

PERCEIVED CHALLENGES OF PRE-KINDERGARTEN THROUGH FIFTH GRADE
BLACK TEACHERS

by
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Abstract

Background: Nationally, Black teachers with less than five years of experience in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms tend to face daily challenges that teachers of other skin complexions do not. Recent studies focused on Black teacher experiences have listed challenges such as racism, discrimination, lack of support, and limited growth opportunities. Although there is not a shortage of certified Black teachers in Texas according to the latest Certified Teacher Demographics by Preparation Route report (2018), there is a lack of their presence in the classroom. **Purpose:** The purpose of this qualitative case study was to utilize a social constructivist theoretical perspective to explore the challenges Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade face daily in their work environment. This study posed the following research question: 1) What are the perceived challenges of Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms? The posed research question allowed for an exploration of valuable lived experiences and data that may potentially be used to improve the overall working and teaching experiences for novice Black pre-kindergarten through fifth grade teachers. **Methods:** The study was conducted using a qualitative case study methods approach to collect and analyze data. Data was collected through interviews via Zoom video conferences with three previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Data was analyzed using the qualitative thematic analysis which included the following steps: 1) Organizing data, 2) Reading data, 3) Coding and organizing themes, 4) Reviewing of themes, and 5) Interpretation of data. **Results:** The study yielded five themes of perceived challenges of Black pre-kindergarten through fifth grade teachers. The identified themes indicated that teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt

that: 1) the lack of mentorship was a challenge for Black teachers with any level of experience; 2) the lack of professional support and guidance when entering the classroom was a challenge; 3) their daily experiences were different from their peers of other races; 4) they worked harder than their White counterparts; and 5) their professional progression was either slow or was going to be slow. **Conclusion:** The data collected from participants' responses verified commonly perceived challenges of Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. While each participant taught in different schools and locations of Texas, they all shared common obstacles and challenges. Addressing those challenges could potentially increase job satisfaction and retention of Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction

According to the latest Texas Education Agency (TEA) Employed Teacher Demographics 2013-2017 report, “A little more than three-fourths of employed regular classroom teachers are female, and about three-fifths are White” (TEA, 2017). The collected data highlights a significant gap between the numbers of employed Black and White teachers. In order to further understand this phenomenon, the focus of this qualitative case study lays in the lived experiences of Black educators, more specifically teachers, who are currently assigned as the regular classroom teacher in a public-school classroom. This qualitative study will also seek to explore the commonly perceived challenges Black teachers face while working in the realm of public grade school education; pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The study will identify the historical and current barriers that adversely impact the attrition and retention of Black teachers. Ultimately, the study should provide more insight into the shortage of Black teachers in public-school classrooms.

The Certified Teacher Demographics by Preparation Route 2013-2017 report showed a steady growth in certified Black teachers (Ramsay, April 2018). Despite the increase in the number of certified Black teachers, the lack of their presence in the classroom appears to be more evident.

The state of Texas requires all public-school teachers to become a certified teacher by meeting five state requirements: a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university; completion of an approved educator preparation

program; a passing score from the appropriate teacher certification exam; submission of a state application; and completion of a national criminal background check by fingerprinting (TEA, 2018).

It is a lengthy process to become a teacher in Texas, so it is important to promote equality in the profession. Despite the growing number of certified Black teachers in Texas, the number of Black teachers is not increasing in proportion to the number of Black students in the classrooms nor in proportion to the number of certifications that are approved by the state each year.

Exploring the perceived challenges that Black teachers self-report in their profession will help uncover important data that can provide more insight into the root cause of the shortage of Black teachers. It is likely that these challenges are not isolated occurrences or incidents that select Black teachers face but rather a systemic problem that Black teachers contend with daily.

For all intents and purposes, Black is defined as any person “of or relating to any of various population groups having dark pigmentation of the skin” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.) and any person who identifies as African American, “an American of African and especially Black African descent” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.).

Personal Narrative

Due to recent changes in demographics; I have chosen to conduct research on a topic that is important to the overall delivery of effective education of all students in rural, urban, and suburban school districts of various sizes. I am interested in learning more about the challenges Black teachers face within school districts located throughout the state of Texas and why there appears to be a shortage of Black teachers. Interviewing

Black teachers to get their personal experiences will assist me in gaining a better understanding, and ultimately give them a voice. There is a strong correlation between the perceived challenges of and the shortage of Black teachers that highlights this problem. Generally, Black teachers are silenced in the workplace due to employment and political reasons. Giving them a voice and bringing awareness to their struggle could mitigate the issues this group of teachers share. I would like to create an ongoing dialogue among teachers and administrators that could create and lead to the implementation of policies that motivate and empower Black teachers moving forward.

The neighborhood I currently reside in is predominantly White which means the teachers in our local school district are also predominantly White. This concerns me due to current research exploring the influence one Black teacher can have on Black students' academic success or the lack thereof. An example of this can be seen in the local city of Katy, Texas, which is approximately 29 miles west of downtown Houston, Texas where the classroom teachers are predominantly White. As well as the social dynamics and influence that Katy's proximity to richly diverse city of Houston has on its students who lack exposure to proportionate diversity of teachers in the classroom. Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay and Papageorge (2017) found "having at least one Black teacher in grades 3-5 significantly reduced the probability of dropping out of high school among low-income Black males by 39%" (p. 3). I am also interested in this topic because Black teachers are applying for positions in their local and surrounding school districts but very few are being selected and if they are selected for a position, it is in an urban school. I foresee that my area of interest will shed some light on current hiring practices and discrimination as well as racism. Lastly, I am a mother of two Black males that attend

public school; my sons did not have a Black teacher in grades 3-5. It is not my intent to challenge prior research but to add to it. Currently, I have the resources to ensure my children will have access to any assistance they may need to graduate from high school but others such as low-income Black males may not be privy to the same level of resources.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore challenges Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade often face daily in their work environment. Exploring these challenges will inform and educate current and future teachers and administrators about the challenges Black teachers encounter in their profession. This study should establish more interest about the way Black teachers are received and treated in their workplace.

Significance & Relevance

There is a significant gap in the employed number of Black and White teachers across the nation. According to the Digest of Education Statistics, (2017) for the school year 2015-16, the race and/or ethnicity of the nation's teachers were 80.1 percent White and 6.7 percent Black. The existing nationwide gap in teacher demographics is currently present in the state of Texas. Supporting data and research can be found and downloaded from the TEA website such data includes the regular studies about teacher demographics, teacher attrition and retention, teacher shortages, mathematics and science teachers and administrators in Texas" (TEA, 2017). The latest report on Employed Teacher Demographics 2013-2017 data highlights the significant gap between Black and White teachers in Texas. The report includes data pertaining to "regular classroom teachers (the

teacher of record) and substitute teachers assigned as the teacher of record” (TEA, 2017). While regular classroom teachers were predominantly White, “substitute teachers were less likely to be White and more likely to be Black/African American” (TEA, 2017). At the end of the 2016-17 school year, there were 358,514 regular classroom teachers; 214,835 (59.92%) White and 36,494 (10.18%) Black/African American.

The state’s employed teacher demographics follows: African American - 35,986.3 (10.2%); and White - 211,028.1 (59.8%). It is also important to point out the statewide number of employed Hispanic teachers at 93,694.5 (26.6%) significantly outweighs the number of Black teachers. (2016-17 Texas Academic Performance Report for HISD)

The largest local urban school is Houston Independent School District (HISD). HISD is the seventh-largest public-school system in the nation and the largest in Texas” (Houston ISD, 2017). Due to the size of HISD, it is important to look at the teacher and student demographics. The 2016-17 Texas Academic Performance Report for HISD states the district employed 11,545.8 teachers in which 4,179.5 (36.2%) were Black/African American and 3,266.7 (28.3%) were White (TEA Academic Report, 2018). The demographics of employed Black and White teachers differ from the national and state norm. The percentage of Black teacher versus Black student ratio is noticeably larger than other ratios. “There were 51, 574 (23.9%) Black students compared to the 4,179.5 (36.2%) Black teachers” (TEA Academic Report, 2018).

The 2016-17 Texas Academic Performance Report for Katy Independent School District (ISD) states the district employed 4,996.0 teachers in which 321.1 (6.4%) were Black/African American and 3,767.5 (75.4%) were White (TEA Academic Report, 2018). The demographics of employed Black and White teachers are similar to the

national and state demographics. The percentage of Black teacher versus Black student ratio is noticeably larger than other ratios. “There were 7,771 (10.3%) Black students compared to the 4,179.5 (36.2%) Black teachers” (TEA Academic Report, 2018).

