducting qualitative research. Thomas and Harden (2008) explained that synthesizing qualitative research involves complexity in contested territory.

Drisko (2020) stated that "qualitative research synthesis is a diverse set of methods for combining the data or the results of multiple studies on a topic to generate new knowledge, theory and applications" (Drisko, 2020, p. 736). Tong et al. (2012) suggested that data synthesis can produce a generation of novice theoretical or conceptual models or identify research gaps (Tong et al., 2012). Barnett-Page and Thomas (2009) supported this assumption that data synthesis involves the culmination of multifaceted evidence. According to Pope et al. (2006), the synthesizing of data is an opportunity to integrate the plethora and diversity of data into wholeness with a central commonality. According to Tong et al. (2012), there are nine approaches to data synthesis: critical interpretive, grounded theory, meta-ethnography, meta-study, meta-narrative, textual narrative, framework, ecological triangulation, and thematic. Thomas and Harden (2008) proposed a three-pronged synthesizing method that entails coding the text, developing descriptive themes, and formulating analytical themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008). van Manen (2017) argued that there is no prescribed step-by-step process for synthesizing "phenomenological understandings, themes, or insights" (van Manen, 2017, p. 776).

Data synthesis for this hermeneutic phenomenological study on African American parents' perceptions and lived experiences on parental engagement was done through thematic analysis. Thomas and Harden (2008) claimed that a thematic analysis produces interpretive constructs, explanations, or hypotheses. In data synthesis, hermeneutic phenomenological data are not restricted to specific standards or procedural methods (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). According to Alsaigh and Coyne (2021), such methods would be antithetical to hermeneutics research.

This hermeneutic phenomenological study used a less structured approach to a phenomenological study data analysis. Creswell and Poth (2018) also suggested that heuristic clarity and experiential data that embodies concreteness, vividness, and lived-thoroughness must be prevalent factors for phenomenological analysis. van Manen (2017) theorized that

> phenomenological analysis is not conducted through sorting, counting, or even systematic coding efforts. Rather, phenomenological inquiry proceeds through an inceptual process of reflective wondering, deep questioning, attentive reminiscing, and sensitively interpreting of the primal meanings of human experiences (van Manen, 2017, p. 819).

van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological structure guided the design of this research study. The structure proposed by Krumwiede and Krumwiede (2012) consists of six non-linear actions: turning to the phenomenon or lived experience; investigating experiences as they are lived, rather than having a preconceived position of the experiences; reflecting on the essential themes of the phenomenon; investigating the phenomenon in a realistic manner; and maintaining a strong and oriented relation and balancing the research relative to the whole and the parts. These six non-linear actions guided the data analysis process.

According to Thomas and Harden (2008), thematic analysis identifies and formalizes the development of emerging themes. This method consists of coding the text, developing descriptive themes, and formulating analytical themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008). After identifying and formulating themes, the phenomenon's essence became apparent (Connell, 2022).

van Manen's method of phenomenology, which embeds thematic analysis, was used to understand the phenomenon through detailed and full descriptions of the participants' lived experiences (Connell, 2022). The steps that van Manen applied in synthesizing data for this study included uncovering themes, isolating statements, interpreting the linguistics, and interpreting artistic descriptions (Connell, 2022). van Manen (2017) claimed that the two methods of a phenomenological analysis — epoché and the reduction — "cannot be folded nicely into a qualitative program of determinable strategies, calculative schemes, codes and inventive analytic and synthesizing technicalities that will produce or conveniently deliver some original thoughts or creative insights" (van Manen, 2017, p. 820). Instead, van Manen (2017) asserted that analysis is done in a nonmethodical manner, and insights are not revealed through rigid and systematic approaches but are discovered or revealed through epiphanic moments. However, as the researcher of the study, I combined thematic analysis with van Manen's nonmethodical method. The thematic analysis included pattern recognition, coding, and categorizing collected data from the three sources (Bettencourt et al., 2020). The coded data was viewed with connection to the overarching purpose of the study (Bettencourt et al., 2020).

Triangulation is an essential component of data synthesis for determining the consistency and deeper understanding of the phenomenological study (Morgan, 2022). Triangulation was achieved by analyzing data collected from semi-structured interviews, professional documents, and focus groups. Triangulation was also used to identify themes that emerge during the research

process and eliminate biases (Risjord et al., 2001). Triangulation helped to determine the consistencies of findings in the study. The Qualitative Data Analysis Software, MAXQDA, was used for data management. This software program analyzed the large amount of data collected and identified codes and sub-codes. The use of the Qualitative Data Analysis Software, MAXQDA improved the research collaboration, and added to the validity and credibility of the study.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of qualitative research depends on whether the data analysis has been conducted with precision, consistency, and thoroughness (Nowell et al., 2017). Trustworthiness is also how the study's rigor is related to the degree of confidence in data, the interpretive aspect of the study, and the methodical approaches or procedures used to ensure the study's quality (Connelly, 2016). Elo et al. (2014) suggested that trustworthiness is the metric for defining a researcher's findings as valuable and worthy of exploration or attention. Trustworthiness is also connected to the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017).

Trustworthiness was embedded in the narrative of the study and the research process. Some strategies used in this study are member checking, triangulation among data sources, and the data collection methods used during the individual interviews and document reviews (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). A reflective journal was used to establish trustworthiness. More importantly, trustworthiness was evident in the completed study through the reflection of my writing and analysis of findings. Empirical studies and peer reviews supported these actions.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) associated the trustworthiness of a study with its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. While a qualitative researcher can go to great

lengths to meet all four of these criteria, the reader makes the final subjective determination of a study's trustworthiness (Birt et al., 2016). The trustworthiness of the research study was assessed through member checking, meaning that the researcher sent the data collected from interviews and documents to the participants for validation (Birt et al., 2016).

Credibility

Elo et al. (2014) asserted that selecting the sample size is essential to the credibility of a study. The optimal size depends on "the purpose of the study, research questions, and richness of the data" (Elo et al., 2014, p. 4). Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined credibility as confidence in the truth of a study's findings or the extent to which the findings accurately describe reality. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) stated that the techniques for establishing credibility are prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checking.

Two approaches were used to establish credibility in this research study. It is essential to identify and describe the participants and have a sufficient sample size (Elo et al., 2014). In addition, the data were triangulated. The data was critically examined to detect recurring behaviors or actions relevant to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transferability

Transferability indicates that the findings may have applicability in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability occurs by identifying thick descriptions in the research findings (Geertz, 1973). Transferability is also the ability to apply the findings from one study to another context or at another time (Elo et al., 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I created the conditions for the transferability of my findings by providing thick and rich descriptions.

However, transferability could not occur, given that the study is limited to a particular site

(Nowell et al., 2017)

Dependability

Dependability means that the findings are consistent and could be replicated (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985). Elo et al. (2014) defined dependability as the data's stability over time in different

conditions. Creswell and Poth (2018) added that dependability is ensured by auditing the

research process. This study will undergo an internal audit with my dissertation committee

members at Liberty University. Other matters related to trustworthiness and ethics in research

will be discussed with the committee members. In addition to having an audit done, the research

process will be traceable, well-documented, and presented logically and sequentially (Nowell et

al., 2017).

Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the

respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Techniques

for establishing confirmability include confirmability audits, audit trails, triangulation, and

reflexivity. In this study, confirmability will be done through bracketing. Tufford and Newman

(2012) define bracketing as "a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially

deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process" (Tufford & Newman,

2012, p.1). Tufford and Newman (2012) made the salient point that bracketing leads the

researcher to deeper levels of reflection by "selecting a topic and population, designing the

interview, collecting and interpreting data, and reporting findings "(Tufford & Newman, 2012, p.

2). I will continue to engage in reflections throughout the process.

Another way to ensure confirmability is by recording the participants and providing a narrative of the research conditions without injecting my motives, biases, and perspectives (Elo et al., 2014). Elo et al. (2014) suggested using quotations from the transcribed text. I will quote participants verbatim with the appropriate citations.

Ethical Considerations

Creswell (2009) suggested that the researcher must be prepared to address any ethical dilemmas that may arise during the research process. Ethical consideration must be a constant in the researcher's cognitive awareness, from selecting the research problem to the study's publication (Creswell, 2009). The research problem of the study, Creswell (2009) recommended, should be one that is beneficial for the participants of the study and others and not only for the Similarly, the purpose of the study will also be presented with complete transparency. The oral and written descriptions of how the study will be conducted will be consistent. Pertinent information on the nature of the research, its intended purpose, and the future use of findings will be stated in the correspondence (Fazli et al., 2018).

Creswell (2009) suggested that the researcher must protect the participants and the suggested site from possible ethical issues during data collection. Protection of the integrity of the data collection process and the participants will be the highest priority. Ethical considerations will focus on safety and transparency. All approvals and written consents received from Liberty University's IRB, the district's superintendent, campus leaders, and adult participants will be housed off-site. Pseudonyms will be assigned to adult participants, the superintendent, and the school district's specific location and name.