Black teachers face many challenges in education, some are noticeable, and others are not; some challenges are discovered through analyzing data and others are discovered through teachers, current and past, sharing their experiences. Lived experiences of Black teachers across the nation provide background information on challenges they face in education.

I have been aware of the demographics of my local school district for quite some time, but I was not aware that Black teachers, in general, faced so many challenges until I was accepted into a curriculum and instruction doctoral program. Most recently, I recognized the challenges in common hiring practices as well as discrimination and racism toward Black teachers in education. Looking at the demographics of my local school district, it is alarming to see the difference in the percentage of Black and White teachers and employees compared to the percentage of Black and White students. Through a social constructivist approach, I am seeking to identify the challenges of Black teachers and to find solutions that can assist with overcoming these challenges. By understanding the challenges of Black teachers working in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, school districts, along with administrators, can make the necessary improvements to enhance the teaching experience for those teachers.

Studies have shown that racial biases still exist within school districts when it comes to hiring, which limits the number of Black teachers that would otherwise enter the teaching profession or be hired in a non-diverse school. Since there is value in having

a diverse faculty of teachers in schools; school districts will need to adjust their approach to hiring in a manner that perceives diversity of teachers. According to Brown, Dilworth, and Brown (2018), “the significant and growing body of evidence that an increased presence of teachers of color benefit students of all backgrounds and those of color, in particular (Cherng and Halpin 2016; Egalite et al. 2015; Dee 2005)” (p. 289). A diverse staff should be an asset to the classroom and not as something that is discussed in terms of affirmative action nor from the perspective of reaching certain ethnic quotas. Research strongly suggests that having a culturally diverse staff of teachers ensures that schools can provide an enriching education for all their students beyond the grade school levels and into the student’s college and professional careers.

There is a significant and growing body of evidence that an increased presence of teachers of color benefit students of all backgrounds and those of color, in particular (Cherng and Halpin 2016; Egalite et al. 2015; Dee 2005)” (Brown et al, 2018, p. 289).

Theoretical Perspective

A social constructivist theoretical perspective will be used while reviewing the identified literature. According to Creswell (2014), a social constructivist believes that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Using this particular perspective will allow me to explore not only the challenges Black teachers encounter in education but also the issues of discrimination and racism that arise when schools select potential candidates for open positions. This perspective will also allow me to seek an understanding of the future issues and challenges I may face working in education. Through this perspective, I hope to gain further insight into the lived

experiences of Black teachers and what can be done to retain and increase their presence in education.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used in this study and are defined below:

Gaps - lack of balance: disparity.

Discrimination – when some superficial characteristic (skin pigmentation, for example) is used in an attempt to restrict individuals’ access to the available economic, political, and social opportunities for advancement” (D’Amico, 1987, p. 310).

Low-income - The term "low-income individual" means an individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount.

Race - a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits.

Race Discrimination - treating someone unfavorably because he/she is of a certain race or because of personal characteristics associated with race (such as hair texture, skin color, or certain facial features).

Racial/Racist Discourse - a form of discriminatory social practice that manifests itself in text, talk, and communication.

Regular Classroom Teachers - the teacher of record.

Teachers - classroom teacher of record.

Research Question

The central research question for this study is: What are the perceived challenges of Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms? To answer this question, the below sections will follow:

Table 1*Content of Chapters*

Section	Explored Content
Chapter Two	Theoretical framework and literature review
Chapter Three	Methodology
Chapter Four	Research findings
Chapter Five	Summary, implications, and future research

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework & Literature Review

Introduction

A literature review was conducted to explore perceived challenges of Black teachers, race, discrimination, race discrimination, and possible reasons that contribute to the shortage of Black teachers. A social constructivist theoretical perspective was used while reviewing the identified literature. According to Creswell (2014), “a social constructivist believes that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (p. 8). Using this perspective allowed me to explore the perceived challenges Black teachers encounter in education as well as the issues of race, discrimination, race discrimination, and racist discourse that exists in their daily lives. This literature review explores several articles that report experiences Black teachers perceive as challenges in education, public schools, and their classrooms. The review essentially investigates the harsh realities of race discrimination and racial discourse that may potentially be evident starting in the early stages of the recruitment process for Black teachers. While exploring the commonly perceived challenges of race discrimination and inequality, causes for the shortage of Black teachers in the classroom were also identified.

The themes identified many challenges and possible solutions to provide mutual respect and equality for Black teachers. The solutions could potentially provide an environment where they can thrive and be successful. Some of the perceived challenges tend to be noticeable and others are not; the unnoticeable challenges are typically discovered through analyzing statistical data. Other challenges are identified through inquiry of current and past Black teachers across the nation. The shared lived

experiences also provide vital background information on the recruitment, retention, and shortage of Black teachers.

With the stress of daily challenges due to the work environment, the additional stress of providing quality instruction can be overwhelming. Findings suggest that while there are many challenges for Black teachers, they can still be successful in the field of education.

History of Black Teachers

The recorded history of Black teachers' employment dates back to the late 1800s. "Tracing the history of Black teachers in the United States, Foster (1997) reported that Black teachers grew more than fourfold from about 15,000 in 1890 to 66,000 in 1910, which was 40% of all Black professionals (Ladson-Billings, 2005)" (Evans & Leonard, 2013, p.1). From the late 1800s to the early 1900s Black teachers were in demand to teach in the U.S. Within 20 years, the employment of Black teachers quadrupled; this was a massive increase considering the period. This employment trend continued for forty more years. "Prior to the *Brown vs. Board* decision in 1954, approximately 50% of all Black professionals in the U.S., some who were graduates of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), were teachers (Madkins, 2011)" (Evans & Leonard, 2013, p.1). Although things were going great for Black teachers, a change was sure to come. "After the *Brown v. Board* ruling, nearly 40,000 Black teachers lost their jobs in 17 southern states from 1954 to 1972 (Fine, 2004; Irvine, 2002; Madkins, 2011; Tillman, 2004)" (Evans & Leonard, 2013, p.1). After school desegregation, Black teachers became less sought after and their White counterparts received teaching jobs over them. Evans and Leonard (2013) study found the following:

In the present decade, the Black teacher workforce is approximately 8% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010), while Black students represent 16% of the school population (Madkins, 2011). There is great disparity between the percentage of Black teachers in the workforce and the percentage of Black students enrolled in U.S. schools (Fine, 2004; Irvine, 2002; Madkins, 2011; Tillman, 2004). (p. 1)

The Black teacher workforce appears to still be experiencing the effects of the *Brown v. Board* decision. Marshall knew beforehand that the historic win would contribute to “the elimination of Black teachers from the classroom, a disservice to students, and a detriment for the teaching profession” (Hawkins, 2013, p. 12).

Currently, “Black teachers are clustered in schools densely populated with Black and brown children from low-income families and work in poorly resourced schools and classrooms (Ayscue and Orfield 2016; Bohrnstedt et al. 2015; Hope King 2018)” (Brown et al., 2018, p. 287). Working in these types of conditions have attributed to preconceived notions that Black teachers are less effective than White teachers. Brown et al. (2018) state the following:

Education literature as well as programs and policies perpetually use the phrase supply and demand, a labor economic term and concept, to explain or promote teacher recruitment and retention legislation and initiatives and particularly those designed to measure the number of African American and other teachers of color. (p. 287)

Black teachers have been reduced to filling a number or quota for schools when they are recruited. “Specifically, the intent of increasing the numbers of Black, Hispanic, Asian

and Native American teachers of color is to establish a teaching force that reflects the rich diversity of perspectives held by the nation's population" (Brown et al., 2018, p. 287). To further add insult to injury, Black teachers in education have been viewed as commodity. Brown et al. (2018) concluded the following:

When Black teachers are viewed metaphorically as a commodity, they are burdened by two things: (a) a societal perception that in some way they are gratified by filling a numbers void in the classrooms; and (b) that they will be fully engaged with Black and other students of color more so than others by virtue of similar skin tone, background and culture. (p. 287)

This is problematic because teachers filling numbers in the classroom contributes to low motivation and job satisfaction. The teacher-student matching is also skewed because belonging to an ethnic background does not necessarily equate to similar cultural experiences. Although, "historically, Black teachers were sought and employed by school districts to exclusively teach Black students" (Brown et al., 2018, p. 287); it does not guarantee that the teacher and student will share cultural backgrounds and experiences.

According to Hawkins (2013), Dr. Ivory Toldson, a Howard University professor and senior research fellow with the Congressional Black Caucus, stated, "teaching is the No. 1 profession among Black men with master's degrees but there are less than 2 percent of them in the classroom" (p. 13). Demographics and research tend to show that there is a significant difference in the number of Black teachers present in schools compared to the number of Black students attending schools.