Electronic data will be kept on a secured device and accessed only through a password and a fingerprint-recognized login. Participants will be informed on how their data will be stored,

analyzed, and used and how they will be identified. Participants will be informed that they may exit the study without repercussions. Information gathered on participants who withdraw from the study will be given to them and erased from any devices or files (Fazli et al., 2018). Any identifying information will be replaced with a pseudonym or a numerical identification. Other considerations suggested by Creswell (2009) include collecting information from electronic surveys and minimizing disruptions to the typical day of operations at the research site. Finally, a preliminary study copy will be provided to the research site to prevent data falsification, misuse of results, or the invention of findings (Creswell, 2009). Data will be retained in a secure location for three years after the completion of the study.

Summary

Chapter Three described the research design of this hermeneutic phenomenological study on rural African American parents' perspectives of parental engagement. The central research question guided the study: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of rural African American middle-school parents and their involvement in parental engagement activities? This chapter also described the methodology, population and sample, data collection, procedures, and data analysis. The researcher's positionality, ethical issues, and trustworthiness were discussed.

The study used a hermeneutic phenomenology as the qualitative research method to explore the participants' lived experiences. The data analyzed emerging patterns and themes. The findings will inform school and district leaders how parents perceive their roles in their children's education. Additionally, findings from the study may help revise and develop policies and practices that will lead to a more cohesive partnership between the home and school to facilitate the academic, social, and emotional development of middle school students.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of rural African American parents and their involvement in parental engagement activities in the Buckscott School District in South Carolina. Parent engagement is generally defined as parents' active involvement in learning and developing parenting skills through a multi-stage process (Gonzalez et al., 2018). This study also explored how these experiences contribute to the extant research and its implications for policies and practices on parental engagement. This multimethod study utilized three data collection methods: semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and document analysis, as delineated in the previous chapter. Chapter Four discusses information on the study's participants, research findings, data analysis, and interpretation of the results and offers a critical analysis of the findings.

Chapter Four provides a profile of the participants, followed by the results of the semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a focus group. Themes and sub-themes are presented in this chapter. The study's central question explored how rural African American parents perceived their lived experiences as co-partners in the education of their middle school students. Two related questions focused on parental self-efficacy and parental role construction. The final inquiry focused on how parents view and respond to invitations by the school to become engaged.

Participants

The participants in this study were recruited from "Buckscott," a rural public school district in east-central South Carolina. The original plan was to collect data from a demographically similar rural school district. Despite the diligent efforts of several

administrators and a well-respected gatekeeper, several attempts to recruit participants proved fruitless. An alternative site was therefore identified, and permission was granted to conduct the study. After the approval of a modified Institutional Review Board (IRB) application (see Appendix A), several gatekeepers at the alternative site were contacted and assisted with recruiting participants. In the interest of transparency, I served as the district superintendent of one of the former school districts in which the research site is located.

As stated in the data collection section in Chapter Three, up to 15 participants were to be invited to participate in semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a focus group. Through purposeful sampling, 20 African American adults were recruited and invited to participate. Thirteen of them committed to participate in the study, one did not meet the criterion of having a middle school child at the chosen site, and three were eliminated to prevent the shaman effect or the skewing of data by being well-versed in the phenomenon (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Six of the nine participants completed semi-structured interviews, and three attended the focus group. Five participants shared self-selected documents consisting of a back-to-school orientation flier and a student handbook. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants.

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that the number of participants to reach thematic saturation for a phenomenology study can range from three to 10. Malterud (2016) posited that data saturation is achieved when no new data emerge or there is no benefit from adding participants to the sample. Since the saturation point was met with the nine participants, recruiting or inviting other participants was not necessary.

I began the findings of this hermeneutic phenomenological study by alphabetically introducing the six participants of the semi-structured interviews. I also separated the focus

group alphabetically as well by their pseudonyms. The rationale for the introductions and brief biographical information of each participant was to give the reader an insight into the lifeworlds of the rural African American parents. During the interviews and focus group, earnest efforts were made to bracket my biases and preconceived assumptions. I was aware that hermeneutics could involve the linear movement from subjectivity to objectivity, and the former can bias the researcher (Ratner, 2002). The data collected and analyzed from all sources was sufficient and appropriate to eliminate the imposition of my theoretical constructs or vitiate the authentic experiences of the participants (Ratner, 2002).

Data collected during the interviews and focus groups were audio and video recorded. Responses were transcribed verbatim. When there needed to be more clarity in responding to inquiries, follow-up questions were asked. At times, the participants vented their frustrations on school-parent-related issues. During these incidences, participants were reminded of the nature of the study. They were allowed to elaborate on their lived experiences related to the phenomenon.

Data analyzed and presented is germane to the study and contributes to understanding the phenomenon. All eight female participants and one male father were 35 years of age or older and were self-employed or worked outside the home. One female participant was a grandmother and legal guardian who experienced limited mobility. She emotionally expounded on how her disability affected her parental role construction. One participant is an employee of the school system, and one was a former employee. Seven participants are lifelong residents of the rural community and were educated in their children's middle school. All participants shared their varied and rich cultural and social experiences, types of parental role construction as a parent of a middle schooler, and their perceptions of parental engagement.

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Table 1

Parent Participants

Parent Participant	Age Range	Data Collection Method	Employment Status	Highest Level of Education
Annetta	46-55	Interview Document	Full-time	Some College
Desiree	46-55	Interview Document	Full-time	Master's
Devonna	36-45	Interview Document	Full-time	Bachelor's
Faith	36-45	Focus Group	Full-time	Some College
Franklin	46-55	Interview	Full-time	Some College
Gerry	46-55	Focus Group Document	Full-time	Some College
Julia	26-35	Focus Group	Full-time	High School
Shelia	46-55	Interview Document	Disabled	Some College
Wanda	36-45	Interview	Full-time	Some College

Interview Participants

All semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually using the Zoom platform. The

participants preferred virtual interviews. Two participants had earned a post-secondary degree,

with one holding a master's degree. Only one of the interviewees did not have some post-

secondary education. Four participants were employed outside the home, one worked remotely from home, one operated a small business, and one was a disabled grandmother. Two participants ranged in age from 36-45, and four ranged from 46-55.

Annetta

Annetta, a recent widow, is a lifelong resident of the community and an alumna of the combined middle and high school that her son now attends. Annetta is a mother of six children. Two of her children have earned college degrees from notable state universities. One child graduated college as valedictorian, and the other as salutatorian. When asked about being acknowledged by the school, Annetta replied that the school "appreciates and acknowledges " her parent's contribution because of her children's behavioral and academic performance. She states that her children's academic success reflects her core values and supportive role as a parent and partner with the school. Annetta adds that the school "thinks a lot of me" by asking her to hold leadership positions.

Desiree

Desiree is an alumna of the school district. She is also e held several professional roles as a classroom teacher, after-school coordinator, and certified counselor in the district. Her daughter, entering her second year on the middle school campus, is an honor-roll student. She attributes her child's academic success and social and behavioral growth to her engagement with the school. Desiree attributed her active engagement to her parent's involvement with the school when she was a student.

Devonna

Devonna expresses excitement at being recruited for this study. As an alumna of the school district, Devonna believes that she received a first-rate education. She is also a graduate

of one of the state's historical black colleges (HBCUs) and is a practicing professional in the social service field. Devonna has two middle school children; the older one is in the eighth grade. She believes that parental engagement can be strengthened by regular communication with and timely responses from the school. Devonna suggests open forums as a practical method of engaging parents.

Franklin

Franklin is the only male participant in the study. His small business allows him to interact with many of the town's residents. Franklin grew up in a single-parent household with a mother who was a fervent advocate of education. Unlike what his mother perceived, he believes education should not just be about graduating and getting a "good job." Rather, education should encourage entrepreneurship and "owning" the job. Franklin believes that engagement begins at home with the parents.

Shelia

Shelia is a grandmother and legal guardian of her middle school grandson. She has done extensive work as a volunteer in the district. Before her disability, she worked as a substitute teacher. Shelia believes that parental engagement is not limited to assisting the child with homework or school-related endeavors but providing resources and ensuring the child develops the character to be successful in school. She often tells her middle schooler to "behave and have manners." She believes that parental engagement is an everyday undertaking, and it begins with having her grandson read for at least 30 minutes each day after school.

Wanda

The school district currently employs Wanda. She is also the parent of a recent high school graduate, a high schooler, a middle school student, and a pre-kindergartner. Wanda also

works part-time after school and on the weekends. She believes she is "very, very good" at engaging in her son's academic and athletic pursuits. Wanda states that if parents are more attentive to what is going on in the school and participate more, students will be better behaved and more academically focused. She also believes that as parents engage with the school, they will better understand what is occurring in their children's classrooms.