Griffin and Tackie, (2017) found the following:

While school systems have made significant progress in recruiting and hiring more teachers of color, they have done little to keep them in the classroom over time. Indeed, teachers of color tend to exit the profession at higher rates than other teachers. (p.37)

Over the years, it has become difficult to keep Black teachers in the classroom due to recruitment and personal struggles in the profession. “We know and understand that African American teachers have been disadvantaged as workers in the past and continue to be challenged in today’s PK-12 school environment” (Brown et al, 2018, p. 288)

Perceived Challenges

During my research, I was able to gain an even better understanding of some of the challenges Black teachers face from their own points of view. The article, “Through Our Eyes: Perspectives from Black Teachers” was composed of several lived experiences of Black teachers participating focus groups across the United States. The article provided a broad range of perspectives of the challenges Black teachers face daily.

Numerous studies have been conducted on challenges Black teachers encounter regarding education, schools, and classrooms. Working in a stressful environment and maintaining lesson plans could heavily contribute to the high turnover rate of teachers.

Over time Black teachers frequently leave classrooms to pursue other careers. According to Evans & Leonard (2013), “...it is clear that school environment factors such as overemphasis on student outcomes and lack of support caused these two young Black teachers’ dissatisfaction and ultimately caused them to leave their schools” (p. 9). One could gather that Black teachers get tired of constant discrimination and racism and other Black teachers decide to leave because they feel they will never

progress if they stay. Griffin & Tackie (2017), noted that “many participants said they felt undervalued and unappreciated, given few opportunities to build their pedagogical and subject-matter expertise and advance as professionals” (p.40). Black teachers may not receive the same freedoms as their White counterparts to advance their subject-matter expertise, skill sets, and careers. On the other hand, Black teachers can only experience this if they make it past the recruiting phase and something as simple as their name can prevent that. In some instances, “names can become a convenient means to screen out undesirable applicants” (Ramjattan, 2015, p. 697).

As mentioned previously, all Black teachers and students do not share similar cultural experiences. Black teachers report they “become the representative for every child of color . . . whether they relate to them, whether their culture is the same or not” (Griffin & Tackie, 2017, p. 38).

According to Griffin & Tackie (2017), “focus groups expressed a strong sense of obligation not only to help Black students learn academic content and skills but also to ensure that their broader developmental needs were being met” (p. 38-39). Black teachers took on more responsibility as well as stress to ensure that students received quality instruction and assistance. One participant stated she “felt responsible to support students (particularly those who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds) in ways that go far beyond the typical professional duties of an educator” (p. 39). A sense of obligation plays a role in Black teachers’ interaction with their students due to their students’ home environments. Black teachers also tend to take on the additional parental roles. “In addition to embracing a parental role, focus group members likened themselves to hairdressers, chauffeurs, advocates, counselors, cheerleaders, and more”

(Griffin & Tackie, 2017, p. 39). At this point, Black teachers have stepped outside their professional role of teacher and into a role outside their scope of work and possibly added additional work to their tight schedules. “Focus group members also said they felt a constant pressure to carry themselves in particular ways in order to present themselves as good role models, especially for students who did not have such role models at home” (Griffin & Tackie, 2017, p. 39). Playing a parental role was further exaggerated by adding the additional stress of being a personal and professional role model or model citizen.

Unfortunately, Black teachers lack the support they feel they need in their classrooms, schools, and districts. “Professional development meetings, rarely address the kinds of issues they face” (Griffin & Tackie, 2017, p. 39) due to their “limited number of Black colleagues” (Griffin & Tackie, 2017, p. 39). With a limited number of Black teachers and little to no formal training on teacher response, “they find that if they want to respond to their students’ needs, they often have no choice but to rely on their own ingenuity and resources” (Griffin & Tackie, 2017, p. 39). Most participants went above and beyond to provide the best possible education for their students with the resources they were provided and with their personal resources.

Griffin and Tackie’s (2017) study also found the following:

Black teachers spoke of finding themselves restricted to teaching Black students only; some told us that no matter how much extra time and effort they put into their classroom instruction, their voices were stifled in staff meetings; some said that no matter how well they related to students, they were asked to “tone down” their personalities and behave in a more “professional” manner; and many

reported that they have been pigeonholed by colleagues, parents, and administrators, pressured to take on the same few teaching assignments and leadership roles over and over again. (pp. 39-40)

Although faced with many perceived challenges, Black teachers also reported they “remain in the teaching profession because they love their students and their work, and they want to be able to fully contribute to the educational success of their kids” (Griffin & Tackie, 2017, p. 39).

Others’ Perceptions of Black Teachers

Milner (2012) found the following:

Negative views of Black teachers’ perceptions include: Black teachers are too strict and provide too much structure in the classroom-learning environment; they ‘yell’ at students and ‘damage’ their self-esteem; they do not provide for enough creativity in the classroom; and they become too personal with students and cross professional-personal lines. (p. 28)

It is easy for non-Blacks to mistake a few of the aforementioned perceptions as negative. I would argue that some of those perceptions could also be perceived as nurturing qualities based on cultural backgrounds. From the perspective of a military veteran, most military veterans prefer structure due to their time in the military service. The same is true for others that are well organized and stick to a strict schedule or classroom structure. Teachers should never resort to yelling at students because it could be very damaging to students’ confidence and self-esteem. Teachers receive some level of conflict resolution during their formal college education or certification process that should mitigate situations like these.

I did not find any other studies that stated Black teachers yell at students; this could be information collected from one interview, which depicts a narrow viewpoint. Creativity in the classroom could prove to be a challenge because teachers generally follow a strict and narrow curriculum that does not allow much time for flexibility. Teacher-student relationships could be perceived as inappropriate when teachers appear to have close relationships with students. Teachers may come off as too personal with their students if they have similar things in common, live in the same neighborhood, if the teacher sees a little of themselves in the student, and the teacher develops an interest in helping the student more. It is great for teachers to be passionate about helping their students; teachers must also keep in mind that there is a line between professional and personal. Teachers are expected to be role models for their students, and they should maintain a certain level of professionalism that makes students comfortable enough to trust and respect them.

Brown et al.'s (2018) study stated the following:

We argue however, that race and culture also inform the kind of metaphors one might use to describe the teacher. In this sense, racialized sociohistorical forces (Omi and Winant 2015) envelope the discourse of the teacher—particularly when deconstructing the metaphoric meaning of the “Black Teacher.” The significance of understanding Black teachers through the literary device of metaphors is that it helps to illustrate the possibilities and limitations of conceptualizing the Black teacher. (p.285)

In addition to others' perceptions, Black teachers and their work ethics are translated into metaphors, generally negative, that precede them in the area of education.

Race and Color Discrimination

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (n.d.), states the following about race and color discrimination:

Race discrimination involves treating someone (an applicant or employee) unfavorably because he/she is of a certain race or because of personal characteristics associated with race (such as hair texture, skin color, or certain facial features). Color discrimination involves treating someone unfavorably because of skin color complexion.

As unfortunate as it may be, Black teachers still face discrimination in the workplace due to the color of their skin. Dr. Leslie T. Fenwick, Dean of the Howard University School of Education stated, “Nearly 60 years ago, Thurgood Marshall first "warned that Black teachers would lose their jobs to racist displacement as the nation's schools were integrated" (Hawkins, 2013, p. 12).

The article, “Where Are All the Black Teachers? Discrimination in the Teacher Labor Market,” explored statistical data of a large school district in the United States. The findings were no surprise due to my past and current knowledge of literature through research and school assignments. Although the recruitment of Black teachers has been a topic for many years, current recruiting practices fail to increase the recruitment of Black teachers. “White principals hired disproportionately fewer Black teachers than Black principals did and when Black teachers were hired, they were disproportionately placed in schools with large populations of minority students or students living in poverty; evidence of workforce segregation” (D'amico, Pawlewicz, Earley, Penelope, & McGeehan, 2017, p. 30). Approximately five of my Black friends

and seven of my Black sorority chapter members that currently teach in the classroom recently shared their past experiences with me; most of them work in urban schools where the leadership is also Black.

According to Edelman (2016), “Teachers of color are underrepresented compared to students of color in every state and a report released at the summit by the Department of Education showed how the supply of teachers of color decreases at multiple points in the educator pipeline including enrollment in and completion of education programs, initial hiring, and retention” (p. 10A). Most teachers are taught instructional leadership during their education programs, so they can immediately start to set goals for themselves as well as their future students.