Focus Group Participants

The focus group session was held virtually at the participants' request. Ten participants were invited to the Zoom meeting, with only three committing to the focus group. Two of the three participants received some post-secondary education but no degree. All participants are employed, with two flexible working hours or at night. One participant was in the age band of 26-35; one in 36-45; and one in 46-55. All of the participants are lifelong residents of the community and graduates of the high school.

Faith

Faith believes that parental engagement is essential in working with the school to meet her son's needs. She stated that when she engages with the school, she is better equipped to assist her son with what he is "strong on and what he is not so strong on." When asked about the types of invitations by the school that resonate with her, Faith answered that any type of communication is essential.

Gerry

Gerry's son is a seventh grader at "Buckscott Middle School." She believes there are several deterrents to parents' willingness to become involved in their children's education. She also believes that the school must be receptive to and accepting of all families' cultural differences and backgrounds. Gerry said that when a teacher acknowledged and respected her

religious belief as a Jehovah's Witness and did not penalize her child for not engaging in a class project that conflicted with their religious belief.

Julia

Julia is a single mother of a seventh-grade middle school student. The participant has no college experience and is a lifelong community resident. She states that she has a keen interest in what her child is learning and often asks his teachers how he is doing academically. For Julia, her participation in parental engagement activities is based on what activity or program appeals to her son or what could benefit her role as a parent.

Results

This session includes information on the three data collection methods, including interviews with eight questions, reflective responses on participants" provided invitations or other documents of choice from the participants, and eight focus group questions. Semi-structured interviews with the six participants lasted from forty minutes to an hour. These interviews were designed to elicit information and find themes and sub-themes related to the participants' perspectives of parental engagement at home and with the school.

Although an orientation session was planned for all participants either through Zoom meetings or face-to-face, the lack of interest and reaching an agreed-upon date and time did not occur. When a date and time were confirmed for the focus group session, with follow-up text messages and emails as reminders, of the six participants' agreeing, only three parents participated in the virtual group meeting. The data collection method was to confirm and expand on the patterns and themes of the research study. Document analysis provided data on parents' responses to the school's invitations for parental engagement. The use of multiple methods provided methodological triangulation.

A choreographic or data analysis spiral approach was used in the collection, analysis, view, re-analysis, and review of the collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gellweiler, 2011). The thematic analysis process included pattern recognition, coding, and categorizing collected data from the three sources (Bettencourt et al., 2020). The coded data was viewed through a connection with the study's purpose (Bettencourt et al., 2020). Specific words, phrases, and ideas emerged during the analysis of each data collection method. Four themes and three sub-clusters emerged from the interviews, the focus group, and the documents.

Additionally, detailed textual descriptions, including quotes from the participants, provided an understanding of the meaning and essence of lived experiences of the participants of the study. These themes, sub-themes, and clusters of ideas were coded and organized according to their frequency. Using the MAXQDA software application, textual and structural descriptions were identified (see Table 2). In order of frequency and associated words, the themes that emerged were parental role construction, communications, community engagement, and parental self-efficacy (see Table 3). Sub-themes were acknowledgment, perceptions, and school leadership.

Table 2

Emergent Themes with Textural and Structural Elements

Themes	Codes
Parental Role Construction	Participate in school activities
	Volunteer
	Realistic expectations
	Involve
	Engage with the school
	Attend events
	Inquire how day is going
	Provide resources
	Read daily
	Help with homework
Communications	Invitations
	Social media
	Surveys
	Forums
	Opportunities to talk
	Delay in responding
	PowerSchool
	Phone conferences
	Personal Calls
Community Involvement	Programs
	Forum
	School and district leadership should be visible
	Parent's involvement influenced by other parents
	Parent night out
	Involve parents in decision making
Parental Self-Efficacy	Thanks/Gratitude for involvement
	Respect
	Staff Attitude
	Instill Confidence
	Happy/ Harmonious home environment

Table 3

Frequency of Related Words from Semi-Structured Interviews

Themes	Frequency of Related Words
Parental Role Construction	142
Communications	39
Community Engagement	42
Parental Self-Efficacy	26

Theme 1: Parental Role Construction

The dominant leitmotif that appeared throughout the semi-structured interviews and the focus group was parental role construction. All participant enthusiastically discussed their activities and mindset of parental engagement relative to their actions at home and school to ensure their children's academic success and social-emotional growth. The participants elaborated on expectations they have established with their children, how they are engaged with the school, and their day-to-day involvement in their children's education. The participants all emphasized the value and importance of education.

Most participants viewed parental role construction as a cooperative relationship between the home and school in providing academic support to the child. Participants also perceived that parental role construction is not limited to school-centric activities. Instead, these African American parents viewed parental role construction as extending the child's learning opportunities and reinforcing or assisting with what the child is doing academically or in extra-curricular activities.

Phases of "helping with homework," "participating in school, or, as Franklin articulated, " being very hands-on" defined how these African American parents perceived their parental role construction. Annetta expressed her opinion on parental role construction, " I try to be involved in things or activities that the school has." Devonna stated that she tries to " stay in contact with the teachers as much as possible and keep an open line of communication with them." The perceptions expressed by the participants embodied the premise that parental role construction is the responsibility of the parents both at home and in mutually beneficial relationships with the school to ensure that the child receives a " proper education that he needs," as opined by Annetta.

Sub-theme I: Active Engagement

Responses collected and analyzed from interviews and the focus group suggested that the participants are more actively engaged than passive or reactive in their child's education. Interviewees expressed that they are actively engaged at home and school through multiple means and approaches, including exposure to cultural enrichment excursions and appropriate televised educational programs. Desiree affirmed her role construction at home, school, and in enrichment activities. She stated, "At home, I can say that I help with homework. And when we are riding or doing things or visiting different areas, like museums or like this weekend, this summer we went to the Coca-Cola Museum in Atlanta, and there we learn lots of things as a family.

Annetta described herself as actively involved both at home and school. She said she helps "my child with his or her homework and asks how the day went. I keep communicating with him on a day-to-day basis on what he has done in school or how was school." Shelia stated that her disability limits her from being physically engaged at the school level. However, she added that her grandson is required to practice work and read each day. When asked about ways of being engaged in the education process in the home, Shelia responded, "The first question I ask is, "what you do today?" Every day, she said, her grandson must read for 30 minutes.

The African American parents who were interviewed did not accept the idea that their children's maturation and the transition to the middle school environment negated their parental responsibilities as being actively engaged. Wanda stated that she diligently tries to provide her son with what "he needs to move on to the next level." Desiree provided a different perspective regarding the active engagement of parents. She believes parents are more engaged when their children are in the first year of middle school. She suggested that parental engagement at this

level could be attributed to the fact that the students are "just getting to the middle school, and they are trying to learn different things." She further articulated that parents are "trying to be there for their for their children." However, she expressed that parents become less involved as students transition to higher grades.

Sub-theme II: Parents' Expectations

Based on the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group, the research study found that verbal affirmations and high expectations are connected to parental engagement. These expectations were not limited to the child's academic performance but encompassed what parents expect the school to deliver in ensuring that the child has a rewarding experience in a safe and nurturing environment.

Although four participants in the semi-structured interviews indicated that their middle schoolers are academically gifted or honor roll students, they all expressed high but realistic expectations. Wanda stated, "I always tell him to just do your best." Annetta also elaborated on the importance of having high expectations when responding to the inquiry on her views of parental engagement. She responded,

> So, when school started back in August, my kids are ready.
> Because of the fact I didn't have that parental involvement
> when I was growing up. So I want better for my kids because
> [sic] what I didn't have. I don't want them to be doing what
> mom and dad did. I want them to be better. So that's why I feel
> engaged with my kids and be involved, because I want better
> for my kids.

Participants explicitly stated that they want their children to matriculate from high school and pursue higher educational aspirations and professional careers. Annetta elaborated on why she is motivated as an active partner with the school in her children's education. She said, "I want better for my kids because what I didn't have. I don't want them to be doing what mom and dad did. I want them to be better. So that's why I feel engaged with my kids and be involved, because I want better for my kids." Based on the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group, the research study found that verbal affirmations and high expectations are connected to parental engagement. These expectations were not limited to the child's academic performance but encompassed what parents expect the school to deliver in ensuring that the child has a rewarding experience in a safe and nurturing environment.

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Participants explicitly stated that they want their children to matriculate from high school and pursue higher educational aspirations and professional careers. Franklin elaborated on why

he is motivated as an active partner with the school in the education of his middle school child. He said,

> Our end goal for our kids is not college compared to our parents and that generation because college wasn't even a thought for a lot of them. And so, their end game for their kids was being able to go to college. Our endgame is to surpass college. So, our involvement is more. I think that it is important.