Racism and discrimination are not limited to the U.S.; these issues are prevalent on an international platform. Internationally, Black teachers face similar challenges such as racism and discrimination while working in education. “Critical Race Theory (CRT) asserts that racism is more than acts of violence, hatred or name calling, but is also prevalent through inaction, omission or deletion” (Lander & Santoro, 2017, p. 1011). Black teachers that work outside the U.S. have shared their experiences with racism in past research studies and most of them chose to deal with the issue by relocating to other schools and areas to teach. It would be accurate to assume that most people experience racism during their lifespan, but they may not be aware of it because they are not being called a racial slur directly to their face. According to Lander & Santoro (2017), “CRT racism can be an everyday racism that is insidious and subtle and goes unnoticed, except for those who directly experience it” (p. 1011). This means that

the people on the receiving end feel and experience this racism, but it goes unnoticed by others that are standing by while it is happening.

Lastly, I found the most significant challenges for Black teachers are centered on racial microaggression that leaves a lasting impact. Microaggression occurs in all levels of education, Closson, Bowman, and Merriweather (2014), state that Black professors are often not afforded respect by virtue of their earned position as faculty, they must construct an image that conforms to expectations, often unrealistic, of the students (p. 85). In other words, no one is exempt from these particular challenges in teaching education. Teachers are constantly set up for failure; to the point that a teacher did some research to see if “her students were actually qualified” (Coffey and Farinde, 2016, p. 29) to participate in her class and found that most of them were not. Other teachers “feel as if they are treated unfairly and that White teachers were oblivious about the subtle ways, they marginalized their colleagues” (Patton and Jordan, 2017, p. 81). Sadly, this information is not anything new; following Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Louisiana; according to Buras (2016), a 2012 court findings in *Oliver* provide a disturbing account of the strategic racial reconstruction of the city’s public schools by White leadership in Louisiana.

Brown et al.’s (2018) research state the following about past Black teachers’ response to workplace discrimination:

They worked under the discriminatory practices of the time, particularly in the south, with state and district salary structures and wages that were significantly lower than those of white educators. Despite significant support from philanthropic groups and the community they served in poorly resourced and

overcrowded schools often working more than one job in order to make ends meet. (p. 287)

Since *Brown v. Board*, Black teachers have endured race and color discrimination in their profession with little to no avail.

Shortage of Black Teachers

Juárez and Hayes' (2015) study found the following:

All teachers are prepared to effectively teach all students, yet few teachers enter the classroom prepared to effectively teach all students, we must keep in mind a reality that Malcolm X regularly noted—that racism is a lot like a Cadillac, a new model comes out every year (Gaskins 2006). (p. 322)

Teacher preparation is key to the shortage of Black teachers. “The educational literature, in turn, has clearly identified the existence and negative consequences of Whiteness within US teacher preparation programs (Cochran-Smith et al. 2004; Marx 2006; Villegas and Lucas 2002)” (Juárez & Hayes, 2015, p. 322). The shortage of Black teachers can also be attributed to the unspoken rule of Whiteness. According to Juárez and Hayes (2015), “most key institutions in US society, teacher education remains a White world (Juarez et al. 2008; Marx 2006)—the future teachers are White, the teacher educators are White, the teachers are White (National Center for Education Statistics 2002; National Summit on Diversity in the Teaching Force 2002)” (pp. 321-322). If the aforementioned is true, there will continue to be a shortage of Black teachers in education.

Although the Whiteness in teacher education is highly visible to Black teachers, it only becomes visible to others through “the on-going calls for multicultural education and cultural diversity activities on the margins of programs away from the main daily

business of preparing future teachers (Cross 2003; Ladson-Billings 1998; McIntyre 1997; Leonardo 2005)” (Juárez and Hayes, 2015, p. 322).

Juárez and Hayes (2015), explores the “notion of academic lynching and how it contributes to the on-going under-preparation of future teachers and thus the maintenance of White racial dominance” (p. 334). Black teachers do not receive quality teacher preparation, so the number of certified Black teachers decreases while the number of White teachers increases.

In the case of Gloria and Malcolm, Juárez and Hayes’ (2015) study found the following:

Each repeatedly, openly and boldly challenged the Whiteness of US teacher education in the preparation programs they respectively worked in by consistently taking stances with Blackness and therefore against Whiteness. In reference to Blackness, and paraphrasing ideas from Black radical traditions in the US, when we are talking about the Black experience, that is to say, the African American community and its collective history and group-based experiences over time in this nation-state known as America, we are referring to humanity and the human condition—that which human beings suffer, dream, strive toward, and struggle against. Because the humanity of all cannot be affirmed simultaneously with the affirmation of Whiteness, affirming Blackness requires opposing Whiteness (Cone 1990). (p. 324)

Challenging Whiteness does not increase awareness or encourage change; it is threatening to the dominant race in education. There are laws in place to minimize this type of unconventional union. “The law forbids discrimination when it comes to any

aspect of employment, including hiring, firing, pay, job assignments, promotions, layoff, training, fringe benefits, and any other term or condition of employment” (EEOC, n.d.). Whiteness in education lends the perception that laws, like equity, are unimportant in the profession.

“Pre-service teacher education programs consistently articulate commitments to fairness, equity and cultural diversity. However, what we observe with the two stories of Malcolm and Gloria is quite the opposite” (Juárez and Hayes, 2015, p. 337). Both teachers spoke up for equality and diversity, but they were met with backlash from their colleagues.

According to Juárez and Hayes (2015), Malcolm was allowed to keep his job due to his “useful to the White-controlled institution as its representative token of integration and goodwill toward people of color as long as he is kept under control tight enough to prevent him from threatening or doing damage to the existing racial hierarchy” (p. 335). Things were a little different when it came to Gloria. Her employer had “plenty of preferable replacements for those few White women like Gloria who are too outspoken, abrasive, and bold in their critiques of Whiteness” (p. 335). Backlash in this extreme form cripples the voice of so many other teachers that have tried to take a stance against Whiteness. Furthermore, critiquing Whiteness in education “delegitimizes” (Juárez and Hayes, 2015, p. 335) the work of those (Black and White) advocating for others against Whiteness.

Looking at the bigger picture of the shortage of Black teachers, new concepts and ideas are introduced to society to consider. Resolving the issue of Whiteness in

education through effective multicultural education could potentially solve the issue of the shortage.

Instructional Leadership

Teachers are working and planning the entire school year to stay on task with their planned curriculum and lesson plans. This can be a hectic schedule if the teacher is new to the profession and does not have any assistance. Teachers are not taught about all the demands of the position during their formal education, so it can become overwhelming very quickly. They are also not taught how to respond to diverse and culturally sensitive issues that arise amongst the staff at their future places of employment.

Cook (2013), stated the following:

My preservice training and subsequent professional development opportunities left me wondering “What about me?” What particular issues would I, an African American teacher, face in my classroom concerning effectively teaching students of color? What are the particular challenges that would confront me—as both a member of a minority group that is perceived as powerless in school and a person with authority emanating from the school? I wanted to know what a culturally competent African American teacher looked like. What was my model? (p. 46)

Teacher collaborations contribute to successful instructional leadership. “Existing literature provides evidence that teacher collaboration is associated with student achievement” (Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015, p. 481). Schools may be able to implement teacher collaborations during planning periods, so the teachers can assist each other, and this will also promote a healthier work environment. The

collaboration may supplement the need to create more training because it will create an environment that encourages the exchange of ideas.

Conclusion

Black teachers face many challenges in education, schools, and classrooms. They constantly encounter negative work interactions, discrimination, and racism. With all the challenges, in most cases they are still expected to “...serve as the proxy for all African Americans and thus must take responsibility for educating not only students of color within their public school but also their peers (teachers, counselors, and administrators) about issues of race and equity” (Cook, 2013, pp. 46-47). Regardless of the challenges, Black teachers continue to push forward to serve the underserved Black students. Society would benefit from Black teachers not only serving the underserved population, but White students need to have encounters with Black teachers as well to become socially conscious. Qualified Black teachers should be afforded the same opportunities as their White counterparts and should not be subjected to such things as “White space, where White teachers hold ongoing liberal discussions that pathologize students of color and their parents as low achievers, at risk, and in need of additional special education” (Matias, 2013, p. 189). Black teachers should also not be retaliated against if they “expose any injustice and hypocrisy in their own departments” (Juarez and Hayes, 2015, p. 334). As it stands, there is a long road ahead to accomplish equality and justice for all teachers as well as the training they deserve. Secretary King emphasized a more diverse workforce would be good not just for students of color but for all students: “It's also important for our White students to see teachers of color in leadership roles in their classrooms and communities. Breaking down negative stereotypes helps all students

learn to live and work in a multiracial society. Ultimately, the work we can do together to create the opportunity for all students will determine not only the kind of economy we have and the kind of people we will be, but also whether we will become the nation we ought to be." (Edelman, 2016, p. 10A). Working together to support each other will produce more positive outcomes; a diverse workforce will have a positive influence on all students and a lasting impact on all teachers. "Teacher educators must rethink and give attention to how courses, and professional development, can better prepare and meet the needs of Black teachers" (Cook, 2013, p. 48). Focusing on mitigating the challenges and providing additional support will sustain and increase the number of Black teachers.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is for the researcher to explain and describe the method used for this study. The researcher will explain in-depth the steps and tools used to conduct the study to include the research design, selection of participants, selection of site, data collection and findings, and the trustworthiness of the study.