Theme 2: Communications

The importance of communication between the home and school was the second most noted leitmotif emerging from the data analysis. Several parents expressed the importance of the school being proactive in fostering continuous lines of communication with parents through various methods, including effectively using various social media applications. With communication, intentional and well-planned activities and actions to promote parental engagement are likely to occur. Wanda further expounded on the importance of communication. She said, "if there is no communication, how would the parents actually know what is going on." Communication is an essential tool for promoting and sustaining parental engagement.

Participants also viewed communication as a form of respect for their role in the involvement of their children's education. Faith, a focus group participant, experienced a situation where she stated that no prior notice was given to parents about a change in school practice. She expressed, "...it goes back to the communication. There are going to be those instances, you know, and parents are going to get fired up mad about that." The word "that" in the context of the inquiry and response referred to a lack of communication. When the home initiates communication, and if there is non-responsiveness or a delay in response, parents can

become frustrated and not become or remain engaged. It could also result in selective participation in school-centric activities.

Faith provided a parent's perspective on the lack of responses by the school to parents. She said, "if I send them notes or letter or whatever and they disregard anything that I've asked or anything that I say, I will probably still get involved because that's the kind of person I am. Faith further clarified her response by stating, "but it just feels as though if I'm not being listened to or my child is not being listened to. Then yeah, I probably won't get involved, especially if there's a program or something that, no, probably won't have my participation."

Sub-theme 1: Use of Social Media

Participants believed that the effective use of social media could improve parental engagement. Although numerous communication methods exist, such as alerts and a parent communication portal, parents often learn about activities and events from other parents' social media. According to Annetta, other parents often use social media to disparage the school. "We love to get on social media and say bad about our schools and our community," she stated. Desiree believes that social media is an excellent avenue for engaging parents, observing that "parents like Facebook." The school can benefit from engaging parents through social media, she suggested. "Informing parents of upcoming events will be perfect because they really love social media, especially Facebook," Desiree reflected.

Devonna disagreed with Desiree. She thought the school should diligently combine traditional forms of communication with technology. Devonna commented, "Everybody is not technology savvy with those types of things. So if you use those, they should also follow up with literature. You know, paperwork, letters in the mail, and things of that sort."

Sub-theme II: Lack of Communication by School

Franklin answered the question directly when asked how the school and district can strengthen parental engagement: "communicate more." Gerry, a focus group participant, believes that a lack of communication often hinders parental engagement. "I feel as though that communication is a very big key to me because I want to know what's going on. And if you're not willing to tell me, then that would deter my husband and me from participating in any school activities." Wanda, another focus group participant, concurred. She believed that the lack of consistent communication has contributed to a gross misunderstanding between the home and school and between teachers and parents. She responded to the possible deterrents to parental engagement by stating that a "lack of communication can cause a misunderstanding with parents or between a parent or teacher or parent and a staff member." Devonna stated she is more likely to learn of events and activities sponsored by the school from her son rather than from the school. She asserted that the school should "communicate directly with parents and not just the children."

Franklin and Annetta attributed the lack of engagement to the child's age. Both believed that students become less inclined to share information with their parents as they mature. Both participants believe the school must do more to apprise parents of events and activities through alert programs such as PowerSchool and Parent Square. Annetta opined that parents see their children attending middle and high school as "grown up" and are less likely to be involved, or the children "don't tell them" about programs and events. Franklin mentioned a "communication gap between the parents and their teenagers." This gap, he expressed, hinders parental engagement and communication between the home and school because middle and high school students "only answer the questions asked, and then you may not be asking the right ones."

Theme 3: Community Involvement

A theme that became obvious during the coding process was community involvement. When asked how parental engagement had changed from when the participants were in school to what it is like now that they are parents, several respondents said that school personnel were more visible in the community. Franklin reflected on the involvement of teachers in the community and with the lives of families and students. He recalled that as a student, "the teacher knew everyone, and everyone respected the teacher, and the teacher made home visits." Understanding the importance of parental engagement in strengthening parental engagement, Annetta stated that the community knew each child, and "the community back then more involved of how child upbringing was at when I was growing up compared to how it is now." Back then, according to Annetta, was the time between the late 1970s and early 1980s when she attended school.

Sub-theme I: Visibility of School and District Leadership

Desiree describes Buckscott Middle School as "family oriented." This former employee stated that one of the reasons she transferred her children into the school system was the family-like environment. "That's why I chose for my children to be in that district because to me it's like a family-oriented district. Everyone is easy to talk to and support you," expressed Desiree. According to her interactions with the school, Wanda concurred that her child had "very caring teachers, who were right there working with me." However, other respondents expressed grave concerns that the school has insulated itself from the community. Annetta agreed that there is a disconnect between the home and school. She stated that many parents "do not know what is going on in the schools." Faith opined that "everybody has different things going on and they (parents) may not be able to go to the school." Annetta expressed that school personnel must be

more visible in the community. She suggested that increased visibility of school personnel would likely result in parents desiring and becoming involved. "Go out in the community instead of having them to come to the school. Show them that you care because action speak louder than word," said Annetta. Franklin concluded that the school must "reach out in the community and get them involved more."

Sub-theme II: Providing Opportunities for Engagement

Several participants explicitly stated that many mitigating factors could impede parental engagement in the school. If parents are going to be engaged, programs and activities must be tailored to their needs. Faith stated that parents would be partners in their children's education if the school offers programs and lectures. Devonna added,

> Just as I said to involve the community more, you know, involve the
>
> parents engaged them more by giving them those opportunities to
>
> be able to come out and for being able to discuss what's openly
>
> going on with the teachers and with the administrative staff so that
>
> they'll be able to get everything situated. They'll have that
>
> opportunity to talk about what's going on.

Theme 4: Parental Self-Efficacy

The final theme from the semi-structured interviews and focus group was parental self-efficacy. The respondents were very vocal in their role construction and influential factors for being engaged. However, they also said barriers that could impede other parents from taking an active role in the child's education within the school environment. Wanda expressed the sentiment that parental self-efficacy can be affected by situational factors, such as employment and transportation. Devonna concurred that these situational factors are not deterrents to

engagement and do not affect her engagement. She said, "I'm always there. We're always supporting our sons, always being their biggest cheerleader for every single thing that they do." Shelia said, "I'm a concerned grandparent and I'm doing all I can do at home to make sure that he is getting a good education." Other interviewees and focus group participants mentioned influences on and barriers to parental self-efficacy.

Sub-theme I: Influences on Parental Self-Efficacy

Although the term "self-efficacy" was not used with the participants, questions were framed to elicit reflection on attitudes, feelings, and social persuasion relative to parental engagement. Desiree emphasized that the personal gratification of helping a student was more critical than tokens of appreciation or public acknowledgment. She elaborated, "I don't need a lot to make me happy or feel like I'm doing well. So, I do what I want and need to do for the children."

Annetta acknowledged that she was motivated to become involved in her child's education because her parents had not been able to engage in her education. "Because with my parents, my father had, I think, maybe a third-grade education and my mom maybe had a fifth-grade education. So, I depended mostly on my siblings to help me back then." Devonna said that her parents built her self-esteem and made her believe she could accomplish her goals, including graduating from college. "I got my parental engagement from my parents from what has been instilled in me. So, what they did for me, I have no choice but to do for mine. It is easy to do because I just mirror how I was raised.

Sub-theme II: Barriers to Engagement

Participants elaborated on obstacles to parental engagement. Faith, explaining why she was not more engaged, stated that her work schedule is "never set." Gerry concurred that her

work schedule from 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. creates difficulties in attending meetings or serving in a leadership role in any school organization. "I certainly don't want to commit myself to being president or secretary or whatever it is for the PTO because I would never probably be able to do that because of my work schedule."

Julia offered a different perspective. She stressed the importance of how parents may be treated and the lack of responsiveness from the school. Julia stated, "If I sent the teacher her a note or if I called to reach out to her regarding a situation and she just or he doesn't reply back to me or get back to me," she is less inclined to be engaged. She also said, "if you go in the school to visit and you have someone greeting you with nasty attitudes that makes you don't want to get involved because you don't feel comfortable enough to get involved."

Beyond influences and barriers that may personally influence their ability or willingness to be engaged, several participants in the semi-structured interviews and focus group spoke of the factors that may deter other parents from becoming engaged. Annetta stated, "We want to see the other parents because they [the administrators] want them to be a part of the school." Franklin emphasized, "Maybe the parent cannot understand what is going on, or maybe the school is reaching out to the parent that don't want help." He concluded with his thoughts on the inquiry of support the school can provide to engage parents by saying, "it's about adult literacy."

Research Question Responses

In this research study, I sought to explore and ascribe meaning to the lived experiences of parental engagement among rural African American parents of middle school students. I was methodical in collecting and analyzing data from semi-structured interviews, parent-provided documents, and a focus group that responded to the central research question and the three sub-

questions of this hermeneutic phenomenological study. Table 4 provides an overview of how the themes are related to the central research question, and the guiding questions.

Table 4

Overview of Themes and Research Questions

Theme	Research Questions	Summary of Findings
Parental Role Construction	▪ Central Research Question ▪ Sub-Question 1 ▪ Sub-Question 2 ▪ Sub-Question 3	Parents indicated in their responses that their engagement with the school is not limited to school-centric activities. Instead, parents provided a litany of activities they engage in at home and within the community to promote active engagement. All participants believed they could contribute to their children's education and the school.
Communication	▪ Central Research Question ▪ Sub-Question 3	All participants, without exception, expressed that communication between the home and school is essential. Communication methods should extend between electronic notifications. Child-specific invitations have a more significant impact on engaging parents in school-centric activities.
Community Engagement	▪ Central Research Question ▪ Sub-Question 2 ▪ Sub-Question 3	Most of the participants wanted other parents to become involved in school-centric activities. They also desire the school to be a "hub" in the community for extended adult learning opportunities and cultural enrichment activities for families.
Parental Self-Efficacy	▪ Central Research Question ▪ Sub-Question 2	Even when parents felt they lacked the necessary skills to assist their children academically, they did not focus on their deficits but strengths. Participants expressed that hindrance to engagement was not predicated on personal and situational factors. From an interpretative stance, it became clear to me as a researcher that all participants felt that social or cultural factors did not influence their psychological and cognitive abilities to effect positive changes in their children's education.

Central Research Question

The central research inquiry was, "What are the perceptions and lived experiences of rural African American middle-school parents and their involvement in parental engagement activities?" Neubauer et al. (2019) posited that hermeneutic phenomenology explores the experiences individuals encounter in their daily lives and their lifeworlds. The participants in this study viewed parental engagement through the lens of their interactions with the school, the establishment of norms and expectations for the child and the school, their relationships with other parents, and an effective communication network between the school and the community or "the village." The participants also saw their lifeworlds as intertwined with other families of middle school students and are connected to the experience through nuclear and extended familial ties and social worlds. According to Dobbie et al. (2018), the social world is where individuals share "meanings, purposes, knowledge, understandings, identities' which affect how and who they interact with" (p. 208).

All participants viewed parental engagement as a mutually beneficial partnership between the home and school. Specific activities take place in the home and are supported at the school and vice versa. Gerry, a focus group participant, described the relationship between the home and school in terms of parental engagement. She elaborated that parents should let the school administration know what is "going on mostly in our lives, especially regarding our children. When the kids leave us, it's called a schoolhouse, so they're there to learn more, and the school to protect them as we would in the household." Gerry concludes that school and home go hand-in-hand."

Sub-Question One

Sub-question one inquired, "How does African American parents' self-efficacy influence their decisions to become involved with the school? Wittkowski et al. (2017) defined parental self-efficacy as the parent's belief in his or her self-perceived capacity to perform his or her parental role construction. To fully understand this sub-question, it is necessary to examine it through the themes of parental self-efficacy and role construction. Shelia equated her parental self-efficacy with her role as a surrogate and her ability to perform her parental responsibilities adequately. She said, "I'm a concerned grandparent, and I'm doing all I can do at home to make sure that he is getting a good education." Annetta viewed her parental competence through the lens of the positive and acceptable behavior of her son. She said, "They see something in me through my child or the work that I have done at the school. When the school sees the child is well-mannered and respected, that child represents the parents."

Sub-Question Two

How do African American parents describe their role in their children's education? Hoover-Dempsey and Jones (1997) posited that one of the components of parental role construction is parents' perception of their responsibility for their child's education. All the participants indicated that they were "100 % engaged," as Devonna made a mathematical comparison regarding her level of engagement. This mother of two middle school students expressed, "for me and my husband, we are 100% engaged in what they're doing and how they're getting it done." She elaborated on her responsibilities and behavior. Devonna said, "I'm always asking a ton of questions to my kids and trying to find out what's going on in school. I'm always asking those questions every single day. You know, we're 100% engaged." Franklin stated, "me, as well as my wife and our extended family are very, very hands on with education." He said his

parental role construction relates to his competency in assisting his child. "At home with all the kids, I help basically with the math part, and I also help with writing. I'm good at numbers."

Sub-Question Three

The inquiry, "How do African American parents describe their response to the school's invitations to become involved?" sought to understand how the school engages the parents through its invitations for involvement. This question, explicitly asked with the focus group participants, resonated more personally with each respondent. Participants in the semi-structured interviews and the focus group agreed that the school communicates through the district's alert system, Parent Square, emails, phone calls, and flyers.

Unlike the participants in the semi-structured interviewees, who spoke of the types of communication received from the school, this group spoke more generally about what motivates them to become involved. When asked, "What types of invitations seem to resonate with you and make you more inclined to participate in your child's education?" Faith stated that the school sends home a flyer or an email with a "catchy like parent workshops or different little things where I see where I can benefit from it, I'll take interest in it." Gerry and Wanda said they would be more likely to accept any invitation that interested their children.

Several participants in the focus group and semi-structured interviews submitted at least one document. The participants were asked to write their initial perceptions of the school-specific invitations. Shelia wrote that a flyer inviting parents to an open house made her feel like "our involvement is the key to our children's success." Desiree wrote, "this invitation is an opportunity to get acquainted with my child's teachers."

Summary

Chapter four provided an overview of the concept of parental engagement. The chapter examined the lived experiences of rural African American parents of middle school students by providing detailed descriptions of six semi-structured interview participants and three focus group participants. Data collected from the semi-structured interviews, focus group, and participants' school-issued documents were analyzed through the choreographic method. This method involved listening to and transcribing the texts from the interviews and focus group, several readings, re-reading the transcripts, coding the data, summarizing the coded data, and interpreting the data through memoing. The four themes of parental role construction, communication, parental efficacy, and community involvement emerged from the data. The sub-themes were barriers to engagement, use of social media, district leadership visibility in the community, and opportunities for parental engagement. The chapter discussed the central research question and the three sub-questions that guided the study.

The nine rural African American parents of middle school students, selected through purposive sampling, provided vivid descriptions of lived experiences on parental engagement as viewed through their relationships and social and cultural experiences with their children, the school, and the broader community. This study encompassed the textual and structural descriptions of the participants' perspectives on parental engagement. Without a dissenting voice, the participants advocated the importance of quality education for their children. Interestingly, they were also of one mindset that school personnel must make a more concerted effort to engage parents by being more visible in the community and actively fostering parental engagement.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived parental engagement of rural African American parents in the Buckscott School District. Chapter five discusses and interprets the findings. In the discussion section, I explain the importance of understanding a paradigm shift in the lived experiences of African Americans through Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1994) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) revised model of parental involvement. Their work can contribute to more meaningful, authentic, and reciprocal home-school partnerships and improved communication for the benefit of children, families, and the school. Following the discussion, I present the theoretical and methodological implications. I then explore the limitations of my work and offer recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Discussion

This section expounds on the hermeneutic phenomenological study of the lived experiences and perceptions of nine African American parents of rural middle school students. This section will provide the contextual connection between research findings and Chapter Two's empirical and theoretical literature. It will confirm that parental role construction, parental self-efficacy, and communication barriers affect rural African American parents' perceived and actual engagement in their middle school student's education.

Interpretation of Findings

I used van Manen's methodology for the hermeneutic phenomenological study to acquire data for exploring and interpreting the lived experiences of rural African American parents of middle school students. I also relied on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1994) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) revised model of parental involvement as my framework. This study used purposive sampling, which entails specified criteria exhibited by the participants before the commencement of the study (Padilla-Díaz, 2015). All nine participants were African American parents of a middle school student. The design allowed participants to describe their lived experiences through focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Data was collected and analyzed using a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology to identify themes and sub-themes.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The theme of parental role construction includes parents' perspectives of how they are engaged in their child's education at home and school. Sub-themes associated with this first significant theme include active engagement and parents' expectations. Theme two of communication includes sub-themes of social media and lack of communication by the school. The third central theme of community involvement includes the visibility of school and district leaders in the community and multiple opportunities for parental engagement as sub-themes. The last theme focusing on self-parental efficacy is supported by the sub-themes of influences and barriers related to the theme.

Interpretation # 1. Cultivating Examples of *Parental* Engagement. Familial support and fictive kin relationship were used to model participants' perceptions of parental engagement. When asked to compare their parental engagement to that of their parents, only two of the six

interviewees indicated that their parents played a significant role in their education. Devonna stated that her parents offered moral support and always attended when she performed or received an academic award or special recognition. Desiree, whose mother had been president of the parent-teacher association (PTA), also stated that her parents were actively engaged in her education. The other four interview participants said that education had been a priority and high academic performance a non-negotiable expectation set by their parents.