Research Question

Black teachers tend to leave the classroom within their first five years of teaching. Exploring the commonly perceived challenges Black teachers face while working in the realm of public grade school education, pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, should improve job satisfaction, retention, and ultimately, student success. The study sought an “understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8), therefore, a social constructivist theoretical perspective was used to conduct the research. Using this perspective allowed for exploration of the perceived challenges Black teachers encounter in education as well as possible solutions to these challenges. This study posed the following research question: What are the perceived challenges of Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms?

Researcher’s Role

As the researcher, I identify as a Black woman pursuing a doctoral degree in Education. Therefore, I have a greater interest in the topic at hand and may be prone to biases due to my own lived experiences as a Black woman looking to work in the areas of education. I currently work as a Program Manager for one of the nine programs offered

through my employer. I am also a state employee where I am tasked to work with stakeholders across the state of Texas. In my current position, I advocate for military veterans, more especially, women veterans, and the challenges they faced in the military are similar to the challenges Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade face. I have over ten years of experience in Human Resources (HR) and Training and Development. I have worked in several HR positions, from HR assistant to HR supervisor. I have also faced some difficult challenges, discrimination, and racism in the workplace based on the color of my skin.

Research Design

A case study design of inquiry was used to conduct this qualitative research study. Creswell (2014) defines a case study as “a design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (p.14). I have conducted research to express lived experiences of individuals that are still facing the same challenges they were presented with over sixty years ago during the Brown v. Board of Education case. According to Creswell (2014), while using a case study research design, “cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995, Yin, 2009, 2012)” (p.14). This particular design of inquiry coincides with my research because I was seeking to understand the lived experiences of Black teachers who previously taught in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade with less than five years of experience. The Black teachers were ultimately facing daily challenges that could have been alleviated with additional support from administrators starting from the hiring phase

to the classroom. The case study design of inquiry shaped the research giving a voice to the participants and the study. I have found that readers are more engaged and invested in the study when it relates to their own lived experiences.

Participant Selection

The participants selected for this study were previous Black pre-kindergarten through fifth grade classroom teachers located in the state of Texas. Each participant self-identified as Black, had less than five years of teaching experience in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, had experience teaching in Houston Independent School District (HISD), and was over the age of twenty-one. Selected participants were also assigned as the teacher of record or substitute teacher assigned as the teacher of record.

Site Selection

The selected sample site was a closed online social network of local current and previous Black educators. The sample site was conducive to a single-stage sampling procedure, “in which the researcher has access to names in the population and can sample the people (or other elements) directly” (Creswell, 2014, p. 158). The site allowed Black teachers with previous experience in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade the opportunity to volunteer to participate in a study where they could share their lived experiences. Furthermore, the sample site was selected to increase participation due to the unique, targeted population.

The sample site tremendously reduced restrictions current school district employees may have been held to. The virtual nature of the sample site additionally made participants feel more comfortable with participating in a video conference to complete the interviews.

Participants were also more comfortable with the research because the research protocols were approved by the University of Houston's Institutional Review Board. "Researchers need to have their research plans reviewed by an IRB on their college and university campuses" (Creswell, 2014, p. 95). A code of ethics for the study was discussed with all participants prior to them signing a consent form to participate in the study. Participants were well informed on their role in the research and why the research was being conducted before they decided to participate.

Largest Local School District

The primary focus of this study was to investigate the perceived challenges of Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade in the state of Texas. Each participant had some experience teaching in the largest school district in Texas which was also one of the local school districts. HISD is located in the city of Houston and surrounding areas. The school district is comprised of 280 schools: 8 early childhood schools, 160 elementary schools, 38 middle schools, 37 high schools, and 37 combined/other schools. The teacher demographics for the district are listed below in Table 2. The years of experience of teachers employed in the district are listed below in Table 3. The Information displayed in the tables was obtained from the district's website.

Table 2

Teacher Demographics

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
African American	4,498	36.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	685	5.5

Hispanic	3,581	28.6
Native American	27	<1.0
White	3,539	28.3
Two or More	172	1.4

Table 3*Years of Experience*

Years of Experience	Number	Percentage
5 Years of Less Experience	5,161	41.3
6-10 Years of Experience	2,200	17.6
Over 10 Years of Experience	5,141	41.1

Data Collection and Analysis

The data was collected through a qualitative method. Please see Figure 1.1 for the breakdown of the data collection and analysis to be used to answer the research question.

Figure 1.1 Methods Data Collection and Analysis

Research Question	Data Collection	Data Analysis
Central question: What are the perceived challenges of Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms?	Online Video Conferences	Transcribe Interviews Identify Themes Interpret Themes Interpret Findings

All data were collected through qualitative interviews with the participants. According to Creswell (2014), “In qualitative interviews, the researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with participants, telephone interviews, or engages in focus groups interviews with six to eight interviewees in each group” (p.190). The participant’s meanings method was used to “keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue” (Creswell, 2014, p. 186); this method helped minimize any personal biases on the challenges of Black teachers. Interviews were conducted via online video conferences which served as face-to-face interviews. Interviews were video recorded, saved, downloaded, transcribed, and then destroyed.

Interview questions were based on the issues and concerns identified in the literature review. The more prominent issues and concerns included: teacher perceptions of challenges, discrimination, and racism. The answers to the interview questions were transcribed and common themes and/or patterns from the transcriptions were identified. The identified themes were then verified through an additional interview with each participant.

Interviews. Two individual interviews were conducted with a sample of three previous Black teachers. Measures were taken to preserve participant identity and provide anonymity; the participants interviewed will be referred to as Alex, Zoe, and Sophia. The interviews were conducted to gain a better understanding of the challenges previous Black teachers experienced while working in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade on a daily basis and to answer the presented research question.

The teachers selected to participate in the interviews were interviewed using a video communications application that allowed them to participate from wherever they

felt comfortable. The interviews consisted of fourteen questions (See Appendix B) that were compiled from the themes identified in the literature review. Interviews and responses were video recorded, transcribed, and coded into themes.

Participants completed two video conferences; each participant was asked the same series of questions during both interviews. After the first interviews were completed, the video was downloaded and transcribed. Themes and patterns from the transcriptions were identified and documented.

A second interview was conducted with each participant to share the themes identified in the first round of interviews as well as gain further insight from participants on those identified themes. After the identified themes were shared with each participant, they answered the same series of interview questions used in the first interview to verify or clarify statements made in the first interview. The second interview was conducted to serve as a method of member checking as well as a method to maintain the validity and authenticity of the research.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected via video interviews were analyzed using a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis “is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set” (as cited in Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017, p. 2). A thorough analysis of the data was completed utilizing this particular analysis method. “A rigorous thematic analysis can produce trustworthy and insightful findings” (as cited in Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2). The goal of this data analysis was to produce valid, reliable, trustworthy findings for the research to contribute to existing trustworthy research.

The following steps were used to complete a thorough thematic analysis:

Step 1: Organizing data. The first step of data analysis consisted of organizing all the collected data. “If data are to be thoroughly analyzed, they must be organized” (Mills, 2018, p. 176). The video conference interviews were transcribed and then organized in a manner that assisted with identifying common themes and patterns. The themes and patterns were then organized based on the frequency of each theme and pattern emerged.

Step 2: Reading data. The second step of data analysis consisted of reading and rereading all of the collected data. As I read each source of data, I made a note of emerging patterns and themes. This step helped me familiarize myself with the data from the video transcriptions. Rereading the data helped determine if the earlier identified patterns and themes were valid.

Step 3: Coding and organizing themes. Once the patterns and themes were identified, the coding process began. “Coding is the process of trying to find patterns and meaning in data collected through the use of surveys, interviews, and questionnaires” (Mills, 2018, p. 180). Since the data was already be organized by common themes, the coding process was relatively smooth.

Due to the few common themes identified in the literature review, and as a young researcher, I strived to use the lean coding approach. “The lean coding approach begins with five to six categories with shorthand labels or codes and then it expands as review and re-review of the database continues” (Creswell and Poth, 2017, p. 190). This approach assisted with keeping the data analysis clear and consistent.