Desiree's and Devonna's comments refute the premise that African American parents are less engaged in their middle school children's education (Marchand et al., 2019). Data from interviews, focus groups, and document analysis suggest that African American parents of middle school students are equally engaged through their parental role construction. Although not exhaustive, these activities associated with engagement via role construction include exposing their children to cultural enrichment activities and events, requiring daily reading, communicating with the school, monitoring schoolwork, and serving on school governance committees. The nine participants viewed their parental role construction through parent-focused, school-focused, and partnership-focused activities (Lupiani, 2004).

The experiences of the interviewees;' parents did not reflect the traditional or Eurocentric view of parental engagement as comprising activities, actions, and behaviors (Arce, 2019). Kelley (2020) posited that engagement is not an activity but a paradigm shift from involvement to ownership and commitment. Faith, a focus group participant, defines parental engagement as "being able to be involved in the student's schoolwork, communicating effectively with the school, and receiving feedback from the teachers."

In reviewing and coding source data from interviews, four participants cited a lack of or limited parental engagement in their education. These participants stated that relatives and

community members took an interest in their education. Annetta states that since her father had a third-grade education and her mother had completed the fifth grade, she had to depend on her siblings for academic assistance.

Extended family systems can include teachers and fictive kin. According to Hunter et al. (2019), fictive kin is essential in a child's development and upbringing. Wanda says, "my parents were not really involved because they were always working majority of the time." She adds that, unlike her parents, she is a stay-at-home parent and engages with the school by supporting academic and extra-curricular activities. Franklin recalled how his mother was engaged and the role of fictive kin in his education. He says his mother was a single parent who placed a high value on education but worked all the time and could not attend school activities. Franklin remarks, "I come from the community where the teachers knew someone who knew my mom or so if anything was out of line, they would directly tell her."

Parents and their surrogates modeled parental engagement was modeled to the participants. African Americans use many culturally distinctive socialization approaches, beliefs, and engagement behaviors by participating in school functions, joining committees, or helping at home (Cooper & Smalls, 2010). The myriad of engagement behaviors exhibited and observed by the participants profoundly affect their parental role construction, their children's academic achievement, and their relationship with the school.

Interpretation #2. Respect for Cultural, Social, and Racial Diversity. African Americans are not a monolithic group. African Americans have a range of traditions, beliefs, social and economic statuses, political affiliations, and ideologies (Marchand et al., 2019). There is, therefore, no single model of parental engagement. Likewise, to view the role construction of

parents through a deficit lens or in terms of the social-cultural capital of white Americans is also a fallacy.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in 2020, African Americans comprised 15% of the national population of more than 49.4 million public school students. Depending on their location, they might or might not have had African American teachers. According to the NCES (2022), 89% of public-school teachers in rural areas are white. This figure contradicts the data obtained from the rural research site, where 13 of the 15 teachers are African American. Egalite et al. (2015) identified educational benefits to students taught by teachers who share their race or ethnicity and can be their mentors, role models, or advocates. Markowitz et al. (2020) posited that additional benefits include improved parental engagement, better attendance, and better academic performance.

Franklin said, "I have had different experiences. Some teachers are defensive out the gate, and they put, put some kids in a box, and I'm not saying all teachers. But a lot of them do." Franklin also recalled an incident where his son attended a suburban middle school before transferring to the research site. He stated that the white female teacher immediately labeled his child. "The lady kept sending bad notes home. I know that he was not that type of kid. We were at a predominantly white school. She put him in this box and recommended medicine. At the beginning of the year, she automatically put him in a box on how she separates the kids."

It cannot be assumed that all white teachers in predominantly minority or majority schools stigmatize African American students. Desiree states that when her child was traumatized by an African American teacher's negative attitude, she went to the teacher with her concerns. She adds, "you don't want teachers to know the problems that you sometimes have because it could cause more problems for the child."

All participants noted that parental engagement could be enhanced through a school culture that treats students and parents fairly and respectfully. When asked what would hinder her from being an engaged parent at school, Faith responded, "teachers that seem nonchalant that would stop me." She then said," I have to feel like my son is being surrounded by people that would treat him as if they would treat their own. If I don't feel that connection, I'm not going to really care." In speaking of respect for and acceptance of parents, Annetta says, "I think some of them might feel that they're going to be judged. So, they hold back and not be a part of the school. They do not want to be 'blast' as the children say."

Regardless of teachers' ethnicity or social background, the participants believed that a non-judgmental attitude and acceptance of all students can motivate parents to become engaged. According to Faith, "Children come from different backgrounds. They have different things going on in the household that would probably deter them from wanting to go to school or parents become involved." Franklin concludes with an analogy of operating a business. "The kid may not be getting sleep, might be sharing a room, or not eating enough. But you know, that's kind of what the teacher signed up for. You know, like when you own a business, you can't dictate the overhead.

Interpretation # 3: Return on investment. Garbacz et al. (2018) provide empirical data on the tangible benefits of parental engagement for middle school students. They said that during this period of biological and social maturation and changes in school environments, middle school students face many challenges that can lead to defiant peer relationships or harmful behavior. Garbacz et al. (2018) suggested that parental engagement is essential at this critical developmental time.

Borman et al. (2019) concur that in the absence of social and emotional support, middle school students are more vulnerable to a decline in academic performance, difficulty in peer relationships, and an increased likelihood of dropping out. Julia, a focus group participant, concurred that middle school students might have a greater propensity to engage in harmful behavior. Julia stated, "of course at our kids' age and going through puberty; they have disagreements and whatnot. Some parents may or may not get along after the encounter." The encounter was explicitly implied as a verbal confrontation between parents or a physical altercation between students. Some studies have suggested that parental engagement can help change negative behavioral and academic patterns and enhance the parent-child relationship.

When asked, "What are the tangible results of your engagement in the education of your child? Annetta responded, "my children are on the Principal Honor Roll or the A/B Honor Roll, and they do not have any disciplinary problems you know from the principal or the teachers." She elaborated that being engaged "keeps [children] on the right track."

Desiree claimed that parental engagement improved her daughter's academic performance. To her, parental engagement "is beneficial to me as well as my child as well as the whole household because they are on the honor roll, doing well in school, and not having a lot of problems with her peers as well as the teachers."

Franklin said, "more than anything, believe it or not, it's the confidence that the child receives." He explained, "when a kid is involved in something, and the parent is interested in it, the kid becomes more involved." Wanda reflected that the engagement of parents in the home environment could positively affect a student. In speaking of her child's increased confidence in mastering a skill, Wanda said, "he understood how to work the problems out on his own when he went back to school."

Implications for Policy and Practice

This hermeneutic phenomenological research study on the lived experiences of rural African American parents of middle school students has significant implications for policy and practice. Implications for potential changes include strict adherence to federal (ESSA of 2015), state, and local mandates, regulations, and laws on parental engagement and providing parents and guardians with meaningful parental engagement opportunities at home and in schools. This section presents the theoretical and empirical findings and recommendations for school leadership teams, classroom teachers, district office personnel, and researchers interested in how parents perceive and perform as co-partners in their children's education.

Implications for Policy

Posey-Maddox and Haley-Lock (2020) posited that although there is federal legislation on parental engagement under No Child Left Behind, many activities center on the school. Accordingly, these efforts are limited to traditional forms of parental engagement (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020). A review of the rural school site's policy manual indicates two policies on parental engagement. *Policy KB*- Parent and Family Engagement, issued in February 2022, and *Policy KBB* Parents Rights and Responsibilities, approved in November 2020.

Policy KB outlines the responsibilities of the local school board, the schools, and parents in ensuring all stakeholders are involved in the educational process of students. The policy delineates the responsibilities under Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA). Notably, this act requires local school districts to provide multiple and authentic ways of engaging parents, including having input into developing district policies. Neither ESSA (2015) nor the *Policy KB* suggests specific types of involvement. *Policy KB* stipulates that activities could include volunteering in the school and with school programs.

Policy KBB details the rights and responsibilities of parents. Several participants wanted schools to offer more support, such as quarterly forums, enrichment, self-improvement classes, and cultural enrichment activities. Policy KBB mandates that parents and custodial parents be treated with respect by school staff. One-third of the participants mentioned a lack of respect from school staff.

One recommendation is to increase awareness of parental rights and responsibilities relative to parental engagement. This recommendation is particularly relevant given that participants in the study were unaware of their rights to organize clubs and be informed of policies and administrative decisions. Another recommendation is to create a system in which parents are apprised of changes in policies and the school's operations in a timelier manner and through several communication platforms, including social media.

Implications for Practice

Practical implications arise from the data collected and analyzed from this hermeneutic phenomenological study. These implications apply to all stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, parents, and the community. During the research, three problems were of grave concern to the participants. These problems were infrequent meaningful communication, opportunities for engagement activities that accommodate working parents and being a part of the larger community.

Although the participants noted that the school communicates with parents in various ways, many families preferred direct communication rather than through materials sent home by the student. Instead, these parents wanted regular, consistent, and informative communication from the school. These communications should offer specific suggestions on how parents can

better perform their role construction or contribute to the school in ways that affirm their abilities and social and cultural capital.