Step 4: Review of themes. After coding and organizing themes, the selected themes were reviewed for further analysis. This step determined if the themes were aligned with the information that emerged from the collected data. The themes were renamed to properly describe the collected data. It was important to accurately identify the emerged themes because they “appear as major findings” (Creswell, 2014, p. 199). It was also important that the selected themes “display multiple perspectives from individuals and be supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence” (Creswell, 2014, p. 200). The themes should accurately represent all collected data and evidence to ensure the reliability of the research.

Step 5: Interpretation of data. Lastly, after identifying common themes and reviewing them for accuracy, the themes and findings were interpreted. My interpretation of the data was shaped by findings in the literature, participant responses and stories, and my lived experiences. As a researcher that does not currently work in the classroom, I relied heavily on existing peer-reviewed literature and participant responses. My personal experiences were derived from my interactions with pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, past and present, educators in my doctoral program as well as my close interaction with my children’s past and current teachers. While interpreting the data, I sought to obtain a deeper understanding of the themes and how they connected the participants.

In addition to the thematic analysis, I made connections between the identified themes, participant responses, and previous research explored in the literature review which resulted in multiple research methods that triangulated data. The first interview aimed to identify themes and patterns Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth

grade are contend with daily. The second set of interviews were conducted to verify themes identified in the first set of interviews. The second set of interviews also served to “solicit participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations” (Bazeley, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Ely et al., 1991; Erlandson et al., 1993; Glesne, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Miles & Huberson, 1994;) of the first set of interviews. Final themes were established triangulating data “based on perspectives from participants” (Creswell, 2014, p. 201), therefore adding validity to the research. Each research method provided additional insight into the lived experiences of Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The multimethod also provided cross-validation of the challenges Blacks teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade face daily as well as assisted in exploration of those challenges.

Potential Limitations

I initially sought to interview three to five Black pre-kindergarten through fifth grade teachers with one to five years of teaching experience. Due to the unique targeted population, I was able to interview three previous Black pre-kindergarten through fifth grade teachers. It was rather easy to locate Black teachers that wanted to participate in the study, but they did not meet the requirements to participate. The small sample size was not a deterrent for potential participants, but it did limit the available participants.

To alleviate fear of participation, I assured each participant that I would adhere to the informed consent form, be honest about the research, and go above and beyond to protect their identity. It was also important to remind participants that their participation could “improve the human situation” (Creswell, 2014, p. 98) for other Black teachers.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is for the researcher to report the findings from the data collection of this study. The researcher will describe the selected participant characteristics, study procedures, themes that emerged during the interpretation of data, limitations of the study, and additional findings.

Participant Characteristics

The participants selected for this study are previous Black pre-kindergarten through fifth grade classroom teachers. Each participant self-identified as Black, had less than five years of teaching experience in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, and was over the age of twenty-one. The selected participants were recruited through a closed online social network of local current and previous Black educators. Participants that met the minimum requirements of the study were asked to volunteer to participate which resulted in participants with teaching experience and assignments that span the state of Texas.

To maintain confidentiality of the study and participant anonymity, due to the small, unique targeted population, participants received a study participant identifier. The participants were referred to as Nathaniel, Mackenzie, and Savannah. The participant characteristics are detailed below in Table 4.

Table 4

Participant Characteristics

Participant	Teacher Certification Route	Years of Experience	Age
Nathaniel	Traditional	3	42
Mackenzie	Alternative	1	30
Savannah	Alternative	4	51

Nathaniel was the only participant that completed the traditional teacher certification route because he decided he wanted to teach at an early age, so he went to college to become a teacher. Nathaniel was also the only male participant. Mackenzie served in the United States military for about ten years before she decided to exit the service and become a teacher; she utilized the alternative teacher certification route because it was faster. Mackenzie stated (2019), "I thought teaching would be my second and final career but was quickly hit with the reality of that dream" (personal communication). Mackenzie was also the youngest participant of the study. Savannah had the most teaching experience and she was also certified through an alternative teacher certification route. Savannah was able to speak from experiences of working at three different schools which offered a well-rounded perspective on the challenges Black teachers face.

Study Procedures

Three participants volunteered to participate in this study to share their personal perceptions of the challenges Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade with less than five years of experience. Participants completed two video conferences via Zoom that served as face-to-face interviews. Zoom is "a video communications application for video and audio conferencing, collaboration, chat, and webinars" (About

Zoom, n.d.). The video interviews were recorded, saved, downloaded, transcribed and then destroyed. Data gathered from each transcription was thoroughly analyzed to precisely identify themes to maintain the authenticity and validity of the research. Each participant signed a consent form to take part in a human research study before participating in an interview as required by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board.

Summary of Themes

Three participants volunteered to participate in this study to share their personal perceptions of the challenges Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade with less than five years of experience. Participants completed two video conferences via Zoom that served as face-to-face interviews. Zoom is “a video communications application for video and audio conferencing, collaboration, chat, and webinars” (About Zoom, n.d.). The video interviews were recorded, saved, downloaded, transcribed and then destroyed. Data gathered from each transcription was thoroughly analyzed to precisely identify themes to maintain the authenticity and validity of the research.

Themes for this study emerged through the video conferences serving as face-to-face interviews. Each participant was interviewed twice via Zoom; the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then destroyed. The transcriptions were organized by emerging patterns and themes and then read and reread to verify themes. The data was then coded, and themes were verified again to provide the most accurate description of the identified themes.

Based on the analysis and interpretation of data through triangulation of data, the following themes were identified through the range of responses from participants: 1) Previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt the lack of mentorship was a challenge for Black teachers with any level of experience; 2) Previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt the lack of professional support and guidance when entering the classroom was a challenge; 3) Previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt their daily experiences were different from their peers of other races; 4) Previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt they worked harder than their White counterparts; and 5) Previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt their professional progression was slow or was going to be slow. The triangulation of data consisted of data collected during the literature review, the first interviews with participants, and the second interviews with participants to solicit additional feedback on the identified themes which supported the validity of the collected data and research.

Theme 1: Previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt the lack of mentorship was a challenge for Black teachers with any level of experience.

Data Examples

Participants felt the lack of mentorship was a challenge for Black teachers with any level of experience. When asked about mentors in the profession, Nathaniel felt he was able to develop with the help of informal mentors he watched and asked various questions to but stated, “a formal mentor would have really helped me transition into the

profession” (personal communication, 2019). Mackenzie felt thrust into the classroom. Mackenzie (2019), stated the following:

The school kind of just threw me in the class. They were like this is our SOP and these are our procedures for emergency situations, there you go. It would have been nice to have someone mentor me for the first few months. (personal communication)

Savannah felt mentorship was important due to shortly experiencing it at her first school district. Savannah taught at three school districts and stated, “The lack of mentorship at the other school districts more than likely further deterred me from the profession” (personal communication, 2019).

Theme 1 Summary

One participant did not experience any type of mentorship or form a relationship with a coworker that they would have considered a mentor. Two participants experienced minimal mentorship through an assigned mentor and informal mentors that were never asked to be a mentor but rather observed by a participant for guidance. All study participants felt that they all could have benefitted from formal mentorship designated by the schools they were employed by. Hanuscin and Lee (2008) found the following:

The literature on mentoring describes mentors acting as parent figures (protecting the mentee from serious difficulty but at the same time allowing them to learn from mistakes); support systems (supporting and helping the mentee on a day-to-

day basis and in moments of crisis); trouble shooters (helping the mentee head off trouble); colleagues (fellow learner); "scaffolders" (sharing experiences and knowledge of ways to work with students, design curriculum, and solve classroom problems--moving beyond basic support to specific help on how to teach); master teachers (providing role models); and coaches (providing training to new teachers) (Abell et al. 1995; Odell 1990). (pp. 56-57)

Providing mentors for new teachers assists with better teacher development, workplace culture, and teacher-student interactions.

Theme 2: Previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt the lack of professional support and guidance when entering the classroom was a challenge.

Data Examples

Participants felt that the lack of professional support and guidance entering the classroom was challenging. Nathaniel felt teachers needed guidance in certain areas but did not have any references to assist them. Nathaniel stated, "A frame of reference, some universal information would be extremely helpful when entering the classroom" (personal communication, 2019). Mackenzie felt professional support and guidance from her coworkers would have made for an easier transition into the classroom. Mackenzie also stated, "I don't think everyone is accommodating to Black teachers and minorities" (personal communication, 2019). Savannah felt the lack of professional support and guidance could have been easily avoided with minimal effort. Savannah (2019), stated the following:

Black teachers need professional support from administrators, supervisors, and coworkers to make sure there is a smooth transition into the classroom. The support does not have to be overwhelming; just making sure the new teacher is comfortable with interacting with everyone in their new work environment. Enough support that the teacher feels comfortable to ask questions if they need guidance or help. (personal communication)

Theme 2 Summary

All study participants felt that all schools should provide some level of professional support and guidance to new teachers, to include teachers with some experience but new to the school, when entering the classroom. Participants deemed this as a challenge due to not knowing how the school operates or the culture of the school. Furthermore, “National estimates on teacher attrition vary by researcher, but by some estimates, as many as 50 percent of teachers leave the profession within their first few years” (Breux & Wong, 2003; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Moore, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). New teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate because they are not receiving the professional support and guidance, they feel they need. Additionally, “The consequences of turnover are vast. High attrition means many schools have large numbers of inexperienced, unsupported teachers; teachers who struggle to provide the level of instruction they hope to provide” (Moore, 2016, p. 60). Initially, new teachers set out to do a great job in their new profession but quickly start to feel the consequences of the lack of professional support and guidance.

Theme 3: Previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt their daily experiences were different from their peers of other races.

Data Examples

Participants felt their daily experiences and interactions were different from their peers of other races. Nathaniel felt the pressure of “living up to” higher standards and expectations. Nathaniel (2019), stated the following:

I experienced feeling like my job was twofold; in the classroom, the material and subject was important, homework, testing, results, the learning process was important but also my image and presence was important so much so that if I saw students out after school, I was expected to uphold or live up to a certain image because it represents more. (personal communication)

Mackenzie felt the teachers from other races were nice and additionally stated, “My day-to-day experience was pretty pleasant but different from my White counterparts; more stressful” (personal communication, 2019). Mackenzie (2019), additionally stated the following:

Although my day-to-day experience was pretty pleasant, there was an undertone, I would describe it as unspoken words, to each day that bothered me. I tried to ignore it as best as I could, but it was still there. I think that’s what made the days stressful; not knowing what the unspoken words were and not knowing my colleagues’ expectations of me. (personal communication)

Savannah felt her peers of other races were able to slack off. Savannah (2019), stated the following:

My daily experiences were different from my peers due to everyone's confidence level in my abilities. I had to prove myself so I could not relax or let my hair down at work, but I did not mind it because I knew I was worthy of being there.
(personal communication)

Theme 3 Summary

All participants felt their daily work experiences differed from their peers of other races mostly in part due to the color of their skin. Participants felt that they were held to different standards of performance and their work ethic was monitored and judged by coworkers, supervisors, and administrators as well as students and parents. Being held to a higher standard also resulted in participants working in a high-stress environment. According to Edelman (2016), "teachers of color, especially males - often given extra tasks like planning cultural activities or mentoring or disciplining students of color. Adding these roles on top of standard responsibilities without extra support can lead to teacher burnout" (p. 10A). Additional findings of this study revealed that participants wanted to be seen and treated as equals to their peers of other races due to the additional responsibilities and the stress that comes along with those responsibilities.

Theme 4: Previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt they worked harder than their White counterparts.

Data Examples

Participants felt they worked harder than their White counterparts to complete the same job. Nathaniel stated, “It felt like my White counterparts did not have the same standards. It did not feel like they had to work to gain the trust and confidence of the students as well” (personal communication, 2019). Mackenzie (2019), stated the following:

I felt like they gave me more responsibility because I got things done quickly and accurately so they tasked me a lot. It wasn’t right for them to add more on my plate because I did a quick and efficient job; I would have liked to be rewarded for that.
(personal communication)

Savannah stated, “I was constantly tested by everyone, so I had to work harder than my peers of other races; I did not have a choice” (personal communication, 2019). Nathaniel (2019), also stated:

From what I know from working in schools that were majority brown skin teachers, my presence seemed to be a job in and of itself; how I presented and conducted myself at all times had the power to positively affect the environment, so I had to stay on my toes. (personal communication)

Theme 4 Summary

All participants felt the need to work harder than their White counterparts to prove they were just as capable to teach. As mentioned in Theme 3 Summary related to different daily experiences of their peers, participants felt that they were held to different standards of performance. Participants did not feel they had any room for error when

performing the teaching job due to the lack of confidence in their abilities. Additionally, Rauscher and Wilson's (2017) study found the following:

All of the Black and several of the Mexican American teachers perceived differential workloads, where they received lower-level courses, more challenging students, and less support from administrators than their White colleagues. Black teachers also reported the need to consistently prove their competence to students, colleagues, administrators, and parents in ways that other colleagues did not have to do, leaving them exhausted, depressed, and distressed. (p. 223)

Theme 5: Previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt their professional progression was slow or was going to be slow.

Data Examples

Participants felt professional progression was slow or perceived that it would be slow which ultimately determined their length of time in the profession. Nathaniel (2019), stated:

My progression was slow. I thought it would pick up at some point, but it never did. Then there was the ageism because I was the youngest teacher at the school. Others would make comments like, "You don't know nothing." "If he thinks he knows something, give him the trouble kids." More work but no progression.
(personal communication)

Mackenzie (2019), stated the following:

Due to my military training, I thought my progression would have been easy, but it appeared that it was going to be very slow. I took it as a sign early on and aborted the ship before it sunk. I didn't want to waste my time stuck in a position that wasn't going to make me happy. (personal communication)

Additionally, Savannah (2019), stated:

I would describe my progression as slow but steady; I did not feel stagnant, but I would have liked to progress faster. I exceeded every standard set for me, so I expected to grow faster along with my colleagues, but it looked like everyone was leaving me behind. (personal communication)

Theme 5 Summary

Participants decided to leave the teaching profession with less than five years on the job because they did not feel that their career would progress in a manner acceptable to them. Each participant determined that their progression was slow and was not currently meeting their needs when they decided to leave the profession. Schools may be able to retain more Black teachers if they provided a chart for progression with expected or obtainable timeframes for promotions. A progression chart helps employees determine what they need to do to progress to the level they are seeking at work.

Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted with a small sample of Black teachers with less than five years of teaching experience in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade in the state of Texas. The findings should not be generalized to other states nationwide. Other

limitations include the participants belonged to a closed online social network of local current and previous Black educators.

Additional Findings

An additional finding that emerged from participant responses was the desire to work in an environment where everyone was viewed as equals and to work alongside more Black teachers. With the desire to be viewed as equals, Black teachers also have to try to acclimate to the “most controversial profession in America” (Goldstein, 2014, p. 1). According to prior research; the lack of Black teachers may be due to the challenges they face while working in the profession. One could conclude that as long as Black teachers face challenges in the profession, the number of Black teachers may potentially be limited. Additionally, Black teachers want to be held to the same standards as their White counterparts, nothing more, nothing less.

Conclusion

The data collected from participant responses verified commonly perceived challenges of Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. While each participant taught in different schools and locations of Texas, they all shared common obstacles and challenges. Each study participant’s teaching experience did not last as long as they expected it to due to experiences in the workplace that were outside of their control. Black teachers are presented with daily challenges their colleagues of other races are not which results in their quick exits from the classroom. Those exits from the classroom could, possibly, negatively impact all students and their learning experiences. Moreover, Edelman (2016) found the following:

Teachers of color are underrepresented compared to students of color in every state and a report released at the summit by the Department of Education showed how the supply of teachers of color decreases at multiple points in the educator pipeline including enrollment in and completion of education programs, initial hiring, and retention. (p. 10A)

Recent studies addressing reasons Black teachers exit the profession so swiftly point to the lack of professional development, support, and growth opportunities. All study participants were motivated and committed when they made the decision to become a teacher, but the daily challenges proved to be more than they could handle. Small investments could also aid in solving or reducing some of the challenges Black teachers are faced with. Savannah (2019), stated, “I would suggest investing in Black teachers, in their professional development to include their personal confidence to really show them that they are valued and trusted. Furthermore, addressing as many challenges as possible could potentially increase student outcomes as well as job satisfaction and retention of Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary, Implications, and Future Research

Summary of Study

Recent studies show that the presence of one Black teacher in the classroom, specifically in third through fifth grade, increases Black students' academic success. While it is important for Black students to excel academically, it is also important for all students to be encouraged to excel academically. The presence of a Black teacher working in any grade also increases the success of all students. My interest in student success led me to explore teacher retention and the effects poor retention may have on student success. During my exploration, discovered the gap between employed Black and White teachers. I am a member of a Greek sorority where many of the members work in the education field. Due to a large number of members working in the education field, I was surprised to learn that nationally, the number of employed Black teachers were extremely low when compared to their White counterparts. The new information sparked an interest in me to learn more about the low representation of Black teachers in the profession.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the commonly perceived challenges Black teachers face while working in the realm of public grade school education; pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Investigating the daily challenges Black teachers face in the classroom, providing an accurate account of lived experiences for the profession to address in the future. A qualitative method was used to collect the data for the study. The data was then analyzed via thematic analysis to identify major recurring themes.