According to Park and Holloway (2018), "frequent and well-crafted communications" can have a positive effect on parents' attitudes and beliefs about how they can contribute to their children's education (p.13). Kraft and Dougherty (2013) posited that regular communication with families can improve the relationship between teacher and student, parental engagement, completion of homework, and student motivation. Communication should not be limited to phone calls, notices, or recorded voice messages. Instead, social media should be embedded in any communication plan for parental engagement.

According to Preston (2022), home and school relationships can be enhanced when educators and school leaders are receptive to parents' perspectives and needs. Working parents can find it challenging to participate in school activities (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). Eight of the nine participants in the study are employed. One parent works 12-hour shifts, so attending school activities or governance is impossible. Another parent has an irregular schedule. All parents stated the need for additional opportunities for engagement.

The last application for addressing possible and apparent barriers to parental engagement entails increased visibility and discussion opportunities. Several parents suggested the expansion of parental engagement activities in the community. More importantly, beyond meetings, parents want to interact personally with educators and school leaders, as one parent observed. Thus, community-based programs and initiatives that improve parental role construction and self-improvement can remove some impediments to parents' involvement with the school. Unlike school-based activities, these activities will meet the needs of the parents (Allen & White-Smith, 2018).

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

Practical implications arise from the data collected and analyzed from this hermeneutic phenomenological study. These implications apply to all stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, parents, and the community. During the research, three problems were of grave concern to the participants. These problems were infrequent meaningful communication, opportunities for engagement activities that accommodate working parents and being a part of the larger community.

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Limitations and Delimitations

To better understand the limitations of this study, a contextual framework for the terminologies' limitations and delimitations is necessary. Theofanidis and Fountouki (2019) posited that limitations are weaknesses over which the researcher has no control. Price and Murnan (2004) and Akanle et al. (2020) defined limitations as internal and external factors that may include methodology, characteristics, biases, or other variables, whether controlled or not by the researcher. Chetty (2016) concurred with the claim that there are limitations in qualitative research that may include time constraints, objective verification of the data collected, and the researcher's personal biases. In essence, limitations are used to affirm a study's reliability and its external and internal validity.

According to Oppong (2013), delimitations concern the "study's theoretical background, objectives, research questions, variables under study, and study sample" (Oppong, 2013, p.157).

Price and Murnan (2004) posited that the researcher can control the study, bias, or methodology through delimitation. Theofanidis and Fountouki (2019) and Oppong (2013) stated more succinctly that delimitation accomplishes the goals and objectives of the research by establishing a manageable framework.

Akanle et al. (2020) expounded that the delimitation of a study involves decisions that the researcher makes both before and during a study. These choices or decisions do include theoretical position(s), the population or characteristics of study participants, or research inquiries. According to Akanle et al. (2020), these examples are the boundaries within the researcher's control.

Limitations

There are four limitations to this research study's phenomenon: sampling size, sampling strategy, data collection method, and data analysis process. The sampling size of this hermeneutic phenomenological study on African American parents' lived parental engagement experiences was relatively small as it included only nine participants. Although numerous attempts were made to recruit twelve to fifteen participants at both an originally approved site and later at an alternative approved site, the projected goal was not met.

As delineated in Chapter 3, recruitment strategies included collaborating with gatekeepers from the school community and informing and recruiting potential participants through various means, including flyers, announcements, phone calls, letters, and follow-up emails. Despite these efforts and has received commitments from more than 15 potential participants, only nine subjects participated in the study. Nonetheless, the sample size was sufficient for thematic saturation and the scope of the study. In addition to size and

generalizability, ethnic diversity among the adult participants and geographical variation among the research sites, including urban and suburban schools, would add richness to the study.

Another limitation was the selected sampling method. This purposeful sampling method involved intentionally identifying specific characteristics for the recruitment and selection of participants who matched those identified characteristics (Oppong, 2013). Using purposeful sampling creates two potential problems for the researcher: personal bias and whether theoretical generalization can be achieved. Purposeful sampling was the most appropriate sampling instrument. However, these potential problems did not distort or generate misinterpretation in the research's findings.

As noted in Chapter Three, this study used three data collection methods: semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and document analysis. The semi-structured interviews and the focus group elicited the participants' attitudes and beliefs. It should be noted that data collection was challenging and impacted by extenuating factors such as health and safety concerns related to COVID-19, employment obligations, and time constraints. As a result, the semi-structured interviews and a focus group were conducted virtually. However, this approach did not "implicate and limit the validity and reliability" of the research (Akanle et al., 2020, p. 110).

According to Theofanidis and Fountouki (2019), data analysis methodology can be considered a limitation. I used van Manen's method of analysis for this hermeneutic phenomenological study. As the researcher, I was keenly aware that my bias, experiences, and preconceived ideas could never be fully bracketed out. Therefore, I used epoche' to suspend my judgments and focus on the participants' experiences. Accordingly, the method and purpose were designed to collect and interpret data on these experiences. This single focus on the lived experiences of African American parents excluded the perspectives of students, teachers, and

school and district administrators. Therefore, as a researcher, evaluative conclusions were limited to the study participants. Validation of the study's results could be accomplished through replication.

Delimitation

Three delimitations were placed intentionally in this study to make it more relevant and manageable (Oppong, 2013). These delimitations included the research design, theoretical frameworks, and characteristics and selection of participants. As the researcher, I intentionally selected a phenomenological study of the five different qualitative studies delineated by Creswell and Poth (2018). This design better suited the study's intention to explore and interpret the meaning of the participants' lived parental experiences. The design also gave participants opportunities to voice their perspectives by providing rich textual descriptions of their parental engagement experiences. Nigar (2020) stated that this design approach allows for describing and interpreting participants' experiences while embracing the researcher's subjectivity.

Bandura's self-efficacy theory and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's parental involvement model formed the theoretical framework for this phenomenological study. Intentionally selecting these theoretical frameworks was most appropriate for exploring parents' perceptions of parental engagement. Likewise, the juxtaposition of Bandura's self-efficacy theory and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's parental involvement model furnished interpretive insight into how parental self-efficacy interfaced with parental role construction.

The selection of participants constituted another delimitation for this study. This selection of participants according to specific characteristics was a response to the paucity of literature on the parental engagement of rural African American parents of middle school students. Posey-Maddox and Haley-Lock (2020) suggested that there is a growing need for schools to make

parental engagement activities more accessible to families, particularly those confronting social and economic disparities. Thus, the selected participants were required to meet specific criteria, the primary one being an African American parent of a middle school student residing in a selected rural school community. This population excluded ethnic variations and parents of students other than middle schoolers. The study excluded African American parents living in urban and suburban school districts. The exclusivity of these parents and purposeful sampling narrowed the focus of the study to a particular demographic. For this study, the sample size was intentional. According to Ramsook (2018), the number of participants is predicated on the data to be collected and the researcher's judgment. For this study, nine participants were used.

Recommendations for Future Research

As I sought a research topic that would fill a gap in the literature, the need for more unbiased research on the experiences of rural African American parents engaging with school leadership, personnel and educators became apparent. Thus, its purpose was to explore the lived experiences of rural African American parents with parental engagement. Indeed, this study confirmed the need for additional research on other aspects of the lived experiences of minority parents' engagement with their child's school.

One of the participants raised a concern that warrants future research: the community's engagement in the school. Participants wanted to remove the wall between the school and the community, figuratively speaking. According to Iyengar, "all learning activities need not be school based; many activities can be done in communities with or without technology, as well as in homes" (2021, p. 438). Many participants wanted school leaders and educators to be more visible in the community and have customized learning opportunities. Desiree commented that one of her elementary school students was surprised to see her out shopping "like a normal

person." Desiree concluded, "adults feel the same way when they see administrators in the street in a respectful manner. When they do, they'll [parents] will become more involvement, and they'll feel more comfortable participating in school activities."

Investigating social capital and minority parents' parental engagement is the final recommendation. Social capital was examined in the study in juxtaposition to parental engagement. Two-thirds of the participants in the semi-structured interviews indicated that when they were children, their parents were not engaged in their education because they were themselves not well educated or worked long hours. However, these participants actively engage in their child's education at home and school.

An additional study can be considered on how this generation of parents views their social capital. One participant said, "they [parents] may not be able financially to be involved." This topic could add to the body of literature on social capital and the engagement of rural African American parents in their children's education.

One participant provided insight into how social capital may influence parental role construction regarding engagement. Faith stated,"

> Everybody have [sic] different things going on. So they may just
>
> not be able to afford the go [get involved]. You know, they may not
>
> have a vehicle. It's different factors in everybody's life that
>
> could deter them from not being involved

The social and cultural of rural African Americans could add to the current body of literature from current extant studies that focus on urban parents with limited studies on social capital and how it impacts the engagement of rural African American parents.