Review of Findings

The findings of this study identified challenges that previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt they faced while working in education. Data gathered and analyzed from participant responses identified the major recurring themes. The themes are: 1) Previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt the lack of mentorship was a challenge for Black teachers with any level of experience; 2) Previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt the lack of professional support and guidance when entering the classroom was a challenge; 3) Previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt their daily experiences were different from their peers of other races; 4) Previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt they worked harder than their White counterparts; and 5) Previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade felt their professional progression was slow or was going to be slow.

Each participant had a very different experience while working in the classroom, but they also had shared many experiences based solely on their race. Participants felt they should have been provided more support and guidance from every employee they encountered at a new school in order to be successful. Participants also felt that mentorship was important and that every school should have some type of mentorship program to assist new teachers with their transition into their new jobs.

Participants felt they worked harder and had different daily experiences of their coworkers. They felt the pressure to strive to overachieve every hour of their workday which resulted in undue stress. Along with the stress, participants felt they were undervalued by students, parents, coworkers, supervisors, and administrators but still

wanted to succeed in the profession. The career outlook for each participant eventually determined their time in the profession.

Although participants felt they were met with multiple challenges, they still it was important to have Black teachers in education. Nathaniel stated, “The presence of a Black teacher has the power and potential to educate every student, parent, colleague, and administrator on levels that are much deeper than the subject matter” (personal communication, 2019). Additionally, Mackenzie (2019), stated the following:

We need more Black teachers but if things don’t change in regard to attitudes toward Black teachers, I’m not sure how that’s going to happen. It’s hard enough for teachers as it is but being a Black teacher makes it even harder. (personal communication)

Implications for Practice

Moving forward, it would be beneficial for schools to promote and provide a more inclusive working environment for not just Black teachers but for all teachers. New teachers should feel welcomed when they enter their new schools and classrooms. Furthermore, they should feel equal to their coworkers regardless of skin color. After looking at the data, it appears that Black teachers feel unappreciated and unwanted which leads to their early exits from the classroom. For example, each participant felt they would have worked in the profession longer if it had not been for the slow growth. It is essential to inform teachers of growth opportunities when they become available as well as making sure each qualified teacher can compete for the opportunity and are fairly considered.

Implementing mentorship programs for new teacher employees, to include experienced teachers, may exponentially improve teacher transitions into the classroom and workplace culture. Moreover, encouraging all staff members to adopt a team mentality by providing support and guidance to new teachers would also help with teacher transitions into the classroom and workplace culture.

Making small adjustments to current practices could contribute to a positive impact on Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade and the students they teach. Black teachers positively impact Black students as well as White students.

Vilson (2015) found the following:

Educators of color can also make a positive impact on white students. Often, the onus of developing cultural competence falls solely on teachers of color. A more diverse teaching population can help white students interact with and understand people of different races and cultures. It would also enable them to see people of color in positions of authority. Exposure to peers and adults with different experiences and worldviews helps all children develop empathy for others and assess their own humanity. (p. 30)

Furthermore, all teachers should be afforded the opportunity to work in an environment that is suitable for all teachers because they make a positive impact on all students.

Future Research

Future research to consider would include the types of discrimination Black teachers experience in education, Black teachers' professional growth and advancement, and how the presence of Black teachers contribute to all students' academic success. Participants were asked if they experienced discrimination at work and they all had

experienced some type or level of discrimination. It may be important to explore what types of discrimination Black teachers feel they encounter. Two participants experienced multiple types of discrimination during their time in the profession; one participant listed several types of discrimination that were very invasive of private their life outside of work.

A mixed-methods study exploring Black teachers' professional growth and advancement would also provide more insight into Black teacher retention or the lack thereof. Participants wanted to stay in the profession but decided to leave due to the outlook on growth in the field. Exploring past growth and advancement of Black teachers will provide administrators with information to increase the number of employed Black teachers, increase employee retention, and reduce the turnover rate.

Lastly, it would be beneficial to conduct a study on how the presence of Black teachers contributes to all students' academic success. While recent and past studies have determined that the presence of a Black teacher contributes to all student's academic success, it would be informative to explore how they contribute to student success.

Conclusion

This research study explored the perceived challenges of previous Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Individual video conferences were conducted to interview participants in order to collect data as well as gain a better understanding of the challenges Black teachers face in the profession. The data collected from this study will contribute to existing trustworthy research in the field of education.

The findings of this research proved to be relatively easy to address by school administrators. The shared experiences of the participants were challenges that could

have been corrected in a short amount of time with proper planning and implementation. Therefore, the data of this study can be used to create and implement better practices and school policies pertaining to employee job satisfaction and success.

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Appendix A

Tables and Figures

Table 1*Content of Chapters*

Section	Explored Content
Chapter Two	Theoretical framework and literature review
Chapter Three	Methodology
Chapter Four	Research Findings
Chapter Five	Summary, implications, and future research

Table 2*Teacher Demographics*

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
African American	4,498	36.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	685	5.5
Hispanic	3,581	28.6
Native American	27	<1.0
White	3,539	28.3
Two or More	172	1.4

Table 3*Years of Experience*

Years of Experience	Number	Percentage
5 Years of Less Experience	5,161	41.3
6-10 Years of Experience	2,200	17.6

Over 10 Years of Experience	5,141	41.1
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Table 4*Participant Characteristics*

Participant	Teacher Certification Route	Years of Experience	Age
Nathaniel	Traditional	3	42
Mackenzie	Alternative	1	30
Savannah	Alternative	4	51

Figure 1.1 Methods Data Collection and Analysis

Research Question	Data Collection	Data Analysis
<p>Central question:</p> <p>What are the perceived challenges of Black teachers in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms?</p>	<p>Online Video</p> <p>Conferences</p>	<p>Transcribe Interviews</p> <p>Identify Themes</p> <p>Interpret Themes</p> <p>Interpret Findings</p>

Appendix B

Participant Questionnaire IRB Approval of Human Study

Participant Interview Questions

Question 1: How old are you?

Question 2: What certification route did you complete to become a teacher?

Question 3: How long did you teach in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade?

Question 4: Did you have any mentors to guide you in the profession?

Question 5: How would you describe your professional progression during your time as a teacher?

Question 6: Did you experience any obstacles or challenges as a Black teacher? If so, please explain.

Question 7: What type of support do Black teachers need when entering the classroom?

Question 8: Do you feel you worked harder than your peers of other races?

Question 9: Do you feel your daily experiences were different from your peers in any regard? If so, please explain.

Question 10: Did you experience discrimination at work? If so, please explain.

Question 11: Did you experience racism at work? If so, please explain.

Question 12: Did you ever report incidents of discrimination or racism? If so, please describe.

Question 13: What improvements would you suggest to assist in retaining Black pre-kindergarten through fifth grade teachers?

Question 14: Are there any experiences you would like to share that you feel would add value to our research study that were not covered in the previous questions asked?

DIVISION OF RESEARCH
Institutional Review Boards

APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

July 22, 2019

Krystle Matthews

kmmatthews2@uh.edu

Dear Krystle Matthews:

On July 19, 2019, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Perceived Challenges of PK-5 Black Teachers
Investigator:	Krystle Matthews
IRB ID:	STUDY00001767
Funding/ Proposed Funding:	Name: Unfunded
Award ID:	
Award Title:	
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Required Modifications K Matthews.docx, Category: Correspondence (sponsor, IRB, misc.);• Research Recruitment Message.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;• Verbal Consent .pdf, Category: Consent Form;• Consent Form K Matthews.pdf, Category: Consent Form;• Research Protocol K Matthews.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol;• Research Interview Questions.pdf, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.);
Review Category:	Exempt
Committee Name:	Not Applicable
IRB Coordinator:	Danielle Griffin

The IRB approved the study on July 19, 2019 ; recruitment and procedures detailed within the approved protocol may now be initiated.

As this study was approved under an exempt or expedited process, recently revised regulatory requirements do not require the submission of annual continuing review

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documentation. However, it is critical that the following submissions are made to the IRB to ensure continued compliance:

- Modifications to the protocol prior to initiating any changes (for example, the addition of study personnel, updated recruitment materials, change in study design, requests for additional subjects)
- Reportable New Information/Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others
- Study Closure

Unless a waiver has been granted by the IRB, use the stamped consent form approved by the IRB to document consent. The approved version may be downloaded from the documents tab.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

Sincerely,

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