Yulianti et al. (2020) suggested that school-centric activities significantly affect parental involvement. As indicated earlier and interpreted from the participants' insights, student invitations for engagement motivate parents to be engaged. Compared to invitations, given that a general school-specific or specific teacher invitation, parents are more likely to respond favorably to student-issued invitations. Understanding why parents are more motivated to engage with the school based on child specific non-academic invitations is a subject for additional research.

Conclusion

As noted in the literature section of this study, understanding how to forge an effective and sustainable partnership between the home and school is essential for students' academic growth and social/emotional development. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was not to revisit the voluminous research on barriers to parental engagement but to investigate the perspectives of rural African American parents of middle school students and interpret their lived experiences. Conclusively, parents should be included in meaningful and authentic parental engagement activities in their children's education.

Purposive sampling was used to identify and recruit a small group of African American parents of middle school students. Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1994) and the revised Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) were the theoretical frameworks of this study. Data was collected and analyzed from semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and document analysis. This triangulation of sources led to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. During data analysis, new insights into parental role construction, parental self-efficacy, the importance of community, and the need for community involvement emerged. This study will add to the literature on the importance and impact of rural African American parents on their children and their school.

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Appendix A
IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 11, 2022

Barbara Ragin
Sharon Michael-Chadwell

Re: Modification - IRB-FY21-22-1095 A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: PERSPECTIVES ON THE PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES OF RURAL AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENTS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

Dear Barbara Ragin, Sharon Michael-Chadwell:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-FY21-22-1095 A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: PERSPECTIVES ON THE PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES OF RURAL AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENTS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS.

Decision: Approved

Your request to change your study site to Scott's Branch Middle School in Clarendon County School District has been approved. Thank you for submitting documentation of permission from the district. Your revised, stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study in Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Appendix B

Permission Request to Conduct Study

August 2022

████████████, Superintendent
████████████████
████████████

Dear ███████████

As a former superintendent in ███████████████████████████ ███████████ ███████████, I am keenly aware of the importance and need for parental engagement. Parental engagement has always been an educational topic that I have been interested in since my early professional career as a district's coordinator of parent education and involvement. As a doctoral candidate, I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in educational leadership.

My research project, "A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study: Perspectives on Parental Engagement Strategies of African American Parents of Middle School Students." The study will explore and interpret parental engagement from the lived experiences of African American parents in a rural school with a high minority student population. Thus, the nature of this correspondence is one of a formal request to conduct a research study at ███████████ Middle School in ███████████ School District.

In conducting this hermeneutic phenomenological study, six to ten participants are needed. All participants must be of African American ethnicity. The participants must also be alumni and parents of the district who have children attending ███████████████████████. All participants will engage in an individual, semi-structured interview lasting no more than ninety minutes. The interviews may be on-site at a convenient setting during or after-school hours if approved. Likewise, the interviews may occur through Zoom if environmental or mitigating factors necessitate virtual interviews. All participants will be eligible for a $25.00 gift card incentive. Participation is strictly voluntary, and participants can withdraw from the study anytime. All data collected will be confidential, and the protection of the identification of participants will be protected, and the collection and compilation of data will be secured.

I appreciate your consideration. If you agree to grant permission to conduct the study, please send an email or an official letterhead indicating your approval. You respond via email at bragin1@liberty.edu.
Sincerely,

Barbara Ragin Champagne
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

Appendix C

Recruitment Letter

Dear Parents/ Legal Guardians:

You are receiving this letter because you are an African American parent or legal guardian of a Scott's Branch Middle student. You are being invited to participate in a research study that will give you an opportunity to voice your perceptions on the importance of parental engagement and how you support and encourage your child's education. The researcher of this study is Barbara Ragin Champagne, a doctoral candidate at Liberty University.

This study aims to understand parents' perceptions and parental engagement activities. As a parent, your voice will inform the school on ways parents communicate effectively with the school and engage in meaningful parental activities. If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to do the following:
- Participate in one audio- and video-recorded 30–60-minute, confidential individual interview.
- Participate in one audio- and video-recorded 60–90-minute focus group discussion.
- Review the interview transcript to ensure its accuracy, which should take about 20 minutes.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To
All participants will receive a **$25.00 Visa** gift card for participation in the two activities stated above.

A parent orientation will take place on [date] at [time] at [location].

If you desire to participate or are interested in learning more about this study, please contact me at bragin1@liberty.edu or fill out the statement of interest below and return it to the school's receptionist by [date].

Sincerely,

Barbara R. Champagne
Doctoral Degree Candidate

Statement of Interest

I am interested in learning more about this study and how I can participate as a volunteer.

□ The researcher has my permission to e-mail me or call me to discuss participation in this research study at following e-mail address or phone number: _____

Signature : _____

Printed Name: _____

Appendix D

Recruitment Flyer

<table>
<tr><td style="background-color:#3a8296; color:white; text-align:center">**Research Participants Needed**</td></tr>
</table>

A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study: Perspectives on the Parental Engagement Strategies of Rural African American Parents of Middle School Students

Are you 18 years of age or older?

█ Are you an African American parent/legal guardian of a middle school student attending ████████████

- Are you interested in knowing how to become a more involved parent in your child's education?

If you answered **yes** to each of the questions listed above, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to explore why and how rural African American parents are involved in their children's education at Lee Central Middle School. The study will also examine parents' perceptions of relevant parental engagement activities and possible barriers to being involved. Participants will be asked to participate in a 30- to 60-minute individual interview and a 60- to 90-minute focus group session. The interview and focus group will be audio- and video-recorded. Participants will be asked to review their transcripts to confirm the accuracy of the information, which expresses their perceptions of parental engagement. This review should take about 20 minutes to complete.

Participants will receive a $25.00 Visa gift card upon completion of the study.

A parent orientation will take place on [date] at [time] at [location]. A consent document will be given to you one week before the individual interview. They will also be available at the parent orientation.

This study is being conducted at ███████████████

███████████

███████████

If you would like to participate, contact the researcher at the phone number or email address provided below.

Barbara Ragin Champagne, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study. Please contact Barbara Ragin Champagne at (████████ or bragin1@liberty.edu for more information.

Appendix E
Consent Form

Title of the Project: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study: Perspectives on Parental
Engagement Strategies of Rural African American Parents of Middle School Students
Principal Investigator: Barbara R. Champagne, Doctoral Student, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be an African
America parent/legal guardian of a middle school student attending ███████████████
Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the study is to understand factors that may impede the engagement of parents in
the educational training of their middle school students. Information obtained will enable parents
and the local school system to better foster meaningful parental engagement activities and
strategies to support the growth of all students.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Participate in a one audio- and video-recorded, 60- to 90-minute focus group interview
   with other participants.
2. Participate in one audio- and video-recorded, 30- to 60-minute individual interview.
3. Review your interview transcripts to ensure their accuracy, which should take 20
   minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include providing definitive findings and valuable insight into how parents
can be contributory partners with the school community for advancing meaningful parental
engagement. The study's overarching nature will contribute to society by increasing the
participation rate of parents and caretakers in their parental role construction; strengthening
home-school partnerships; improving the school climate and learning environments; and
improving the academic performance of middle school students.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Face-to-face interviews and focus groups will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. Hard copy data will be stored in a locked cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and hard copy data will be shredded.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Participants will receive a $25.00 Visa gift card upon completion of the study

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

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

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

The researcher conducting this study is Barbara Ragin Champagne. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or bragin1@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Sharon Michael-Chadwell, at sdmichaelchadwell@liberty.edu.

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

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix F

Semi-Structured Individual Interview Questions

The following list of semi-structured interview questions was developed for this study:

1. In what ways have you been engaged in the education of your child at home? At school? (SQ1)

2. What are the tangible results of your engagement in the education of your child? (SQ1)

3. How would you describe your engagement with the school with that of your parents when you attended school? (SQ2)

4. In what ways do you perceive your contributions as a parent and an equal partner in your child's education are acknowledged by the school personnel? (SQ2)

5. What are your experiences with school personnel in supporting the engagement and support of parents? (SQ2)

6. What is one activity or program that you would like Buckscott to implement to increase awareness and understanding regarding the importance of parental engagement? (SQ3)

7. How do you view your engagement in your child's education? (SQ3)

8. How can the district and campus leadership's involvement with parents be strengthened? (SQ3)

Appendix G

Focus Group Questions

1. How do you define parental engagement?

2. In what ways does the school validate parents' contribution or support parents in their efforts to be engaged in their children's education?

3. What factors or actions of the school may cause parents not to be involved in their child's education?

4. What are contributing factors for parents not to become involved in their children's education?

5. How does the school invite you as a partner in your child's education?

6. What types of invitations seem to resonant with you and make you more inclined to participate as a partner in your child's education?

7. How can the school and home benefit from parental engagement?

8. How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact your involvement with the school in your child's education?

Appendix H

Participant's Selected Document